

BLACK / OUT

The Magazine of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays Volume 1 Number 1 Summer 1986 \$3



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Women's movement / women of color - Black
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ARTS & Culture / film.

B in file: Feminist Theory / lesbian feminism

BLACK/OUT

Publisher

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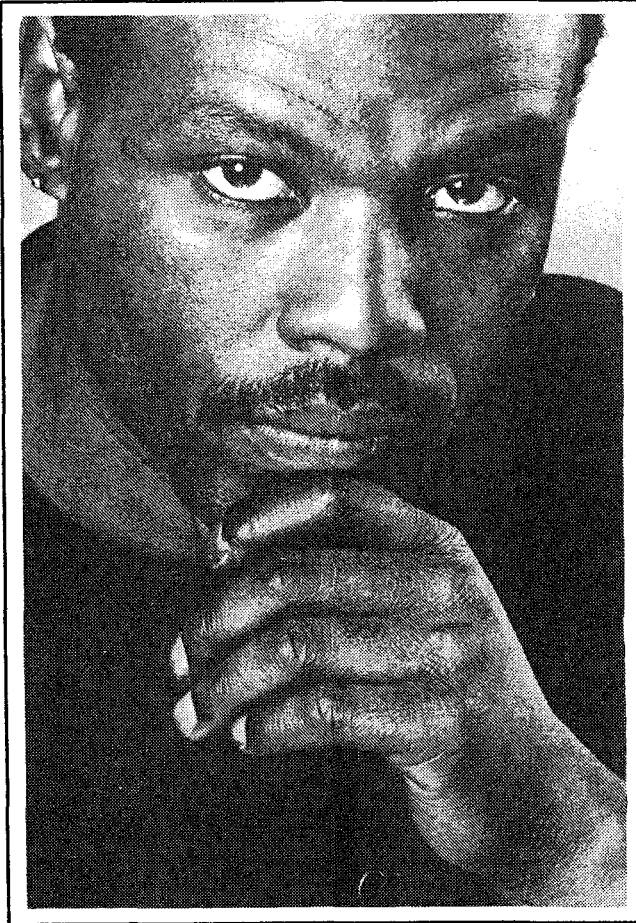
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REPRINTS: Some of the articles in this issue previously appeared in the following publications: "Caring for Each Other" in the *Philadelphia Gay News*; "Working for Liberation and Having a Damn Good Time" in the *New York Native*; "The NCBLG Family Gathers" and "It's Not for Me to Say" in *Gay Community News*.

From the Editor

A New Magazine, A New Movement



Welcome to *Black/Out*, the new quarterly magazine of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. *Black/Out* is the voice of the new movement of Black Lesbians and Gays, one which bespeaks renewed Black pride and solidarity.

Our name, *Black/Out* is intentionally a pun. Although birthed by Latino and Black drag queens at the Stonewall Inn in 1969, the Gay rights movement, an essentially white movement, has failed to embrace us. We, like those outrageous drag queens who started it all, are the fringe of the movement — relegated to “color” supplements, minority task forces, and workshops on racism — rather than woven into its fabric. At the same time, the Black civil rights movement seems slow to add gender and sexual politics to its agenda. In the Black press, our news is no news. In short, there has been a “blackout” surrounding our lives, our visions, our contributions, which *Black/Out* seeks to end.

Additionally, the name, *Black/Out*, is intentionally a contraction for:

Black and out-of-the-closet
Black and outfront
Black and outrageous
Black and outspoken
Black and outright
Black and outstanding.

We are, by virtue of our sexual preference, outlaws, outcasts, and outsiders. The simplest act, like going to a poorly-lit bar, is nothing less than revolutionary. So, it follows that we are revolutionaries and that *Black/Out* is a revolutionary publication.

Now, more than ever, with the rising AIDS hysteria, increasing violence against Gays and women, the disintegration of our communities, discrimination in housing and employment, and problems with custody and visitation rights, we cannot afford to be silent.

It is the hope of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays that you consider *Black/Out* yours: a place for viewpoints, a place for dialogue, a place to connect, a place to be all of what we are.

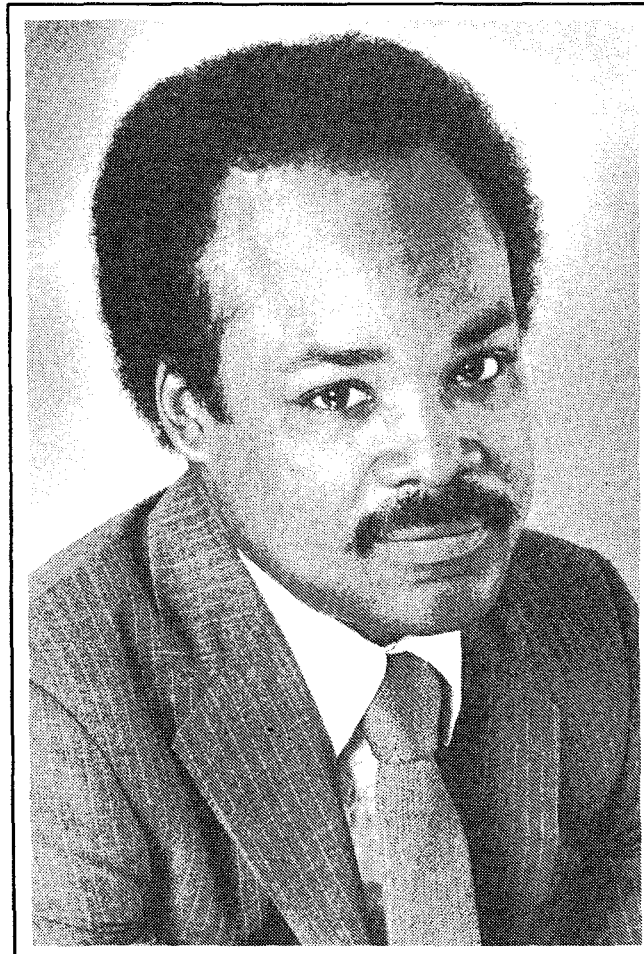
Welcome home.

Welcome to *Black/Out*.

Joseph Beam
Editor

“Black Pride and Solidarity: The New Movement of Black Lesbians and Gays”

By Gil Gerald, Executive Director



Two and a half years ago, on the day that Jesse Jackson announced that he would seek the nomination of the Democratic Party for the Presidency of the United States, I, too, was inspired to take a leap of faith. I volunteered to quit my job as an architect and work full time as the Executive Director of the National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG), at a time when the organization, literally, did not have a dime to its name.

That year, I tried my hand at writing grant proposals for the first time, and NCBG received a total of \$5,000 in grants. The following year, 1984, featured a grant writing campaign that generated \$8,300 in grants, followed by \$21,000 in 1985, and \$34,000 in the first five months of 1986. This pattern clearly vindicated the optimism of a few of NCBG's delegates to its 1980 founding convention that we could indeed rise to the challenge of generating the kind of financial support required to run a national organization.

The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG), which approved the name change at our 1985 conference, is not out of the woods yet. We still must develop a program of ongoing communication with, and support from, our membership and constituency. We receive regular letters of concern from our members who have not heard from us. Their concern is understandable and justified. A new, recently acquired, business computer in the national office, to manage our mailing list of over 5,000 entries, has brought us closer to sustaining regular communications with our members.

NCBLG now has three chapters: The Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays, The D.C. Coalition of Black Gay Men and Women, and the Minnesota Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. Two organizations, The Langston/Jones Society, in New Orleans, and the Triangle Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, in Durham, N.C.

are petitioning to be chartered as chapters. In Baltimore, Detroit, New York City, Philadelphia, and St. Louis, NCBLG has ongoing chapter organizing efforts in various stages of development. This totals ten active local organizing programs, a marked improvement over a year ago when there were no more than four, and also an improvement over our previous high, in 1980, when seven, mostly paper organizations, convened delegates to establish NCBG. It is a joy to read reports, such as the ones coming from North Carolina, indicating that our local group, the Triangle Coalition, is working diligently on Gay and Lesbian Pride

Celebrations Celebrations in the Raleigh-Durham area.

NCBLG's staff now consist of two part timers in addition to the full time Executive Director's position. Craig G. Harris, AIDS Conference Coordinator, serves on a part time capacity, as does A. Billy S. Jones, Program and Administration Coordinator. This provides the Executive Director with the opportunity to concentrate on fundraising, and traveling to build and represent the organization.

NCBLG's ability to secure \$20,000 from the federal government to fund the *National Conference on AIDS in the Black Community* is only a modest beginning. Currently NCBLG has proposals under consideration in several municipalities and states to provide support, on a consulting basis, for AIDS prevention and education in the Black Community. The Board of Directors of NCBLG recently approved a resolution to retain the services of a fundraiser to raise \$100,000 to support the whole complement of programs envisioned and implied in NCBLG's statement of purpose and in our new theme, "Black Pride and Solidarity: The New Movement of Black Lesbians and Gays." All of this represents the courageous efforts of a relative few; the rest is up to you!

NCBLG's National Conference to Address AIDS Among Blacks

by Craig G. Harris

One of every four AIDS patients is a Black American. Half of all women with AIDS are Black, and three of every six children with AIDS is Black. Despite more than 4,800 diagnosed cases of AIDS among Black men, women, and children, our community has failed, so far, to respond to the epidemic of an illness which is rapidly becoming one of the major causes of deaths among Blacks.

Though medical scientists have not yet found a cure for the syndrome — which renders the body's immune system incapable of combating a number of opportunistic infectious diseases — measures to prevent the spread of AIDS can be successful. Physicians, politicians, community workers, and Lesbian and Gay activists are all in agreement that education is the most effective means of curtailing the increase of new cases of AIDS, and of decreasing the general public's fear of AIDS.

Educating Black Gay and bisexual men, and Black IV drug abusers of risk reduction practices is essential for lowering the incidence of AIDS in our community. Safe sex practices also need to be introduced to sexually active adolescents who may be the unknowing partners of members of at-risk groups, and to hemophiliacs, diabetics, and persons with sickle cell disease. The task of educating these at-risk groups, their partners, and potential partners is not easy, and as attempts by mainstream AIDS educators have failed to enlighten people of color, it is clear that new strategies which are conducive to effectual communication and information dissemination in the Black urban and rural milieu must be developed.

Educating the often heterosexist Black professional community may be an even more difficult task. It is appalling that after six years of the AIDS crisis, only two national Black organizations have addressed the issue in an action oriented way. Those organizations are the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

With the assistance of a \$19,824 grant from the United States Public Health Service, NCBLG, along with the National Con-

ference on Black Mayors and the National Minority AIDS Council, will cosponsor a national conference on AIDS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY. This conference will be held at the Washington Convention Center in the district of Columbia on July 18, 1986.

“Educating Black Gay and bisexual men, and Black IV drug abusers of risk reduction practices is essential for lowering the incidence of AIDS in our community. . . . Educating the often heterosexist Black professional community may be an even more difficult task.”

The objectives of this ground-breaking educational effort are two-fold. Primarily, NCBLG aims to inform leaders and opinion makers in the Black religious, civic, media, social service, medical, para-medical, drug treatment, and Lesbian/Gay communities of the impact of AIDS on Blacks, and the special need for education and AIDS related services in the Black community. NCBLG wants also to create a more informed and supportive social environment among con-

CDC Stats as of May, 1986

ference participants, to enable an increase in local community initiatives to provide AIDS related services as required for AIDS prevention, and as required by people with AIDS in the Black community. Featured speakers include: Walter Dowdle, M.D., United States AIDS Coordinator; Wayne Greaves, MD., Chief of Infectious Disease at Howard University Hospital; Frederick Garnett, board member of the National Association of People with AIDS; and Gwendolyn Rogers, NCBLG secretary and chair of its political action committee.

The conference will benefit from the expertise of a diverse planning committee which includes: Dr. Winston Frederick and Dr. Wayne Greaves of Howard University Hospital, D.C. Commissioner of Public Health Dr. Andrew McBride, D.C. AIDS Commissioner Jean Tapscott, Eddie King, Director of Education at Baltimore's Health Education Resource Organization (HERO); and Black Gay activists and AIDS educators David Naylor, Clif Roberson, Dr. James Tinney, and Lawrence Washington.

Capacity for the AIDS IN THE BLACK COMMUNITY conference is limited and early registration is suggested. For further information regarding the conference or other NCBLG programs, contact: NCBLG, 930 F Street, N.W., Suite 514, Washington, D.C. 20004, 202/737-5276.

