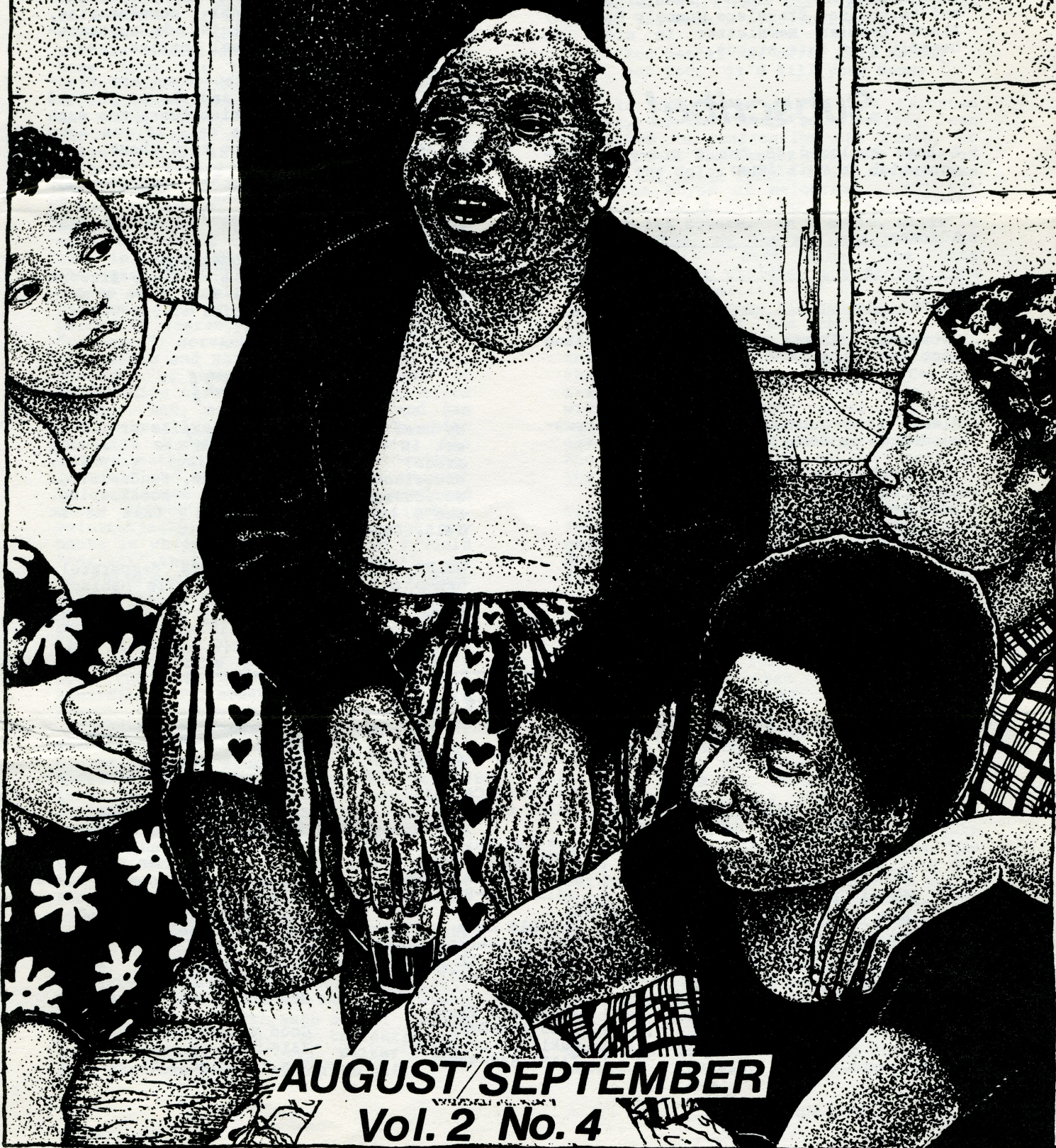


ONYX

BLACK LESBIAN NEWSLETTER



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

Vol. 2 No. 4

1983 Sarita Johnson.

Donations

We now have nonprofit status through the sponsorship of the San Francisco Women's Centers. Therefore, all donations are tax deductible. Checks should be made out to the San Francisco Women's Centers/Black Lesbian Newsletter in order to benefit from this status.