People with AIDS by Race/Ethnicity

	Adult/Adolescent		Pediatric		Total	
	Cases	(%)	Cases	(%)	Cases	(%)
White	11,901	(60)	51	(18)	11,952	(59)
Black	4884	(25)	168	(60)	5052	(25)
Latino	2796	(14)	60	(21)	2856	(14)
Other	115	(1)	0	(0)	115	(1)
No Record	111	(1)	2	(1)	113	(1)
Total	19,807	(100)	281	(100)	20,088	(100)

Safer-Sex Guidelines

1. Don't pass body fluids (semen, urine, blood, etc.). The sharing of body fluids is becoming more and more implicated in the AIDS transmission process.
2. Use condoms during anal sex. This both reduces the risk of semen being released in the rectum and helps protect both partners from infection should the rectal lining be injured.
3. Do not engage in Rimming or Fisting. Passing fecal matter and/or tearing or otherwise injuring the rectal lining is very dangerous.
4. Limit the number of your sexual partners. Most indicators show that large numbers of sexual partners increase your chances of contracting the virus. Also, know your partner's history. If he has had a large amount of sexual contacts, has often contracted sexually transmitted diseases, and does not engage in "Safer-Sex" practices, then engaging in intimate sexual contact with him puts you at greater risk.
5. Do not use drugs during sex. The use of mood-altering drugs can interfere with your sense of reason, thereby increasing the chances of you allowing yourself to engage in risky sex practices. If you are an IV drug user, seek help and don't share needles.
6. Do be creative and enjoy yourself. Hugging, petting, mutual masturbation, and erotic games are all safe and fun. The more you put into them the more you get out of them.

**National Gay Task Force Hotline
1-800-221-7044**

**Toll-free national hotline run by
NGTF to provide information and
referrals.**

NEWS BRIEFS

Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals of Color Meet

Ithaca, NY — Amidst anonymous phone threats and a lack of support from organizations of color on campus, over 75 students from northeastern colleges such as Harvard, Hunter, Lehman, and Yale convened April 11-13 at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. The conference, themed, "Our History, Ourselves, Our Visions, Our Pride," featured workshops; films; autonomous caucuses by race, gender, and sexual orientation; a dance; and a rally. Among the presenters were NCBLG board members Joseph Beam and Barbara Smith, NCBLG Executive Director Gil Gerald, Chinese activist Don Kao, Asian poet-writer Merle Woo, filmmaker Emily Woo Yamasaki, and New York community organizer Margarita Lopez.

Hemphill Receives NEA Fellowship

Washington — Poet Essex Hemphill, publisher of Be Bop Books in Washington, D.C., has been awarded a 1986 Fellowship in Poetry from the National Endowment for the Arts. The purpose of the \$20,000 fellowship is to enable a writer to travel, study and compose for a year.

Parkerson, Jones and Hemphill Awarded Grant

Philadelphia — "Voicescapes," a poetry and music collaboration of Michelle Parkerson, Essex Hemphill, and Wayson Jones, was the unanimous first choice for a Residency for New Works grant from the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia, said the Center's Program Director Chris Hayes. The \$3,950 grant will help finance the work-in-progress, which Hemphill says "explores people of color from an urban experience who have varying sexual orientations." Parkerson, Hemphill and Jones will perform "Voicescapes" on August 9, the last night of their two week residency at the Painted Bride Art Center. The Painted Bride received 122 applications for residency grants of which 11 were funded.

Bowen Addresses NOW March

Washington — Angela Bowen, the newest NCBLG board member, addressed the crowd of approximately 80,000 people who had assembled for the National Organization of Women's (NOW) March for Women's Lives in Washington, D.C. on March 9. Given two minutes on the official dais, Bowen spoke of the importance of coalition building if we are going to defeat the Right. On a more personal note, she added that she did not want her daughter to have the kind of abortion she had been forced to have as a young woman.



NCBLG at the NOW march for women's lives.

SIMON NKODI: *On Trial for Treason*

By James Charles Roberts

Johannesburg — Simon Nkodi, the Black, Gay South African freedom fighter is still being tried for alleged crimes against the state, but according to Gary Kinsman, spokesperson for the Toronto-based Simon Nkodi-Anti-Apartheid Committee, he is in good health and still has a chance of being exonerated.

Nkodi was arrested on September 21, 1984 following a riot that broke out after a banned funeral service. He and 21 others, the "Vaal 22," were finally charged with treason after having been incarcerated for a year.

Kinsman noted that the Gay Association of South Africa (GASA), which Nkodi helped found, was slowly coming around to the point where it may one day speak out in his defense. GASA has been criticized widely for refusing to come to Nkodi's defense in an official capacity. Some theorize that this silence is in response to government intimidation. GASA is the first Gay/Lesbian organization in South Africa's history.

The trial, which began last January 21, has attracted the attention of anti-apartheid forces as well as Lesbian/Gay activists. Kinsman and others have noted that the government is relying largely on paid government informers to establish its case against Nkodi. The government is going as far as to intercept correspondence sent to Nkodi from within and outside of South Africa. At this point, Nkodi's lover, who is white, is forwarding Nkodi's mail to him.

Despite the government's efforts to, in Kinsman's words, "make Nkodi a scapegoat," the defense, led by anti-apartheid attorney Pricilla Jana, has, Kinsman said, "shown that there is no real evidence to prove that the riot was organized or that any of the 22 are guilty of treason."

Aside from the Toronto group, Lesbian and Gay organizations from all over the world have come to Nkodi's aid. Gil Gerald, executive director of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays, has written, "We want you [Nkodi] to know that we are engaged in a public education effort here to raise the consciousness of the community to better understand the linkages between our own history and oppression as a people and the inherently evil and unjust system under which all South Africans live."

Other organizations that have expressed support include the International Gay Asso-



Simon Nkodi, Black, Gay South African freedom fighter is still being tried for alleged crimes against the state.

ciation, Amnesty International, and Black and White Men Together (BWMT). BWMT's Awards Committee is considering noting Nkodi's struggle at its National Convention in New York City which is set to take place June 28 through July 3 this year.

In the meantime the Toronto group has been active in its own right. Last May 28 Bishop Desmond Tutu, arguably the most influential Black South African alive, participated in a rally in support of Nkodi and the

21 other Vaal members under the sponsorship of Kinsman and other Committee persons.

Anyone wishing to join the struggle against this instance of South African oppression can write to Gary Kinsman, Simon Nkodi Anti-Apartheid Committee, 2020 MacPherson Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5R 1W8, or call (416) 929-0689.

TIMOTHY LEE *Murder or Suicide?*

By James Charles Roberts

Concord, CA. — Controversy still surrounds the mysterious death of Timothy Lee, a young Black Gay man who was found hanging from a tree in Concord, CA.

Despite the official explanation that the death was due to "suicide," there are those, including the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG) and the NAACP who believe there is a distinct possibility that the 23 year old Lee was raped and/or murdered.

Last November 2, Lee, a native of Berkeley, was found hanging from a fruit tree. His wallet was found 30 feet from his body, but there was no evidence of robbery. Furthermore, neighbors in the area of the Concord train station, next to which the body was found, reportedly heard screams at about the time Lee died. Coupled with this is information that the Klu Klux Klan had attacked other Black men that very night.

When found, Lee's body was covered by what authorities called "ant bites." Others

who saw the body, however, thought the marks had been made by lit cigarettes. This controversy prompted the local NAACP and NCBLG to request an FBI investigation.

NCBLG's executive director, Gil Gerald, even took George Straka, Concord's Chief of Police, to task by saying "It is clear to us that there are conflicting reports of how and why the death of Timothy Lee as well as other Black Gay men in the Contra Costa County occurred." Gerald went on to describe Lee's as a "racist and homophobic" murder.

The NAACP's Thordie Ashley urged anyone who could offer evidence of a crime against Lee to come forward. She said, "We got people to come forth who had not talked before to say that they had heard screams from where the incident occurred." Ashley described Concord as a conservative community that has witnessed a resurgence of KKK activity.

FBI Special Agent Walter B. Stowe has been conducting a preliminary investigation into this incident to see whether the available facts warrant a full FBI investigation. When contacted by phone Stowe declined to comment on the case.

News from the Chapters

NEW YORK — New York City is on the road to having a local NCBLG chapter once more! Between 30 and 40 women and men attended a May 23 meeting in Greenwich Village called to begin work on an organization intended to become a New York chapter of the coalition. The meeting was chaired by national board members Betty Powell (who serves on the committee responsible for membership and chapters) and Gwendolyn Rogers, national secretary.

Impetus was given to the New York chapter idea by NCBLG's conference in St. Louis last Thanksgiving: the publicity and interest it generated, and the significant involvement in it by New Yorkers. When the board chose to meet in New York at the end of March, concrete planning for the New York chapter began. Close to two hundred people attended that Saturday evening reception at NYU hosted by the board March 29, at which more than \$500 in contributions and pledges was raised. There was clear enthusiasm among the relatively equal numbers of men and women in attendance, as they listened to veteran Black Lesbian and Gay organizers talk about coming "home."

A similar energy existed at the May meeting, particularly among the impressive number of men there. The meeting was kept fairly informal, with the goal of soliciting from those in attendance what issues *they* felt such a group needed to address. Two areas mentioned were work with Black gay youth and, related to this, AIDS education. Betty Powell, referring to the national board's media campaign and to Abiola Sinclair's jaundiced series of columns in the *Amsterdam News* last year, suggested a local media watch project, as well as a local newsletter.

Local committees were formed to plan NCBLG's participation in two upcoming marches in New York and to do outreach to increase the community's involvement in them. On June 14, Black Lesbians and Gays will be able to choose the NCBLG banner (from among those of many other groups with which they may work) to march behind, from the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. (Harlem) State Office

Building on 125th Street, through the streets of Harlem, in a march against apartheid held in commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the Soweto uprisings. And, for the second year, NCBLG will have a contingent — this year's will have music! — in the New York City "Heritage of Pride" Gay/Lesbian Pride Day parade on June 29. There will be an outreach table in the Christopher Street festival as well. The committee plans to target Black bars and encourage patrons to come out and join the contingent on the day of the march.

The meeting served another important purpose — to share information about other ventures of relevance to the Black Lesbian and Gay community, and encourage involvement in them. A good deal of the meeting time was given to Phil Reid, a candidate running for State Senate from the 27th District on Manhattan's Upper West Side, which includes a large part of Harlem. "I'm as openly Gay as I'm openly Black" is a statement Reid has made in his campaign, and which he repeated to the meeting. Information was provided about the Council of Churches of the City of New York's Minority Task Force on AIDS and its activity, particularly the recruitment of individuals to be trained as "buddies" to non-Gay and Gay people with AIDS at Harlem and Lincoln hospitals, two facilities which serve overwhelmingly people of color and have heavy AIDS caseloads. The organizer of

a Black Gay men's support group which meets biweekly at the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center shared the existence of his group; as did Renee McCoy for the Planning Task Force on Lesbian/Gay Homelessness. Volunteers for this task force, as well as assistance with Reid's campaign are being recruited. A voluntary collection raised about \$75 enough to cover the cost of renting the meeting space and mailing announcements.

Additional contact persons for the New York Chapter are:

Betty Powell, (718) 875-7090

Colin Robinson, 440 St. John's Place:
Apt. #4B, Brooklyn, NY 11238-5349
(718) 636-2009.

— Colin Robinson

PHILADELPHIA — Coupled with the excitement generated by the February NCBLG board meeting in Philadelphia and a startup donation of \$500, Philadelphia is also on the road to organizing a local chapter. Jon Carlton, who was in Philadelphia organizing for the Multi-Texture Hair Expo, which took place April 27-29 at the Philadelphia Civic Center, made the donation in memory of six stylists, who have died from AIDS, with whom he had worked on previous Expos. Carlton's check, which has been received by NCBLG National Office, has been deposited in an account earmarked for NCBLG/Philadelphia.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS: NCBLG National Memberships are available on the following scale:

Individual Membership	\$ 20.00
Supporting Organizations	\$ 30.00
Chapters	\$200.00

- YES! I am interested in becoming a member!
- YES! I want to contribute to NCBLG
- Enclosed is my \$20 membership.
- Enclosed is my \$10 subscription.
- Supporting Organization's \$30 contribution
- Enclosed is my contribution \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Zip _____

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Xerox and return to NCBLG for processing. Thank you.

CHAPTERS

BAY AREA BLACK LESBIANS
AND GAYS
437 Webster Street
San Francisco, CA 94117

D.C. COALITION OF BLACK
GAY WOMEN AND MEN
P.O. Box 50662
Washington, D.C. 20004

IRUWA
P.O. Box 19146,
Minneapolis, MN 55419

ORGANIZING EFFORTS

BALTIMORE COALITION OF
BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS
618 West Franklin Street
Apt. 6
Baltimore, MD 21201

LANGSTON/JONES
c/o Kohn,
P.O. Box 5061
New Orleans, LA 70150-0611

ST. LOUIS COALITION
c/o Elcan
3745 Lindell Blvd.
Apt. 1007W
St. Louis, MO 63108

PHILADELPHIA
James Roberts
c/o BLACK/OUT
P.O. Box 2413
Philadelphia, PA 19103

NEW YORK CITY
c/o Gwendolyn Rogers
230 Riverside Drive
Apt. 18A
New York, NY 10025

TRIANGLE COALITION
c/o Mandy Carter
604 West Chapel Hill Street
Durham, North Carolina 27701

TOPEKA, KS
Retha Simms
2641 S.E. 11th Street
Topeka, KS 66607

SAN DIEGO
James B. Newton III
4895 Deaton Drive
San Diego, CA 92101

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG) calls upon our Sisters and Brothers of African descent to join in:

Black Pride and Solidarity: The New Movement of Black Lesbians and Gays.

As a national organization, we are committed to building solidarity between Black Lesbians and Gays, Transpersons, and with our heterosexual Sisters and Brothers, with the understanding that an end to the oppression of Black people requires the full participation, dedication, and commitment of us all.

We are committed to fighting for an end to Lesbian and Gay oppression, racism, sexism, class oppression, militarism, and all the barriers which interfere with our right to live in peace and harmony. We stand in solidarity with movements for liberation and social justice.

We condemn the increasing racist attacks against the Black community, and other People of Color. We condemn the increasing right wing attacks against the Lesbian and Gay community. We condemn the refusal of the Reagan administration to provide adequate funding for AIDS and other health crises, while squandering funds to wage war.

We are the NATIONAL COALITION OF BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS (NCBLG), a national political and educational organization, providing support and advocacy for individuals and organizations on issues affecting the Black Lesbian and Gay community.

PURPOSES

1. to actively work against racism, sexism, ageism, classism, homophobia, and any other forms of discrimination within the Black community and the Gay community
2. to create positive attitudes between and among Black non-Gays and Black Gays
3. to improve the working and social relationship between and among Black Lesbians and Black Gay men
4. to raise the consciousness of Black Lesbians and Black Gay men on major local, national, and international issues
5. to stimulate wholesome and soulful sociopolitical atmospheres for Black Lesbians and Black Gay men
6. to work cooperatively with other national and local Lesbian/Gay organizations in the pursuit of Lesbian/Gay civil rights
7. to work cooperatively with other national and local Black organizations in the pursuit of human/civil rights
8. to support the struggles for human and civil rights for all including — but not limited to — women, youth, physically challenged, senior citizens, prisoners, Native Americans, Asians, Latin Americans, et al
9. to promote coalition building and unity among and between Black Lesbians and Black Gay men
10. to pursue political power and recognition in non-partisan, non-violent, but aggressive ways for the survival and growth/acceptance of ourselves as Black Lesbians and Black Gay men
11. to maintain and stress the beauty of Black culture and Lesbian/Gay culture, thereby projecting our motto: "As Proud of Our Gayness as We Are of Our Blackness"

Caring for Each Other

By Joseph Beam

Some years ago when I was growing up in West Philadelphia there was a brother named Slim who was tall, lanky, and an alcoholic. Most often he could be found at the court on the avenue watching us play basketball. Every so often, no doubt inspired by his drink, he'd demand to play in our game. When refused he'd curse us and start swinging his half full half gallon jug. We'd stop the game. Some of us would rest, others would head for the water fountain, but usually two brothers would attempt to console Slim. Almost always, he, happy for the attention, would be escorted home and safely deposited on his front porch. It was never a thought to call the police or an alcohol rehabilitation center, where Slim had been many times. It was a matter of taking care of your own kind. Calling the Man would have introduced another variable, one which too often proved to be a wild card.



Left to right: Assotto Saint, Craig Harris, Ray Melrose, Dan Garrett, and Colin Robinson

"If I can drop at least \$10 to get into Catacombs, Paradise Garage, or The Clubhouse, I can spend \$2 to buy a condom to save my life and yours."

I say that to say this: The State (a euphemism for white people) has never been concerned with the welfare of Black people. So it comes as no surprise to me that the Philadelphia AIDS Task Force (PATF) has trouble getting AIDS information to North Philadelphia, that the New York City Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC) outreach doesn't quite make it to Harlem, or that the efforts of Washington, D.C.'s Whitman-Walker Clinic (WWC) fail to extend east of the Anacostia River. It is not a matter of whether their racism is intentional or unintentional. We die "by accident" daily and the State is a witness who documents that demise. Poet Essex Hemphill writes in "For My Own Protection": We should be able to save each other./I don't want to wait for the Heritage Foundation to release a study saying/Black people are almost extinct . . .

The current expectation of the Black community that the State would enter and mitigate our problems is a recent one. Thirty years ago we would not have had that expectation. The State, composed of suburbanites and people who have gentrified our neighborhoods, doesn't give a damn about Black Gay men and IV drug users and it would be a fatal mistake if we were to relinquish our responsibility for AIDS in the Black community to such an external mechanism.

Our responsibility is twofold: we should continue holding a gun to the heads of PATF, GMHC, and the WWC until minority outreach coordinators are hired and specific programs are implemented. But concurrently we must insure our own safety and administer to our own sick. A Black Gay brother, hospitalized in Philadelphia, remains there because has no place to go. It doesn't require an organizational structure or government funding to provide a home for him. I don't understand he was always quite popular in the bars. In the neighborhood we *know* the brothers who like to freak sometimes. We *know* the brothers who shoot dope. In other words, we *know* who we fuck with and our lives depend upon *us* relaying the necessary

information about sexual health concerns. If I can drop at least \$10 to get into Catacombs, Paradise Garage, or The Clubhouse, I can spend \$2 to buy a condom to save my life and yours. If I can leaf through *Ebony Men* for fashion tips, I can locate information about the methods of safer sex. It's a matter of priorities. For surely while I dress to cavort with my living friends over cocktails, the State is busy taking care of the State and maintaining the current state of affairs. We would be most wise to do likewise or our prospects for survival are slim. Black men loving Black men is the revolutionary act of the 80s. So I say to you: What have you done for us lately?

The opinions expressed in this space are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays.

The NCBLG Family Gathers

By Craig G. Harris

*And many other soldiers of rank and file
gathered, members of the family,
the youth and elders of the tribe.
This is how we bond in fellowship —
in a circle of light and missions.
The family gathered,
armed and extremely dangerous.*

— Essex Hemphill
from *Blackheart: family gathering*

Thanksgiving weekend. All around the country families gather for the annual celebration of the rip-off of the Native American people. But one family used this holiday weekend to gather under another theme, "Black Pride and Solidarity: The New Movement of Black Lesbians and Gays." The family was the National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG), and the site of the reunion was the Sheraton-St. Louis.

The occasion was the NCBG General Convention/Annual Conference, held last November 29-December 1, and representatives from branches of the family were present. From local residents, to chapter, affiliate, and individual members, to representatives from the Black Lesbian & Gay Centre project of London, the family gathered.

NCBG's board members and convention delegates started the business of the weekend by passing a motion to change the family name to the National Coalition of Black

Lesbians and Gays, and by welcoming Philadelphia writer/activist Joseph Beam to the board of directors. There was also discussion of ratifying the organization's by-laws to better serve the needs of its rapidly growing membership. That discussion, however, was tabled, and it was resolved that a more intensive review of the by-laws over a period of several months would be necessary to launch the new movement of Black Lesbians and Gay men.

Following the General Convention, the family was welcomed by NCBLG Executive Director Gil Gerald and the board co-chairs Louis Hughes and Michelle Parkerson, at Friday afternoon's General Conference session.

On Friday evening Henry Craig Chinn, Jr., Assistant Director of Cooperative Legal Education at Northeastern University School of Law and President of Boston's Black Men's Association, delivered the first of two keynote addresses. Quoting Baldwin, Fanon, and Aimee Cesaire, Chinn spoke of the impact of colonization on the Black Lesbian and Gay community. He stressed the importance of coalition building within the Black community at large, stating, "We, as Black Gay and Lesbian people, must make a broader and more publicized involvement in our communities on every level in order to change the way that we are perceived." He

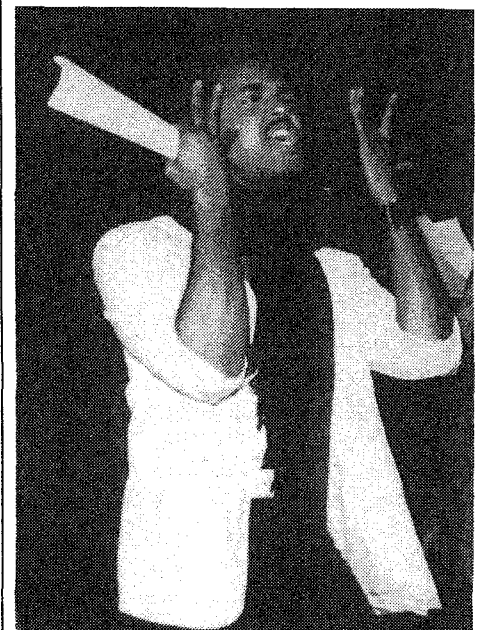
used the Black Power movement as a reference, adding, "Recall how the Black Muslims and the Black Panthers were both groups that at first were looked upon suspiciously until they involved themselves in a serious way with Black people's concerns."

Addressing the issue of fear and ignorance of AIDS in our communities, Chinn stated, "While the media would have the public believe that mostly Gay men are dying of AIDS, it is the poor and Blacks who are dying disproportionately at higher rates than their percentage in the population. The Black populace is not being educated about the illness, at least not in Boston where I reside. I can only imagine that the situation is no different elsewhere."

These themes were echoed the following evening when Gwendolyn Rogers, NCBLG board member and chair of NCBLG's political action and education committee, delivered her address, assessing the state of the Black movement. Rogers began by saying that she had not prepared a formal speech. She wanted to feel her audience, knowing that they would steer the direction of her address. In a very powerful extemporaneous talk, Rogers asserted that while the Black movement is in another period of dormancy, and national Gay organizers are being forced to think quickly of new ways to raise funds or fold, NCBLG is in a stable financial posi-



NCBLG Board member Barbara Smith and Co-chair Louis Hughes bestow the 1985 "Life-time Achievement Award" upon Mabel Hampton.



Assotto Saint

tion and is continuing to wage political battles on several fronts.

Rogers spoke of the need for an autonomous Black Gay and Lesbian movement, stressing that "we need to get our house in order." Relating her experience as a delegate to the U.S.-sponsored international women's conference in Nairobi in July of 1985, Rogers warned her audience of their responsibility to speak out on behalf of our brothers and sisters throughout the diaspora — particularly those in South Africa. At home, we need to counter the attacks of the Moral Majority, the irresponsibility of the Black press, and the structural racism of the Gay movement. Rogers' keynote was a pep talk which she would not conclude until her audience indicated by numerous standing ovations that they were psyched.

The five workshop sessions of the weekend offered a variety of issues such as: "Bringing the Black Family Home," "Building an Autonomous Black Gay Press," "Spirituality as a Liberating Force," "Crisis: Violence Against Lesbians, Gays, and Heterosexual Women," "Alternative Strategies for Organizational Development in the Black Community/Coalition Building," and "Our International Mandates."

The most well-received of the workshops included: "AIDS in the Black Community," in which panelists Eddie King, Lawrence Washington, and David Naylor discussed the growing threat of AIDS to the Black community in general and the Black Gay community in particular, laying the groundwork for NCBLG's AIDS Advisory Board; "Building Positive Black Gay and Lesbian

Self Images," focusing on the impact of racism, internalized homophobia, and substance abuse in our community, with the leadership of Dr. Julius Johnson, Dr. Vickie Mays, Barbara Smith, and John Patterson; and "Black Lesbian and Gay Oral History," enriching our knowledge of Black Lesbian and Gay pre-Stonewallers, led by 83-year-old Lesbian activist Mabel Hampton.