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ONYX (BLN)
1442A Walnut St., #307
Berkeley, CA 94709
(415) 540-0671

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

Sept. 6th for the October issue;
Nov. 4th for the December issue.
(415) 540-0671

Cover design by Sarita Johnson.

Staff

Monifa Ajanaku
Camille Barber*
Marlene Bonner*
Anita Countee
Sarita Johnson*
Pandoura*

*core members

We welcome any and all written and graphic work by black lesbians. Our format includes news, reviews, personal perspectives, political commentaries, interviews, poetry, letters, ads, announcements, humor, and journal entries.

Fictitious names or pseudonyms are standard literary practice and should be used if the contributing artist fears too much visibility. Give us a call if you have an idea that you want to talk about.

ONYX is now a bimonthly publication. (When submitting, please send written work typed and double-spaced if possible).

ATTENTION ARTISTS/PHOTOGRAPHERS

ONYX needs your black and white artwork and photographs. Call and leave a message for Marlene or Sarita at 540-0671.

HELP!

We need new members with skills or interest in working with us in the following areas: writing, editing, graphics, distribution, outreach, law, fundraising, advertisements, typing, bookkeeping. Let's hear from you now! Call us at (415) 540-0671.

HELP! The staff of ONYX desperately needs a typewriter and a file cabinet. Please call us if you can donate one or both. Your donation will be tax deductible. 540-0671

Outlets

Laughing Goddess Grotto
4118 Telegraph Avenue
Oakland, CA 94609
(415) 653-4169

Oakland Natural Foods
2710 Park Blvd.
Oakland, CA 94606
(415) 839-8074.

The Old Mole
1942 University Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94704
(415) 540-6077

A Woman's Place
4015 Broadway
Oakland, CA 94609
(415) 547-9920

Old Wives Tales
1009 Valencia
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 821-4679

Modern Times Bookstore
968 Valencia
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 282-9246

Options for Women Over 40
San Francisco Women's Building
3543 18th Street/Valencia
San Francisco, CA 94110
(415) 431-6405

P. O. Plus
584 Castro Street
San Francisco, CA 94114

Good Vibrations
3416 22nd St.
San Francisco, CA 94110

the color purple

Reviewed by Paula Ross •1983

I was the kind of child who, as my mother put it, always had my head "stuck in a book." I didn't just read alot, I inhaled books, devoured them. But almost without exception, the books I lugged home from the library in my bicycle basket were just longer and slightly more sophisticated versions of the Dick and Jane, "Look, Sally, look. See Spot run," versions of white suburbia that bored me silly in my school readers. One enduring memory from my book-filled childhood: I whizzed through volume after volume of a series called "The Bobbsey Twins," by Laura L. Hope. There were two sets of these twins, a boy and a girl in each. Their frolics ranged from the seashore to the mountains. They had ponies and puppies. They had perfect parents. And they were looked after by perfectly stereotyped black (excuse me, "coloured") servants--Dinah and Sam.

Dinah and Sam grinned an awful lot. Pictures of them consisted mainly of large white teeth flashing in very black faces. And, of course, Dinah and Sam just naturally adored their little white charges. I detested Dinah and Sam. The white author, in a condescending, pathetic and horrifically racist attempt to reproduce black dialect, rendered their speech virtually unintelligible. Painstakingly, I would go through any books in which they appeared and I would "correct" their grammar. In pencil. In my child-sized block printing. I must have been seven or eight at the time. But I knew perfectly well what white people thought of black people who talked like Dinah and Sam. (I was too young to know that white people thought pretty much the same things of black people regardless of the quality of their speech. But that's another story.)