In addition to the workshop sessions, there was time set aside for men's and women's caucuses to discuss such issues as "Building Lesbian Leadership" and "Men Loving Men."

"The most well-received of the workshops included: "AIDS in the Black Community," in which panelists Eddie King, Lawrence Washington, and David Naylor discussed the growing threat of AIDS to the Black community in general and the Black Gay community in particular."

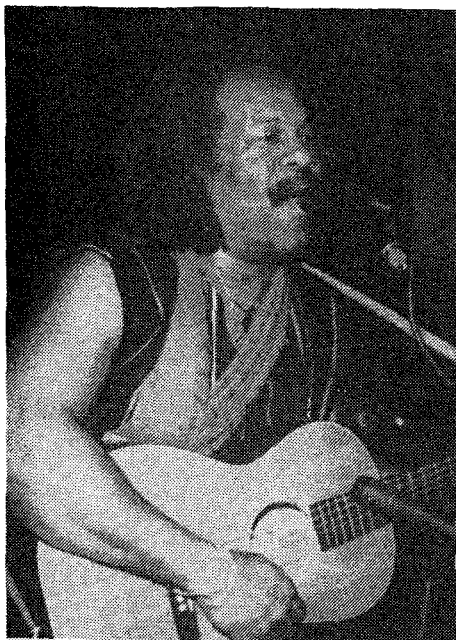
Members of this family could not gather in celebration without sharing their performance skills. Media Coordinator Michelle Parkerson planned cultural programs which included screenings of *Before Stonewall*, *Hair Piece: A Film for Nappy-Headed People*, *Got to Make This Journey: Sweet Honey in*

the Rock, and her most recent work-in-progress, *Storme: A Life in the Jewel Box*. This hour-long documentary explores the history of the Jewel Box Revue through the life story of Storme DeLaverie who served as the emcee for the multi-racial cabaret of female impersonators.

Live entertainment was presented by Washington-based dancer/choreographer George Bellinger, Jr., writers Pat Parker, Essex Hemphill, Cheryl Clarke, Irare Sabasu, Jewelle Gomez, and members of the Black-heart Collective. Along with Ortez Alderson and Willie Barnes, Haitian playwright Assotto Saint staged a stellar performance piece excerpted from his *Rising to the Love We Need*, and *New Love Songs*. Washington, D.C. composer Wayson Jones and West Coast recording artists Gwen Avery and Blackberri supplied jazz, folk, and R&B tunes.

The highlight of the Thanksgiving weekend is, of course, dinner. And ours took the form of a ballroom banquet on Saturday evening, honoring the commitment, energy, example, and life of our eldest present family member, Mabel Hampton — also a member of Senior Action in a Gay Environment (SAGE) and the Lesbian Herstory Archives.

When the family gathered around the lobby of the St. Louis Sheraton, sharing hugs and bestowing well-wishes and goodbye kisses, we were nourished and filled with a new conviction and commitment to "Black Pride and Solidarity: The New Movement of Black Lesbians and Gays" until we meet again for our next reunion, in Atlanta, Georgia, in April 1987. ■



Singer-songwriter Blackberri.



Keynote speakers Henry Chinn, Jr. and Gwendolyn Rogers.

COMING OUT

By Angela Bowen

LAST MONTH, I turned 50. At 49, I came out publicly. At 40, I came out to myself. It sounds so simple to say "I came out", but the incremental steps along the way, the feelings and thoughts that allowed me to do that are very clear to me. And dear! Just recently, having dinner with friends, the topic of being "out" came up, and in speaking that night, I was forced to define why it was necessary for me to be so "out". So far out.

When I fell deeply in love with a woman at the age of 40, I didn't question for even a second the fact that I was a Lesbian. My emotional connections had always been with women, and two light affairs spread over the previous 20 years had let me know that sexual relationships with women were exciting. Neither time had I suffered angst over it — just accepted it as one part of my nature. But suddenly at 40, I knew what all the songs and poetry were about. So I was delighted to finally have myself figured out.

That was the mid-70s, and it was important for me at that time to discover out Lesbians, but even more so to discover Black Lesbians willing to be out. And I wanted more than anything to be able to be completely out in the Connecticut city I lived in then. However, it wasn't safe for me, my business or my family.

But during that period, I saw Audre Lorde speak, and heard her siren call: "What are the silences that you swallow day by day? If we wait to speak until we are not afraid, we will be sending messages back from the grave." I knew then that I would live my life as an open Lesbian as soon as I was able, and I began working to extricate myself from my complicated heterosexual family life so that I could speak in exactly the way I am doing at this moment.

I moved to Boston in '83 and began writing for the women's papers. But my real debut as an out Lesbian came last June on Gay Pride Day when I spoke at the rally. Since that day, I've been living the open, free life I could only fantasize about ten years ago.

Let me say that the decision to speak to that many people on Boston Common was very scary. But, like Audre Lorde, like Barbara Smith, like Beverly Smith, women I had read and admired during my closet days, I wanted to be out there for that alone Black woman who might need to see me at a significant time in her life.

Sometimes we throw ourselves out there and we're never really sure whom we're affecting. But I've had feedback. One closeted woman who didn't feel safe enough to come to that rally, saw a tape of that Gay Pride speech on cable. She taped it herself, then managed to meet up with me later. She said she was so surprised and gald to see my Black face that she almost kissed the TV screen. Another closeted woman came to a Lesbian workshop I did on Cape Cod as part of a conference by women who had been to the Women's Conference in Nairobi last summer. She said she never even imagined that the woman leading the workshop was going to be Black. Both these women were as relieved to discover me as I was to discover them, and we're all now members of a large Black Lesbian support group.

A relative of mine recently called to say she had just discovered her son is Gay and she needed to discuss her feelings and talk about how to handle it. Everything is fine with them now, and I'm delighted I was out there so that she could have someone to turn to.

These are only some of the positive reactions to my being such an out Black Lesbian. However, lest you think this is an entirely altruistic undertaking, I must say unequivocally that I'm having absolutely the grandest, most affirming and uplifting time that I've ever had. Finally, I feel all together. Whole. Affirmed. Happy.

My dreams at age 40 didn't even begin to prepare me for the freedom I feel at age 50. So, for anyone shackled in some closet with the door locked, I say, keep picking at the lock. No matter how long it may take, you deserve to know this feeling, even if it's for only one day before you die.

©1986 Angela Bowen. This commentary was delivered on WMBR-FM in Cambridge, MA as part of its International Women's Day programming on March 9, 1986.



Working for Liberation and Having a Damn Good Time!

By Barbara Smith

I have never been very comfortable around men. Although I had male lovers when I was straight, they were few and far between. My major recollection of these relationships, besides how painful and humiliating they were, was that I never really understood what was going on. I am frankly amazed when some Lesbians say how easy it was for them to handle men and even to run their relationships with them during their heterosexual youths. I did not understand men, period.

By the time my twin sister and I were born, all the men in my family with the exception of two uncles had vanished. My grandmother and one of her sisters were widowed. Another of her sisters was divorced, and yet another, who I now think may have been a Lesbian, never married at all. My mother's sister, Aunt LaRue, was married, but Uncle Bill left the year I was nine. My own father was a total mystery. The official story was that he and my mother had separated before or soon after our birth. He was never discussed. Recently, I've wondered what actually happened, but in any case I never met him, never saw a picture of him. Whenever I look in the mirror, I see a face I can only partially explain.

When I was growing up during the *Donna Reed Show*, *Father-Knows Best* 1950s, I often wished that I lived in a regular family with a father, a mother who stayed home, a big house, desserts at every meal, etc. But "regular" was of course white. Not every kid in my neighborhood had a father, most of the mothers went to work as mine did, and then, exactly a month before my tenth birthday, she died. Because I had no father, I became, to my mind, more definitively an orphan; but as years passed and most of the other family members who raised me also died, I felt much more longing for the women I had known than for the man I never met. What I feel now is tremendous curiosity, intensified perhaps by being a writer. I want to know my whole "story," including the missing facts about my father. It's unlikely that I ever will.

Long before I came out I was most familiar and comfortable with a world of women. Although I was intrigued by males' sexual potential when I reached adolescence and found some boys attractive, I found girls attractive, too. Men in general were scary and unknown and the older I got the more frightening and incomprehensible they became. It was apparent that they wanted women, but they did not seem to like women. Although I never experienced physical violence, the loud-talking on the street and the mental games men played reminded me that the potential was always there. They were also the means by which one might get pregnant and thereby ruin everything. What a relief it was to come out finally and be done with the whole mess.

As a feminist and Lesbian, some things about my prior relationships with men became clearer. I found out that it wasn't just me, but that sexism had basically stacked the deck against me from the start. As I got more and more involved in specifically Black feminist organizing, I was always conscious of how significant race was in shaping my experience as a Black Lesbian. Although the politics of feminism were empowering, the white women's movement was no haven. My racial identity and North America's response to it — i.e., racism — kept my fate directly linked to that of every Black person alive, including Black men. Race assigns to us a shared status, certain common experiences, and a rich history and culture despite differences of gender, sexual orientation, and class. To put it another way, being Black puts us in a great deal of danger here, no matter what variety of Black person we are or how much running we may do to try to prove otherwise. If Thomas Sowell's car breaks down on a back road in Mississippi or a dead end street in Philadelphia, South Boston, or Bay Ridge, his ass is just as likely to be grass as is any other Black person's who is not neo-conservative, upper middle class, straight, and/or male.

Blackness is an inestimable bond. My having established a positive relationship to mine years ago is a major reason that I'm still alive. Even as a baby I suffered as a result of racial oppression

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and I had to learn to cope with it long before I had any inkling of what it might mean to be a woman or a Lesbian. This does not mean that racism is more important than other oppressions. But as I've often stated, it is the most pervasive and dangerous oppression in my life.

My perceptions about race are not something I have to explain to activist Black Gay men, nor do I need to delineate the challenge of being queer in the Black community. I also don't have to explain that talk I talk, why I cannot get into white women's music, why I do not call Black persons past a certain age by their first names, or why I am so worried about our youth. It's all understood. We share language, culture, values, the African genius, family ties — in short we share Blackness.

“My perceptions about race are not something I have to explain to activist Black Gay men, nor do I need to delineate the challenge of being queer in the Black community. I also don't have to explain the talk I talk, why I cannot get into white women's music, why I do not call Black persons past a certain age by their first names, or why I am so worried about our youth. It's all understood. We share language, culture, values, the African genius, family ties — in short we share Blackness.”

My appointment to the board of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG) last year has given me the opportunity to work with and to know many more of my brothers and the experience has been for the most part wonderful. Of course, I am blessed to be in contact with highly progressive and aware Black gay men who have chosen to define their situation politically and not merely as a lifestyle. I am not saying that our differences never cause problems or that sexism never enters in, but I've observed a great deal of willingness to grapple with these issues. If there's one thing that most impresses me about our interactions, it is how much kindness there is between us. Perhaps because sexual and romantic agendas are suspended, we can all just relax and treat each other like folks. I often imagine what our heterosexual sisters and brothers might think if they could see us, supposed man and woman-haters, steadily working for our and their liberation and having a damned good time in the process.

Our relationships with each other are objectively different from those that white Lesbians have with white men, gay or straight. Most white women have been raised to identify with a dominant and privileged racial group as opposed to an embattled subordinate one. Unless they come from ethnic, nationality, or religious groups that are not W.A.S.P. and not assimilated, or from the working class, white women do not consciously share a specific culture or the experience of oppression with white men. White Lesbians' relationships with white gay men frequently break down when the men identify more strongly with their privileges as white,

often affluent males, than they do with their lack of privilege as homosexuals.

The different content of their relationships with white men does not fully explain, however, why some white women adamantly refuse to acknowledge the historical and political status that links Black Lesbians to the other members of our race, especially to those members who are Gay. Because the most outspoken Third World Lesbian activists have not generally advocated a “men are the root of all evil” position, we have been accused of being hopelessly male-identified and viciously attacked by white Lesbian separatists in particular. What these women never bother to examine is how their intransigent racism leads them to invalidate our legitimate concern about the destruction of all people of color.

A letter from a woman named Ruth in the December 1985 issue of the recently revived *Lesbian Inciter* cites seven disturbing “trends,” including working on issues that do not solely affect white Lesbians. She writes:

“4. Using ALL your time, energies and whatever material resources you may have, on every thing but the Lesbian cause; Nicaragua, apartheid, etc., etc. Of course we should all be for an end to U.S. and contra involvement and apartheid. . . . But to drop what affects women for what affects men as well as women, is just going right back to humanism.

5. Very tough, but must be addressed — Julia Penelope has had the courage to do so — the attitude of many Black Lesbian[s], who say “if you want us you must take our men, too.”

This writer has distorted a major point of Black feminist analysis. We never asked white women to “take” either us or Black men. We have demanded repeatedly, however, that the white women's movement seriously confront racism, which minimally requires the understanding that it grievously affects all people of color — women and men, heterosexuals and homosexuals, old and young all over the globe. It does not merely crop up from time to time among wimmin at womyn's events. It also beats me how one can “be for” an end to the crimes of intervention in Latin America and apartheid in South Africa without working toward same. Perhaps one just loaf and invites the goddess to fix it all. Fortunately, this brand of apolitical purism does not dominate the Lesbian/feminist movement. And in any case it is highly inappropriate for any white people to dictate what kind of relationships we should have with our people.

Black Lesbians and Gay men have something special to celebrate: the growing cohesiveness and vitality of our movement, coupled with our growing love and respect for each other. We are definitely progressing. I only wish I could tell Michael.

I met Michael in the mid-1970s, when he was a medical student at Boston University. He was my first Black Gay friend after I came out. He was also no doubt the first man to tell me somewhat

The Lesbian Inciter, December, 1985, p. 5 See also Julia Penelope's articles “The Mystery of Lesbians: I, II, and III” in *Lesbian Ethics*.

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Two Views on "The Color Purple"



It's Not for Me to Say

By Angela Bowen

The flyleaf of *The Color Purple* calls the book "honest, poignant, laughing, defiant . . . a story about heroic lives, love, and the nature of God . . . it breaks new ground in fiction with its portrayal of the bonding of women." Seems to me Steven Spielberg (director) and Quincy Jones (producer) of the recently released film could do with some understanding of those words, particularly the "nature of God" and the "bonding of women" part. They missed out on those themes somehow.

However, Walker, in a December *MS* article, says she trusts the men doing the film. Acknowledging that a woman director would have placed more emphasis on the women, she suggests that Spielberg was more interested in showing the transformation of Mister and says it doesn't bother her much. At least Walker understands the terms of the debate. Neither Spielberg nor Jones do. They think the issue is race. In a Boston *Globe* interview, Spielberg states, "This movie is more about humanity than it is about race. If this movie was all about race . . . I wouldn't have presumed . . . to have stepped in . . ." And from Quincy Jones (whose involvement in the project helped secure Walker's partici-

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All in the Family

By R. Harris

The controversy surrounding *The Color Purple*, seems to be just another chapter in the old conflict between Black men and women about the depiction of Black life in America, and the same battle over a few seats in the back of the bus named "American Literature." Most simply stated, Black male writers have on the whole been more concerned with externals to the Black community: Black-white relations and how the white world deals with us. Therefore, Black women tend to get relegated to the background. On the other hand, Black women writers have focused more on internals: Black-Black relations, with the external world as an important factor in — but not the main focus of — their work. Alice Walker's *Meridian*, for example, although about a civil rights activist in the 1950s and '60s, is more about her inner life than about The Movement, yet Ernest J. Gaine's *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*, despite its female protagonist, says more about the social order than it does about Miss Jane's internal life.

Because Black women writers have dealt with things within the Black community, and have risen to prominence in part due to the feminist movement, they have often been under attack by Black men,

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IT'S NOT FOR ME TO SAY

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pation), "Who thinks someone else could have made a better movie because of color? When you get to the level we're talking about it's all merit. You don't give this remarkable book to someone because of race or *sex* (italics mine). You give it to the best to get the best out of it. The complaining is just plain bull."

It's difficult to see the social conscience that Walker ascribes to Jones when he doesn't even entertain the notion that Black people should have a concern, let alone Black women. Black women finally see ourselves portrayed in a blockbuster of a bestseller as the positive, loving, scrapping, strong women we are, who support, teach, laugh with and rely on one another throughout our lives. *The Color Purple* is the story of a woman's steady climb out of a desperate and intolerable life imposed upon her by men. There's no way to get around that simple reality. And every time she makes another step, a woman helps her do it. Then she grows strong enough to offer other women some wisdom.

"It's difficult to see the social conscience that Walker ascribes to Jones when he doesn't even entertain the notion that Black people should have a concern, let alone Black women."

Of course, in making a movie from a book that covers so many years and characters, choices had to be made, and Spielberg made some choices that Walker feels he had every right to. But it does seem odd that the choices always involved a decision not to show scenes where women contributed to the evolvment of Celie (the lead character, played by Whoopie Goldberg). But it feels quite deliberate for him to include the part where Sofia confronts Celie and tells her off for suggesting that her husband (Celie's stepson) beat her, and yet not finish the scene to include Celie's apology and their making up and becoming closer as a result. That incident told a lot about Celie's character, and you can't tell me a woman would have even considered leaving it out. Of course, as these incidents were left out, more was being added to show us that Celie's husband, Mister (Danny Glover) was changing and growing, and we were made to pay attention to his transformation throughout, rather than to Celie's.

Celie's passionate sexual awakening with Shug (Margaret Avery) is reduced to a couple of very chaste kisses. We never see the real development of their sexual relationship. The audience is not allowed to know that they become lovers, sleep together consistently and eventually live together away from Mister. Spielberg treats their relationship as if they had a fling one day and then became like sisters.

But the most glaring omission was of that classic conversation between Shug and Celie about the meaning of God. Why would anyone (or maybe the question is how *could* anyone) make a two and a half hour film of *The Color Purple* and not include the centerpiece that pulls it all together? Maybe because if he had used the discussion from the book in its entirety, we would have had to hear Celie talk about a white male God who never listens to a poor Black woman. That's pretty threatening stuff, particularly for most of Spielberg's audience who he admits have never seen him do anything heavy. We'd also have to hear Shug's philosophy on God,

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ALL IN THE FAMILY

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partly out of envy for their success, and partly because they have brought up things the men would rather not have seen brought up. Over the years, Black women have dealt with sexism, homosexuality, homophobia, molestation, rape, and just plain pig-headedness on the part of Black men. Black men through it all have felt things like this should be kept "in the family" and not discussed where whites might get the wrong idea about us. Many men have dealt with the issues raised by Black women writers in the same way my family deals with my gayness, by not talking about it. It is something over there, out of sight and out of mind. *The Color Purple*, popping up in wide screen Dolby stereo could be ignored.

As Black women have attempted to define their lives and themselves in their own terms, to call themselves by their own names and not the names men both Black and white have called them; so, too, in *The Color Purple*, Celie eventually defines herself and goes on to live her life in her own way. So the conflict *about* the film in an uncanny way mirrors the conflict *in* the film. Just as Mister wants Celie to remain silent, many male critics want Black women and other outsiders to remain quiet and leave to them the job of creating proper depictions of the Black community.

Part of the controversy also stems from a hangover from slavery and Reconstruction when what one Black person did had an effect on the lives of all the Blacks in the community. If one Black stepped out of line, was guilty of "reckless eyeballing" or whatever, retribution for the crime could be exacted at any time on any member of the entire Black community. We developed "pre-individualist" thinking, discouraging individuality out of self-defense. Now this thinking has segued into many people's views of how we should be depicted. Any depiction of us is automatically a depiction of all of us. Except when attempting to force governments to create, expand, or retain programs for the least of us or to stop continuing discrimination, many want all depictions to be uplifting and morally acceptable, as if we all were Dr. Cliff Huxtable's family. Negative images are attacked. Many of us have yet to realize that, in the words of Audre Lorde: "Difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than a reason for destruction." But then, why should they? Why should we be any different from the white majority that has always seen our difference as the perfect excuse for plotting our destruction?

As a Black Gay man, I acutely feel this lack of respect for difference. My Gayness is viewed as the worse form of deviation from the accepted norm, and therefore not something to be recognized or discussed. To steal an idea from Nikki Giovanni, many of us are not willing to accept in ordinary Black people, as well as our writers and artists, the same type of diversity we are willing to accept in our jazz musicians. Many Black critics of *The Color Purple* wish for a uniformity of sound, wish, in a sense, for all of us to sound like Grover Washington, Jr., or else be silent. Because I am an outsider, Gay, different, and revel in that difference, I want to be able to express myself in any way that best fits me, using the phrasings of Ornette Coleman, say, or Arthur Blythe, if I see fit. I have to side with Black women writers in their attempts to broaden our horizons. The Black experience can no longer be defined just by straight men. All our voices have to be heard, and the way we are perceived by the white majority does not matter. I define myself, and call myself by my own name, and the names others call me do not matter. Particularly now, our very lives depend on our speaking for ourselves, talking openly about our lives, and being honest with ourselves and our community, even if it means bringing up things some would rather have left "in the family." ■

IT'S NOT FOR ME TO SAY

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love and freedom, which would never do in light of the nonsense he decided to slip into the film about Shug. Who could have been ready for this?

Although Shug may seem to us like the quintessential free woman, loving men and women at her will, Spielberg decides that she's pining for the love of her preacher father, chasing after him throughout the movie as she repeatedly seeks his forgiveness for her sinful ways. She even goes so far as to run after him waving her wedding band at him shouting, "I'm married now." He rides by, his face turned away from her in disdain. She finally corners him and forces a reconciliation that can only be described as one of Spielberg's "Amazing Stories."

Notice that I didn't tell you where she finally catches up with him. That's because I know you're going to see it. What the heck! Whoopi Goldberg is fine. But we knew that anyway, right? Danny Glover is just fine too. Margaret Avery (Shug) is fine. Tata Vega (the voice of Shug) is mighty fine. And Desreta Jackson, who played Celie, is a wonderful actor I hope I'll get to see sometime again. Of course, parts for Black actors being as scarce as they are, that's a dim hope. And the music and the cinematography are all as delightful as we expected them to be. But I've got a little trouble with the sweeping, panoramic views of grass and sky so early on in the movie. It was too grand and wide for the prevailing mood of fear and despair that sets the opening scenes. The cameras did nothing to convey the feeling of confinement of Celie's life and spirit that began the story. But then, what do I know? Quincy said Spielberg was the best.

When Quincy Jones asked Walker what her fears were about seeing the film done, she said she feared *them* (whites, one must presume in the context of the piece) embarrassing *us*. Well, they didn't. They didn't embarrass *us* women either. The men embarrassed no one but themselves. To have pursued a woman whose book won a Pulitzer and a National Book Award to beg for the right to make a movie of her work; to promise to leave the integrity of the book intact and then to rewrite essential pieces for whatever reasons you might tell yourself you have strikes me as artistically insulting, misogynistic and homophobic. But then, who am I? Just one of thousands who have read and loved everything Walker's written and who's read *The Color Purple* four times. I didn't really expect to see 'my' movie made. And I was right. But Quincy Jones says Spielberg's the best. Whoopi Goldberg thinks this will bring him an Oscar. And Walker says Spielberg thinks with his heart. So if they're satisfied . . . ■

C O N G R A T U A L T I O N S

BLACK/OUT

from *Sojourner*

THE WOMEN'S NEWSPAPER OF BOSTON

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WORKING FOR LIBERATION

Continued from page 14

wistfully upon observing our early organizing efforts, "You women seem like you have it all together." I probably assured him that it only looked that way and that historical conditions were also in our favor because the feminist movement, for all its problems, provided a stronger base from which to build as Black Lesbians, than the more narrowly defined white-male-dominated Gay rights movement possibly could.

"Race assigns to us a shared status, certain common experiences, and a rich history and culture despite differences of gender, sexual orientation, and class. To put it another way, being Black puts us in a great deal of danger here, no matter what variety of Black person we are or how much running we may do to try to prove otherwise."

Michael was brilliant, politically active, a lover Black culture, and the soul of wit. He was also a home boy, whose family, like mine, came from Georgia. When he completed his internship and residency at Harlem Hospital, he returned there to practice psychiatry in a rural community health center. Years passed and we sometimes got news of each other from our mutual friend, Alyce, also a doctor.