More than twenty years later, writer Alice Walker has redeemed for me all the Dinahs and Sams from the clumsy hands of white (and some black) authors who for so long have kept alive non-dimensional, false images of black people. She has worked that transformation through the use of what she calls black folk english (a term she prefers to "dialect"). And her miracle infuses the pages of her most recent, and 1983 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, The Color Purple.

The Color Purple gives me back those pieces of myself I lost to the Bobbsey Twins. And in two of its main characters, Celie and Shug, The Color Purple has also given me two black women who are lovers. With each other. In the American rural South. In the early half of the Twentieth Century. Walker's work is a precious treasure, a rare gift.

But that gift is not simply her creation of a believable, tender, and tough lesbian relationship. It is all the connections, to family, to community, to black culture, that flow through Celie, the book's spiritual center.

"You better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your Mammy."

In the hands of a less talented writer, in the hands of a writer less committed to confronting the truth, no matter if it challenges fiercely believed myths, The Color Purple could have fallen into the abyss of melodrama. All the elements for a soap opera are contained between its covers. As a child, Celie is raped, twice, by the man she thinks is her father. Each time, she gets pregnant. Her children are stolen from her. She's married off to a man she despises and becomes his household drudge and caretaker of his children. Her dearly loved sister, Nettie, leaves for thirty years, she and Celie determined that Nettie won't repeat Celie's tragedies. But with Nettie gone, and with the warning of her rapist ringing in her ears, Celie has no one to talk to except God. To whom she writes letters. And through which much of the story of The Color Purple is told.

While Celie writes God, Nettie writes Celie. And it is these sections I found disappointing. Whatever inspiration gave Celie such vivid life is missing in Nettie. Most of Nettie's letters come from Africa. And although she describes in some detail her life there, as a Christian missionary, I never really felt I knew who she was or what her experience in Africa as a Black American woman was really like. Her love for Celie, and the pain she feels when her letters go unanswered, year after year, are, however, very real. It is Celie's husband, Albert, who intercepts Nettie's letters, allowing Celie to believe that no one in the world, with the exception of Shug, loves her. When Celie discovers this, almost thirty years later, she wants to kill him.

Walker, like Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange and other black women writers, has been royally trashed by black critics for her portrayals of black men. The Color Purple is not likely to change that. The men here are no prizes. They are guilty of inflicting incredible cruelties on the women who love them, bear their children, cook their food and keep their houses clean and their beds warm. But it is a mark of Walker's refusal to take the easy way out, that she does not allow Celie, who has endured so much of those cruelties, to comfort herself with simple hatred. Instead, Celie continues to

(continued on page 6)

miss burma

-by Raymina Y. Mays

Miss Burma had taken to joining the women on the stoop of the apartment building where she lived. She'd sit wide-legged, dip her dress between her legs and tell stories 'til times got better.

Liz and Callie'd look dead into Miss Burma's face, wide eyed, concentrating. Jesse'd lay her head against Sharon's shoulder and digest all that was being said and then dream that Miss Burma was her grandmother.

The women discovered that Miss Burma had no relatives or friends left when they found her wandering the halls, talking to herself or to imaginary women in front of or behind her, and smelling bad from old alcohol and no clean dress. No one took care of her nearly enough, though social service people came around once a month to take her to cash her check and buy food.

Before leaving for work, Liz and Callie prepared breakfast for Miss Burma. They'd leave her lunch in her refrigerator. Jesse and Sharon took her dinner to her in the evening if Miss Burma wasn't feeling well, but on most days, Miss Burma would eat dinner with all or some of them. Each week, the women alternated these duties. On weekends all volunteered to clean Miss Burma's apartment. They'd talk to her and look through her photo albums. If it was one woman's turn to comb Miss Burma's hair, they all went.

They belonged to Miss Burma and Miss Burma belonged to them. Miss Burma was their decided connection to the past. Miss Burma was their wonder. Wonder she had survived. Wonder she remembered stories to tell them. Wonder officials hadn't come along and taken their Miss Burma to a state home or another place to die without having had a chance to leave her stories with anyone.

Miss Burma had antedotes to make crises bearable or seem less important than they were. "Fight, you say you having a li'l fight. Honey, me and mine'd fight 'til times got better. Dollin' get to fightin and didn't care who knowed it. I was wit a woman one time who was married because it was supposed to mean something to be married even when your heart was not anywhere near being married. Anyhow, I was having a fight wit this woman about this very thing. . . us loving each other and the man she was wit come from nowhere swinging and carrying on for just the opposite. . . cause she didn't love him. We had to stop fightin, me and my woman friend, to kick his behind before he hurt one of us. You fight 'til times get better, darlins, but most times there is a something that bring you together and you do fight at times to find out what it is."

Miss Burma's best stories seemed to come around 7:30 after dinner, when they were all full and sitting on the stoop in front of the apartment. This night Miss Burma held in her hand her ration of red wine as the women had gotten her to a place where she'd only drink one glass per day. The smoke from a reefer cigarette was shifting according to the breeze. Moths were dancing around the street lights overhead and the children were being called indoors as daylight was about over. Miss Burma was prepared to pick from her host of stories that the women had heard slightly different versions of at least once. Maybe she'd give them something new to hold onto for the hard times. Miss Burma began to finger the wine glass and look up at the street lights and up at the moon as she'd do all night, depending upon the point she'd try to make.



"Women stories. You say you want women stories. Got a lifetime of them stories. Got some known facts on hatred. On love. On how to live. How to give up and then make it back. On some not making it back."

On this night, it seemed that Miss Burma would season their hearing first with a love story. But she shifted a bit and sat straight up. The women were not sure what they'd hear, as she usually slumped forward and looked tired.

Local News

"Well," she began. "I believe it was '48 or '49. I was by myself. Lonely. I hope y'all know what I mean. I ain't talking about the kind of alone that come from being by yourself cause you ain't talking to your mother, or you between loves and you just had a fight with your best friend, either. I mean to tell you about the kind of loneliness that comes when these situations could be turned around and it still wouldn't mean nothing."

Miss Burma rocked with the rhythm of her own words, as did the women.

"Lonely," she said. "So lonely. Lonely. Walk under the sun in dry grass looking for a four leaf clover so this thing will change. Lonely. Cook dinner for another person and yourself, eat both cause you know you wouldn't have anybody over on that day if there was somebody, cause you know they couldn't help your condition. "Now ain't that . . .?"

Before Miss Burma could beg the answer to her question, someone said, "That's lonely . . ."

"Yessssss," continued Miss Burma. But you know what I did?"

"What?" Sharon asked and she couldn't sit still.

"Oh children. . .there was in '48 or '49, before I was this old and not so willing to give in to a bad feeling, a creeping up on me. It can happen around noon or it can happen around midnight. I say the time don't matter much. But before this creeping up on you happens you go through something. I say, before it is done. . .you go through something. You listen to the blues. You know, the I'm-gonna-beat-my-own-self-upside-the-head kind. You lean against the wall trying to rub away a dull ache in your thighs. You live on top of, under, and in between lonely. But when it's done. . ."

"When it's done," begged Sharon.

"I say, when it's done, you move with this creeping up on you, get hold of a tenderness for your own self, a delight in yourself. You look at yourself with a bit of admiration. I say the next time you feel as bad as I'm talking about take hold to this new devotion to yourself. I don't have to go no further with this do I?"

Miss Burma heard the word no four times. She began to rub one eye with the hand that was not holding the wine glass. She began to slump and lean forward. The women knew she was growing tired, so they helped her from the steps and into her apartment.

"Yes," Miss Burma said, "You say you want women stories. I say I got a lifetime of them stories."

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THIRD WORLD LESBIAN AND GAY CONFERENCE

Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays and National Coalition of Black Gays/West are planning a Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference in the Bay Area this fall over the Thanksgiving weekend in co-sponsorship with other Third World/People of Color lesbian and gay organizations. The conference will provide educational workshops, forums, speakers, and materials to enable participants to more effectively combat homophobia and other forms of discrimination and provide opportunities for expression and sharing of culture and artistic achievements by Third World/People of Color. For those wishing to participate in the planning of this conference, please contact Billy Jones, (415) 621-8078 or Midgett, (415) 864-0876.