In 1983 I visited Michael in Georgia and we finally took a trip we had often talked about, to see some relatives of mine in Dublin. I had not seen Aunt Viola for almost 30 years, since she and her first husband (my grandmother's brother) had come up to Cleveland for my mother's funeral. I joked that having Michael along might throw them off my trail, queer though we were. Aunt Viola was lovely, but her new husband, a farmer and traveling country preacher, definitely picked up on something. As we were getting ready to leave, he actually took down the Bible and read us the verse that warns women not to put on things that pertain to a man and vice versa. Thunderstruck, but trying to remain composed, I asked him if he read that because I was wearing pants and he said, "Yes." He admitted that the secretary at one of his churches also insisted upon wearing pants and that when they argued about it she pointed out that the pants she wore were made for women. I thought, "Well, I sure can't tell that lie, since the ones I have on came from the men's store at A&S."

Michael and I said our goodbyes, then stopped for fried chicken. On the drive back, we talked about how rough it was to be who we were, especially for him, without a support system or community. But thank goodness, he certainly was my support system that day. If he hadn't been with me, I might have keeled right over when the Reverend started in with his little sermon. To thank him, I sent him a package of my own and other books by Lesbians of color. I also told him about organizations like Black and White Men Together (BWMT) and NCBLG and encouraged him to try to find folks when he commuted to Atlanta to see friends and go to the bars.

Last October, Alyce called to tell me Michael had died, not from the scourge of AIDS, but from the complications of diabetes. He was 34. This then is for Michael. Like all my work, it is indebted to those who have made the work possible — the members of my family. ■

Poetry

A Poem for Wilson

(for my brother who died of AIDS on June 8, 1981)

Sonia Sanchez

1. death

The day you died
a fever starched my bones.
within the slurred
sheets, i hoarded my legs
while you rowed out among the boulevards
balancing your veins on sails.
easy the eye of hunger
as i peeled the sharp
sweat and swallowed wholesale molds.

2. recovery (a)

What comes after
is consciousness of the morning
of the licensed sun that subdues
immoderate elements.
there is a kindness in illness
the indulgence of discrepancies.

reduced to the menage of houses
and green drapes that puff their seasons
toward the face.
i wonder what to do now.
i am afraid
i remember a childhood that cried
after extinguished lights
when only the coated banners answered.

3. recovery (b)

There is a savior in these buds
look how the phallic stems distend
in welcome.
O copper flowerheads
confine my womb that i may dwell within.

i see these gardens, whom i love
i feel the sky's sweat on my face
now that these robes no longer bark
i praise abandonment.

4. wake

i have not come for summary.
must i renounce all babytons?
here, without psalms,
these leaves grow white
and burn the bones with dance.
here, without surfs,
young panicles bloom on the clouds and fly
while myths tick grey as thunder.

5. burial

you in the crow's rain
rusting amid ribs
my mouth spills your birth
i have named you prince of boards
stretching with the tides.

you in the toad's tongue
peeling on nerves
look. look. the earth is running palms.

6. (on) (the) (road). again.

somewhere a flower walks in mass
purchasing wholesale christis
sealing white-willow sacraments.

naked on steeples
where trappist idioms sail
an atom peels the air.

o i will gather my pulse
muffled by sibilants
and follow disposable dreams.

Outlaws (The Work Ahead)

Dan Garrett

These days language shakes down
to elementals: pride, history,
activism, tomorrow, you and
expectation flows in my veins,
unhalting, knowing it's the darkness
of you I have wanted to melt into.

We love as outlaws
men in search of our own constitution.

Martin, Malcolm and Harvey's dying let us know
there is work to do,
not to hope or grieve for
laugh away or moan through,
simply to do.

With no land for our harvests
we must free the earth
and with rake, shovel and spade
turn the dirt, drop the seeds,
looking out for rain, sun, weeds
and for the hard rows we hoe
our crops gain from sweated, tender effort,
schools, dance halls, theatres rising tall,
and in our hot Black hands
we'll take the law
as with glass
stretching it clear and glistening
shining with freedom.

Exit Sign

Stephen F. Langley

Because you know the answer all too well
You dare not ask to stay
So you lie there, eyes gathering your
Things in half light, admiring the smooth
Back of the stranger who faces the wall

Caressing the cool face of your
Watch with a thumb, you play dumb
Pretending you're too naive to read
Body language

The Emancipation of Fanny Gordon

Julie Blackwomon

Fanny Gordon spent forty years
bolting doors against her passions
plugging cracks and tacking plastic to her windows
to keep out her love for women
She zipped herself inside a marriage
that did not fit and watched women
she could have loved pass quietly
by the outskirts of her life
But at sixty two
Fanny Gordon finally grew weary of loving
at half mast and left home
to repaint the ancient memory
of distant comets
that once exploded in her life

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Reviews

Our Dead Behind Us by Audre Lorde. W.W. Norton, 1986. 64pp. \$6.95 paper, \$14.95 cloth.

By Jewelle Gomez

Our Dead Behind Us is Audre Lorde's most personal collection since *From A Land Where Other People Live* in 1973. It is a sharp edge and an open-mouth kiss from a woman who knows the rocks in the road. Lorde has learned to turn words into urgent tears without submerging us or herself in hopelessness or leaving any doubt about the harshness of the reality behind her poetic images. I do not use personal and autobiographical interchangeably. There are those who presume that women's work is merely diary pages set in type; that women are not capable of nor inclined to imagination or artifice. Any reader of Lorde's collection, *Black Unicorn*, quickly sheds that mistaken notion. Personal here means a familiar touch. Lorde's images and language reach easily into my life and feel like secrets shared.

Her work always has finely tuned style and craft and this collection is no exception. But here the poems are a flash of feeling, something we can mistake for our own even as we continue turning the pages:

*"Some women wait for their right
train in the wrong station
in the alleys of morning
for the noon to holler
the night come down."*

This, from her poem "Stations," is one of the few to catch women in stasis. Most picture women moving, searching, clarifying as if Lorde herself were traveling both back in history and into the future of her children.

One poem speaks of a picnic in West Berlin in 1984 that resounds with the somber echo of long dead Jewish voices. In another, she concedes, "History is not kind to us..." Yet she is still able to dream "of our coming together/enriched driven/not only by love/but by lust for a working tomorrow..." She says in the same poem "I am writing these words as a route map/an artifact for survival..." She uses her words to weave together the past, present and future, making them interdependent so that if what we (those who are struggling for liberation) make of the world is a sad reprise of what has gone before we must accept responsibility for it.



But this is not a didactic book, it is a sensuous one. Her words also make explicit the ways women can love each other: the furtive, warm hand of a woman on the knee of her official dinner companion; a visiting woman delegate; the fullness of the intimacy of a lover's hair on the bathroom sink; the stolen passion before battle. These are the familiar waking dreams of all of us.

While Lorde has drawn us into a world that is immediate she has not forsaken the mythological imagery which has so characterized her later work. The final poem in this collection, "Call," may be the most moving incantation she has constructed. In it she invokes the spirits of Black women warriors and Aido Hwedo, the Rainbow Serpent which must be worshipped although its names and faces have been forgotten. In this poem, as in the others, her prayer is a song not a dirge. It is a warning and an exaltation. The poem "... arms your beauty/with a hundred knives..." With that startling image Lorde forces upon us the sour sweat of Grenada and Soweto and the countless other places where murder lurks. But because she is always moving toward a new clarity, a fresh perspective, a deeper embrace there can be no despair: "I am a bleak heroism of words/that refuse/to be buried alive/with the liars."

Eight Days A Week by Larry Duplechan. Alyson Publications, (40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118) 1985. 260 pp. \$6.95 paperback.

By Charles Michael Smith

Eight Days A Week is Los Angeles writer Larry Duplechan's first novel, which he calls "a period piece," because most of the novel, a Gay love story, takes place during the summer of 1979 in Los Angeles and environs. The book, I suspect, is largely

autobiographical, and is told in the first person by its main character, Johnnie Ray Rousseau.

Johnnie Ray is a 22 year old Black Gay man who by day is a secretary in a law firm and by night a struggling nightclub singer at Tom Sawyer's, "a claustrophobic little club," where Johnnie Ray meets his lover-to-be, Keith Keller, a banker. It's love at first sight for Johnnie Ray who admittedly "has this thing about blonds" which dates back to his childhood. They meet twice more (in the oldies section of a record shop, and again, at the club), have sex ("We went at one another like magnet and steel. Like winos at a bottle of Thunderbird. Like a starving man at a Fatburger."), and become lovers.

However, the relationship turns bitter-sweet. Their lifestyles and temperaments are poles apart: Keith is a homebody and because of his high position in a bank has more stable work hours; Johnnie, on the other hand, is less domesticated and because of the nature of his work keeps late hours and is on the road for long periods.

And then there are Keith's bouts of jealousy when men pay too much attention to Johnnie. Keith seems either unable or unwilling to recognize the reason for Johnnie's flirtatious ways: the need to prove to himself that he is indeed attractive. Johnnie has a deep-seated feeling of physical inferiority that stems from the fact that his younger brother David "was a beautiful child... with smooth cream-colored skin... huge green eyes, and jet black hair..." and was much made over by family and friends.

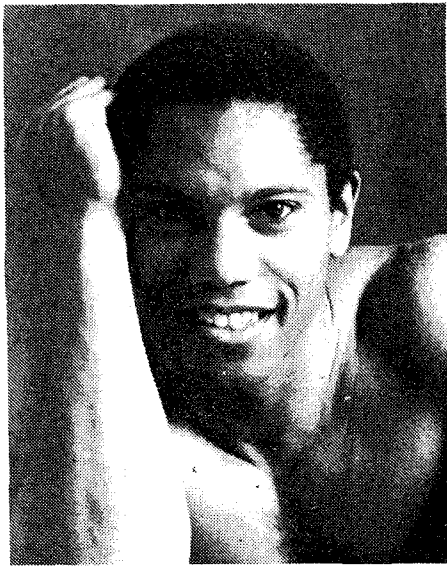
So when Keith says to Johnnie, "What's the use of having a lover if I'm going to be alone?" he knows he is asking Johnnie to do the unthinkable — quit show business. His refusal brings down the curtain on their relationship.

Eight Days A Week, although quite entertaining at times, has its problems. First of all, Larry Duplechan tries to be a little too cute, a little too clever. His humor seems forced. Throughout the novel song lyrics are quoted in the narrative or by the characters (like Keith's line: "Wild Thing, I think I love you") and characters and types of behavior are compared to actual show business personalities ("He hugged me tight against him, growling like Roy Orbison"). When Johnnie Ray Rousseau declares: "I have this tendency to spout trivia when nothing else comes to mind," I believe he's speaking for his creator. It's a shorthand way of defining his characters. And after awhile it becomes

tedious.

Secondly, his view of most female characters is unflattering. (Do I detect a tinge of sexism here?) They tend to be caricatures, who are either not too bright or just plain bitchy. For example, Duplechan (in the character of Johnnie Ray) describes the waitresses at his local hangout as being "generally as intellectually simple as they were physically plain." And Johnnie's manager, Marsha Goldman, "a small dishwater blonde woman," comes across as a dyed-in-the-wool shrew.

What few Black men appear in the book don't fare much better. The only Black man Johnnie Ray has been to bed with is described in such a disgusting — and disturbing — terms, you wonder why he bothered at all. (Zaz, a saxophone player, is "a big, nappy, utterly unkempt young man" who "smelled like the corner where you keep the cat box." Their lovemaking takes place among "the piss-stained, sour-smelling sheets of [Zaz's] frameless bed.")



Larry Duplechan

It is quite clear that this novel is aimed at a readership of white Gay men and those Black Gay men who hate themselves and "really dig the fair-haired boys." What self-respecting and self-loving Black Gay man would say, as Johnnie Ray does, that "You know you're in a class joint in L.A. when the busboys are Caucasian"? Would any Black Gay man with any pride and dignity set out to gain the erotic attention of white men just so he can claim a "personal victory" against personal ads that read: "No fats, fems or Blacks, please"?

Duplechan's work lacks an Afrocentric point of view. It is as though he wants to escape his Blackness. "If you look at your-

self through the eyes of the person dominating you," says Kenyan novelist-playwright Ngugu wa Thiong'o, "then it means you are not really in a position to resist, or oppose him."

The most interesting parts of the book dealt with the music business. If Duplechan, who is a former professional singer, had decided to write a novel about this so-called glamorous world, he would have produced a much better product. Then he could have added a few touches of humor and romance, if he wanted to. As is, *Eight Days a Week* is too concerned with telling the world how wonderful and sexy white men are. If he wanted to do that, he should have taken out a full-page ad in *The Advocate*. Duplechan *does* have talent as a writer, and he should put that talent to better use.

The jacket blurb calls *Eight Days a Week* "funny . . . sexy . . . memorable." But I think the late Black Gay writer and literary critic of the Harlem Renaissance period, Wallace Thurman, would have said precisely the same thing about this book that he said about a book he critiqued in 1926: "[It is] one of those books that everyone should read, speculate upon, discuss, and then forget."

Living As A Lesbian by Cheryl Clarke. Firebrand Books (141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850) 1986. 96 pp. \$6.95 paper; \$14.95 cloth.

By Doris Davenport

About three years ago, I wrote a very objective "rave" review of Cheryl Clarke's *Narratives: Poems in the Tradition of Black Women*. The book was — and is — impressive for Clark's "natural" poetic style, and for how she presents Black Lesbian feminism. Reviewing the book for a straight Afro-American journal, I modestly (read arrogantly and dogmatically) suggested that *all* people might learn something from the book; that all poets, especially, could learn something about writing poetry from the book. Since then, I have waited impatiently for Cheryl's second book of poems.

Living as a Lesbian is like *Narratives* only in that several of the poems tell stories, and the style, in many poems, is as natural, or crafted naturally, as those in the first book. Otherwise, the contents are more eclectic, more inclusive than the first book. (The title of the book might well be, in fact, *Living as a Black feminist activist Lesbian*.) The subject matter of the poems range from specific po-

litical activists and events, to "Lesbian erotica" and personal habits. Two major motifs run throughout the book: political commitment and Clarke's particular brand of dry, sardonic humor. One poem, "how like a man," is a combination of both, with lines such as these:

*how like a man
is the ku klux klan
it comes in the night
to wag
its ugly shaft
to laugh at the final climax of its rape
as rope chokes out the final cry of 'why?'
blood blurring sight of a naked cross.*

The poems that deal more directly with "living as a lesbian" also exhibit a certain kind of humor, as in the poem "i come to the city for protection" when she says, "I been in love/six times in the last six months/and ain't done tryin yet." A better example is the poem "nothing," a raunchy, rhythmical list of things the narrator would do to keep her



Cheryl Clarke

lover, such as:

*sell my car
tie her to the bed post and
spank her
lie to my mother
let her watch me fuck my other lover
miss my only sister's wedding
to keep her wanting me.*

In an overall way, when the poems in the book work, they do so because Clarke really

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matches style and rhythm to content, and each element of the poem infuses all the others. "freedom flesh" (for Assata) is an example of this kind of meshing, as is "what goes around comes around/or the proof is in the pudding." The latter poem deals with having lied to a lover; the lover cries as the speaker in the poem fixes dinner: "Ain't no point denying/my souffle won't even flutter./I withhold from the woman in my shower crying/afraid of the void I filled with lying."

Generally speaking *Living* is less powerful than *Narratives*, although there are several very powerful poems in the book, one of which is a long tirade-like, very descriptive poem about being a compulsive overeater. The poem catalogues the various foods eaten, as well as the reasons for eating them, such as wanting comfort, "someone to sleep with," and others. The poem is so well crafted, until reading it made me feel stuffed. Relatedly, the poem "sister of famous artist brother," about the life and death of Kimako (Baraka/Jones) makes the reader feel the irony, the grief, anger, pain, and loss.

On the other hand, there are a few flaws in the book. Several of the poems are overwritten, such as "urban gothic" and "the layoff." Sometimes the use of Black English is forced and awkward. Also, a few of the Lesbian love poems are rather maudlin, and trite. All things considered, however, the book was worth the wait, and definitely worth having. Wimmin/Lesbians who read the book for a strictly *Lesbian* content will perhaps be disappointed, but then, we *do* live in the (un)real world too. Relatedly, there are some aspects of Lesbian lifestyles which are simply not touched on — but then, that is probably deliberate. If nothing else, the book shows the myriad complexities, the multi-faceted existence of a Black Lesbian's life. That, in itself, is invaluable.

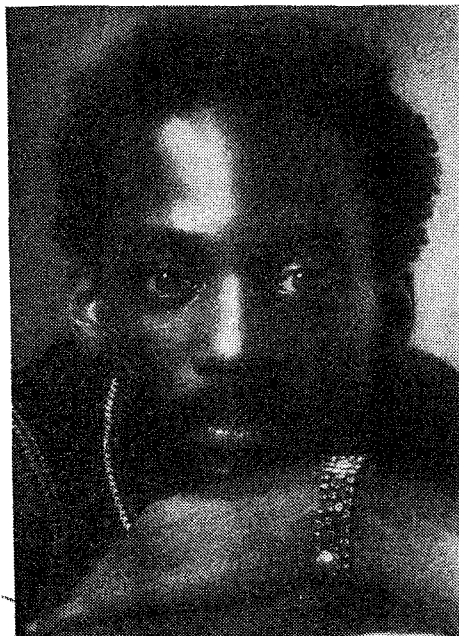
Earth Life by Essex Hemphill. Be Bop Books, (3351 Mt. Pleasant Street, N.W., Studio 9, Washington, D.C. 20010) 1985. 21pp. \$5 paper.

By Brad Johnson

Broken glass, scattering sheaths slice light. The embittered landscape of *Earth Life* by Essex Hemphill instigates the emergence of this image in my mind as I read. And still, from the depths of each jagged shard, in all its pristine clarity, is the reflection that every human being who has ever been forced to wear the stifling wrappings of the label

"Black and Gay" will recognize. Here is poetry from a man who seems to have successfully broken out of his personal prisons, only to be soon made painfully aware that on the "outside," that wreckless domain of homophobic humans," . . . My life is a hunter's season."

From Be Bop Books in Washington, D.C. comes this chapbook of poems from a writer who has also performed several of them as a collaborative performance work co-produced with instrumentalist/composer Wayson Jones. Essex Hemphill has managed to synthesize into twelve poems much of the anger and revulsion many people who are Black and Gay harbor towards the morality-laden attempts by others to engineer their extinction. These are manifestos, a guerilla's catalog of humiliations and indignities suffered at the hands of the blinded ones who, consumed with fear, have become fearlessly resolute in their refusal to acknowledge the fact of our human commonality, one that embraces an infinitely varying spectrum of emotional, spiritual *and* sexual realities.



Essex Hemphill

But ripping away the fabric of illusions by which others intend to suffocate him compels the poet ultimately to resort to more aggressive forms of self-defense, as each move on his part to shake off the suffocation only instigates a swift and brutal coarsening and thickening of the fabric being wound about his head. And he will not be silenced without a fully-committed struggle. Hemphill, however, has come to grapple with the uncompromising demands of his violence through the Word, and with the opening

lines of "Cordon Negro," the first poem in this collection, begins to exorcise it thusly:

*I drink champagne early in the morning
instead of leaving my house
with an M16 and nowhere to go.*

He acknowledges the inevitability of confrontation imposed from without, and its seeming universal pervasiveness. As destructive as it could be, his violence will be readily seen to be retaliatory and defensive one, a coat of poisonous and lacerating quills put on as a last and regretful resort about his pure mind/body/soul finding itself rootless and completely vulnerable to the collective vindictive acts of a parasitic and fundamentally insecure civilization. If all this seems too sweeping or melodramatic a condemnation or "calling to task" of existing societal machineries, let Hemphill eloquently provide the particular circumstances that render the consequent psychic loss to large numbers of human beings more acutely concrete, as he does in the poem "Alpha Wave Disruptions":

*The police stop me at a roadblock,
ask me: where I live?*

I tell them

anywhere I can —

off a bitch, on a bench, on a grate.

They want proof.

They arrest me for having none.

They suspect I'm a non-person.

I tell them I come from Earth.

They choke me at my collar

and tell me no such place exists.

The rootlessness and isolation forced upon him by the overwhelmingly alienating elements of the society in which he feels himself imprisoned are themselves brought into question by that society's enforcers, who are seen to be determined to redefine him out of existence, countering his innate foundations of self-worth with lies he is made, on threat of death, to believe about himself, as evidenced in these lines from the poem "Surrender Is Treason":

I am young enough

and black enough to be accused.

*. . . I'm young enough, black enough
to be shot on sight, questioned later.*

In these extremes of a policed existence, survival comes quickly to mean resorting to the commission of revolutionary acts, those willful perpetrations some consider life-threatening, as in the rocking of boats with

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an increasing list to starboard and other forbidden dreams, if only to ensure the safeguarding of his own sanity. Hemphill places checks on his burgeoning need to bring down oppressive systems, but there can be no doubt about the genuine intensity of his feelings, expressed here with rancorous conviction in these lines from the poem "Forever":

*If I had a brick
and fast legs.
If I had a gun.
If I were an army.*

In having his most cherished aspirations so effectively repressed and outlawed by others of his kind, he is, in effect, being robbed by them of himself. He finds himself altered, embalmed with the sanctioned approval of the State, as it were, even put on display for those sad millions who can no longer love or appreciate life but through the morbid ritualization of its death and artificial resurrection, a phenomenon vividly described in the the poem "Visiting Hours":

*The government pays me
nine thousand dollars a year
to protect the East Wing.
So I haunt it.
... Modigliani whispers to Matisse.
Matisse whispers to Picasso.
... I'm expected to die, if necessary,
protecting European artwork
that robbed color and movement
from my life.*

And so it is as well with many white Gay men, who have fashioned a rather peculiar fantasy regarding Black Gay men in the same way European artists fashioned their's regarding Black people globally. However, this fantasy is a sexual one (which it has also been for heterosexual Caucasians), and Hemphill spares not even his white Gay brothers for their misguided and racially-motivated attempts to stifle and thereby denigrate him through their blind acts of sexual wish-fulfillment. He does so in the poem "If His Name Were Mandingo" in such a way as to reveal the fundamental parasitism inherent in the fantasizing, to make plain for all to see the addictive elements of some white Gay men's lust regarding sexual acts with Black men as if Black men were a drug whose very nature reinforces the illusion they desperately cling to in order not to experience any personal joy or fulfillment with the reality that Black men are.

*He speaks good damn English to me.
... He doesn't speak the
"dis" and "dat" bull
I've seen quoted.
... I don't suppose you ever
hear him clearly?
You're always busy
seeking other things of him.
His name isn't important.
It would be coincidence
if he had a name, a face, a mind.
If he's not hard-on then he's hard-up
and either way you watch him.
... He doesn't dance well,
but you don't notice.
He's only visible in the dark
to you.*

Two poems, however, "Black Beans" and "Better Days," reveal the private, unfettered substance that becomes Hemphill's poetry when he is free to revel in his own dreams. Having learned to appreciate the lessons of self-reliance, he suffers no hurt from envy of the material wealth of others somehow denied, or perhaps eschewed by him. The stuff of love is very elemental, unadorned energy with no moral trepidations or material concerns, unfolding itself in a realm where contradictory and opposing forces interact inexorably as complimentary portions of a whole, moving in and out of each other and changing places without a hint of disorientation, as the man who dreams he is falling from atop a cliff into the abyss, and who sleeps through the plunge into the blackness of the chasm with his eyes wide open, falling and falling until he realizes he is flying and that he can control his flight as he soars to the heights and beyond:

*I smell your lust,
not the pot burnt black
with tonight's meager meal.
So we can't buy flowers for our table.
Our kisses are petals,
our tongues caress the bloom.
... Our chipped water glasses are filled
with wine from our loving.
And the burnt black beans —
caviar.*

Side by side with this effervescence will be found more sobering reflections on desire as expressed in "Better Days," the closing poem of *Earth Life*. The physical and emotional wants of the human being, subtly or radically different though they may be from culture to culture and from person to person, are fueled from the same source: the

need to know and experience love and to share it with others. Freeing himself from the angst-ridden modes of thought and behavior of "western" civilization enables Hemphill to acknowledge and accept this need in himself, and it also enables him to face and accept the loneliness that comes with this new-found territory, for it is not always inhabited by others willing or needing to share it with him:

*In daytime hours
guided by instincts that never sleep,
the faintest signals come to me
over vast spaces
of etiquette and restraint,
... I am so driven by my senses.
... to seek pure pleasure
through every pore.
... But it concerns me,
... that I am being consumed by want.
And I wonder where stamina comes from
to search all night until my footsteps
ring awake the sparrows,
and I go home, ghost walking,
driven indoors to rest
my hunter's guise,
to love myself as fiercely
as I have in better days.*

Jonestown & Other Madness by Pat Parker. Firebrand Books (141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850) 1985. 75pp. \$5.95 paper; \$11.95 cloth.

By Donna Walker

Jonestown & Other Madness is Pat Parker's song of praise for loving the whole world. The author of *Womanslaughter*, *Movement in Black*, *Pit Stop*, and *Child of Myself* has woven a finely textured book of poetry that speaks to her life as a Black, Lesbian, feminist, activist and mother. Flowery words for a book which focuses on the everyday madness of racism, homophobia, violence against people of color, and the possibility of love. It is an example of Black Lesbian writing which needs to be heard throughout the country.

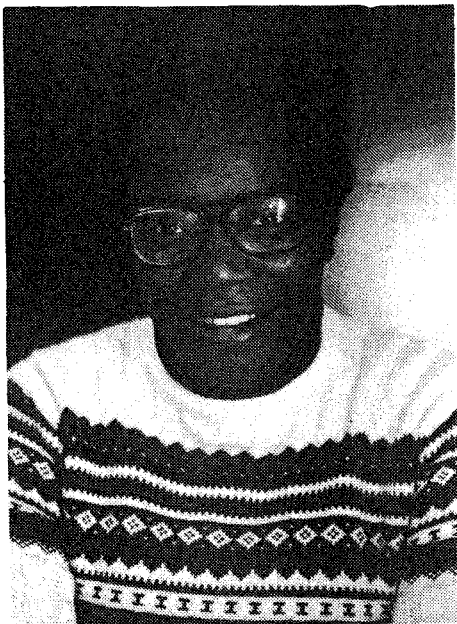
Parker uses the macabre saga of Jonestown, Guyana as a focal point to her opening question in the forward: "If 900 white people had gone to a country with a Black minister and 'committed suicide,' would we have accepted the answers were given so easily?" With this question asked, the reader begins a series of side trips to other 'incidents' of madness in which Black folk, Gay folk,

Continued on page 24

Continued from page 23

women folk, and children have been involved. Some of the incidents caught the attention of the nation as in Jonestown and the Atlanta murders; others caught the attention of the author as she writes of lovers in the night and the playfulness of children. What makes this a powerful voice of Black Lesbian writing is Parker's ability to make the reader feel indignant about the underlying reasons for the madness.

In "Jonestown," for example, Parker examines the myth that Black folks do not commit suicide. She highlights two themes: one, that the Rev. Jim Jones led the victims to their death because he was able to show them that he cared enough to put them out of their misery. A demented madman? Yes. Unfortunately, he was also charismatic enough to give hope a shape which moved people to their deaths. The second theme was that Jim Jones made the Jonestown site appear to be a paradise on earth, the first step



Pat Parker

toward the Promised Land. As Black people we were taught early in the Black Church to shoulder our burdens, our crosses, and to look to the promised land for release from earthly misery. Jonestown was a parallel to that teaching, fomenting this imagery the victims shared into the reality of stepping forth onto the freedom train.

Parker points out that Jonestown as an "incident" was an unexpected lesson of the extremes to which people of color go to seek self-respect and affirmation. Jonestown as a poem is a lesson that the conditions under which we live requires active, rather than passive, reactions.

Placed in the latter stage of the book, "Jonestown" is the climax to the recurring theme of *why*. It strengthens the poetry which precedes it, and serves as the final question, before the last poem "Legacy," a poem to a child to be proud of her people and their strength, her race, and her heritage.

Another example of how Parker defines her world is in the poem "Love Isn't." It is here that Parker sets aside the romantic images of love that most people possess. She focuses on the people and issues which she, as director of the Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center, serves. It is a wonderful example of how one woman loves what she does, who she serves, and that the acceptance of herself means the acceptance of the world she lives in.

Or the reader can read "Bar Conversations" and see Parker's own anger and confu-

sion about Lesbians oppressing other Lesbians through the instrument of S&M. She questions whether the activism of the Gay movement is validated by the use of violence in the form of so-called sexual pleasure. And we, readers, should find ourselves in agreement. Still, that isn't what Parker is asking of us — to agree with her viewpoint. She simply presents the facts and the underlying circumstances, from which we make our own pronouncements.

Parker doesn't seek to provide the answers. In her poetry are the seeds of thoughts for everyone to develop as they wish. The power of her words is not in the potential for sermonizing, but in the questions she raises. Once again, a Black Lesbian/feminist writer has made her voice known, from a whisper to a roar.



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STEEL WALLS

Black women and men represent a disproportionate percentage of this nation's imprisoned. As recently as 1981, Black men comprised 49% of men imprisoned in federal institutions, while Black women comprised 40%. Needless to say, being a Lesbian or Gay man in prison exacerbates an already awful situation, which is often evidenced by abuse from authorities and other inmates, broken family ties, and few support systems.

The purpose of "Steel Walls" is to connect brothers and sisters on the inside with brothers and sisters on the outside, and to provide a forum to liberate our words about America's prisons. Our brothers and sisters behind bars need our support as much as we need to be aware of their struggles. Letters offer a connection to a different reality and let prison authorities know that a particular inmate is not isolated.

My experience with prisoner penpals has been positive and enriching. The two brothers I correspond with, neither of whom are Gay, have contributed much to my life. In fact, I must thank Kenya for the art which accompanies this space and Ombaka for its title.

However, some words of caution are in order. There have been prison penpal scams. Use your intuition. If something feels wrong or funny, don't do it. The reason for writing is not about money, but rather about support. Rules and regulations about packages and correspondence vary from institution to institution. So you might want to write for such a list early on in your correspondence.

— Joseph Beam

Seeking Friends

The following sisters and brothers have written NCBLG in search of support and connection:

James Taylor
02071
P.O. Box 100
Cedar Junction, MA 02071

William L. Morgan
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Trenton State Prison
Capital Network 861
Trenton, NJ 08625

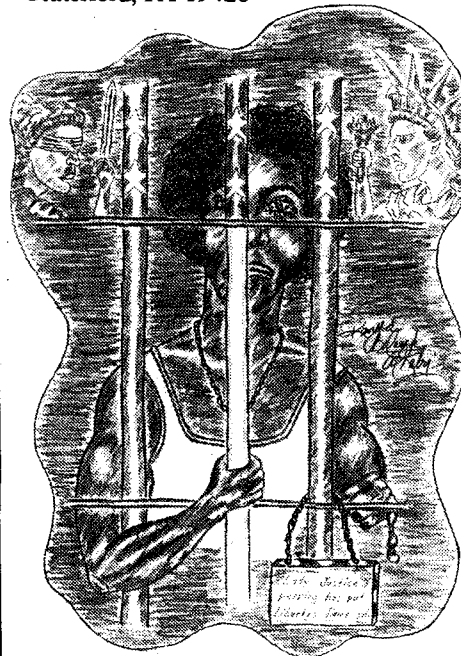
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Cardell LeGrand
78-0139
Attica Correctional Facility
Attica, NY 14011

Gregory Graham
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Attica Correctional Facility
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M-7160 — Drawer K
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Dallas, PA 18612 0286

Vernon Maulsby
Y-4429
P.O. Box 244
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Marion, VA 24354 1027

Kenneth Cotton
017652
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017548-R-3-South-5
Florida State Prison
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A160130
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17400
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Fareed A. Muhammad
aka R. Calvin N-43011
P.O. Box 711 S-519
Menard, IL 62259

Samuel J. Tropez, Jr.
P.M.B. NO#65718 — CCR Tier — B Cell #7
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA 70712

Herman Wallace
P.M.B. NO#76759 C.C.R. Tier #A-13
Louisiana State Penitentiary
Angola, LA 70712

Joseph Pollard
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LA State Penitentiary
Camp H Unit 1 C Dorm
Angola, LA 70712

Charles A. Pote
13249
P.O. Box 400
Rawlings, WY 82301

Pencil drawing by Kenya Baleech Alkebu

CONNECTIONS

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(Chapters throughout the USA)
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**GAY, BISEXUAL, LESBIANS
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Cornell University
535 Willard "Straight" Hall
Ithaca, New York 14853

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COMMUNITY CHURCH**
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SAPPHIRE SAPPHOS
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Washington, D.C. 20001

SALSA SOUL SISTERS
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New York, NY 10009

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New York, New York 10001

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Calendar

July 25 thru July 27, 1986 — The Sea Gull Resort Hotel in Miami Beach is the site for the *Sixth Annual Gay and Lesbian Press Conference*. The conference will include election of board members, workshops, caucuses, entertainment, the GLPA Press Awards and much more. Registration is \$65 and \$105 for members and non-members respectively. For more information, contact: GLPA 1986 Convention, P.O. Box 7809, Van Nuys, CA 91409.

August 9 thru August 17, 1986 — Come Play at *Gay Games II*, an international festival of athletics and cultural activities in San Francisco, themed, "Triumph in '86." Sporting events include basketball, bowling, boxing, cycling, golf, racquetball, swimming, diving, volleyball, softball, and much, much more. For additional information please write San Francisco Arts & Athletics, Inc., 526 Castro Street, San Francisco, CA 94114, or call 415/885-2510.

November 28 thru November 30, 1986 — Los Angeles — *The International Lesbian/Gay People of Color Conference '86*. For more information please call Geneva Fernandez at 213/665-1485 or write to Steve Lew, Secretary, ILGPOCC, '86, 859 North Virgil Station D 145, Los Angeles, CA 90029.

Publications, Submissions

Lesbians of Color Anthology — We are currently compiling a Lesbian of color anthology that includes: diaries, short stores, letters, oral histories, journals, poems, autobiographies, theory, science fiction, essays, photographs, interviews, humor/cartoons and more. We are encouraging Lesbians of color to write and develop new forms of expression. We want to work with women who have not identified themselves as writers before and who have not had support for their work. We encourage all writers to contribute to this exciting anthology. Deadline is June 15, 1986. Write to Sistervision: Black Women and Women of Color Press, P.O. Box 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 4E2.

B. the International Newsletter of Black Men Who Love Black Men, a triannual, has published its premiere issue, which features personal advertisements, poetry, and info. To contribute, write to B., P.O. Box 263, New York, NY 10276.

Lesbian Coupling — Lynn Scott and Pam White are seeking essays for an anthology relating to Lesbian's coupling experience. We are asking for writing that expresses the important aspects of the love relationship. Please query with SASE if you are interested and we can send you our letter explaining our project. Submit queries to: Scott and White, Box 56, Millers Falls, MA 01349.

Changing Men (formerly *M: gentle men for gender justice*), the quarterly pro-feminist men's liberation magazine is seeking contributions by men of color for a special fall issue. Submissions may take the form of poetry, reviews, graphics, essays, short fictions, etc. Send submissions to *Changing Men*, 306 N. Brooks, Madison, WI 53715 by July 1, 1986.

Employment

The Portland Office of the American Friends Service Committee is looking for a *Gay/Lesbian Program Director*. The salary range is \$20,000 with exact salary to be determined by level of skills and prior experience. Job responsibilities include: developing contacts

in the Gay/Lesbian community including people of color and identifying ways of support; consulting with local and state Gay/Lesbian organizations to gain cooperation in development of a Gays and the Law Conference; and develop contacts with local and state religious organizations to identify support for Gay/Lesbian issues. *Application deadline is July 1, 1986*. For more information, write to: Ann Stever, c/o AFSC, 2249 E. Burnside, Portland, OR 97214 503/230-9427.

The Seattle Office of the American Friends Service Committee is looking for a *community Relations Program Director* who will work 3/5 time on Gay/Lesbian issues and the other 2/5 time on other community relations issues, such as immigration. The salary range is \$20,000 with exact salary to be determined by level of skills and prior experience. The job responsibilities include the ones listed above plus close communication with staff in the National AFSC office dealing with immigrants' rights; distribute information to immigration communities, advocacy groups, and the general public; and provide minor assistance to local groups organizing specific events such as press conferences, demonstrations, and educational events. *Application deadline is July 1, 1986*. For more information, write to: Diane Narasaki, AFSC, 814 NE 40th Street, Seattle, WA 98105. 206/632-0500.

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