PAT NORMAN CANDIDATE FOR SUPERVISOR IN '84

Pat Norman, Coordinator of the Lesbian and Gay Health Services at the Dept. of Public Health in San Francisco, has officially announced her candidacy for Board of Supervisors in San Francisco. There appears to be a considerable amount of support for Norman in the city health services community. Norman plans to do outreach to women and ethnic minorities. Pat Norman is the first openly self-acknowledged Black lesbian candidate to run in a political election in San Francisco history.

CASSELBERRY-DUPREE PLAN TOUR

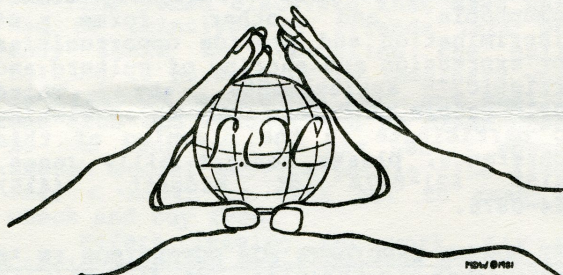
The very popular Judy Casselberry and Jaque Dupree will take their highly stylized music to women audiences abroad. They are planning to tour the East Coast, Europe, and Jamaica in the fall and winter. Please watch for announcements about a big bon voyage party for the duo in late September.

LINDA TILLERY, singer extraordinaire, is planning a new solo album. She needs your financial support in this important venture. If you can assist in any way, leave a message at ONYX/BLN (415) 540-0671 and we will get you in contact with Linda.

JOIN US in supporting our local artists and musicians. These are just a few of the many talented women in our community: Mary Watkins, Casselberry and Dupree, Linda Tillery, Sarita Johnson, Helen Keller, Vicki Randall, Avotcja.

SISTERS BONDING TOGETHER

Recently, two members of the ONYX/BLN staff met with Ardena Shankar, Program Committee Chairwoman for the upcoming National Lesbians of Color Conference. One of the points Ardena stated was, "the lesbian of color faces a triple threat to her survival. The freedom to live the full productive life of her choice is a constant concern. Because of the common struggle in which people of color and lesbians are engaged, we have reserved this time and place to reach out to each other."



LESBIANS OF COLOR

On the weekend of September 8-11, 1983, Lesbians of Color will sponsor a four day National Lesbians of Color Conference at Cottontail Ranch in Malibu, California. The theme of this conference is "Sisters Bonding Together." The theme represents the belief that our greatest strength lies in unifying and working together.

The "new right" is a threat that should not be taken lightly. Solidarity between people can help undermine this threat and can encourage positive and significant social and economic changes. One way to accomplish this goal is for the smaller groups within the larger group of oppressed people to come together and create a bond that is impossible to break . . . a human bond.

The 1983 National Lesbians of Color Conference will bring together women from diverse backgrounds and cultures. Our goal is to encourage the recognition and appreciation of our differences and similarities, to acknowledge the oppressions of others facing similar oppressions, and to provide a network of skills, support, and opportunities to combat those who wish to undermine our strength and determination.

Lesbians of Color was founded in 1978 and since its inception has been self-supporting. However, the conference is a large undertaking and needs financial support for special needs such as transportation, scholarships, and additional expenses. We join in asking individuals, groups, and businesses to support the fundraising efforts by making a tax deductible donation to the conference and to encourage five or more

THE COLOR PURPLE (from page 3)

grow, to gain a strong sense of herself, of who she is. She comes, by the book's end to forgive Albert (who she'll only refer to as Mr. _____) and make him her friend. She does this not out of some inflated sense of nobility, but for herself.

This resolution may infuriate you if you feel revenge is sweeter than forgiveness, particularly where men are concerned. I think, however, that The Color Purple just may convince you that revenge can be a two-edged sword, that forgiveness can come out of strength and power, not only out of fear.

And what about Celie and Shug? They are lovers. And nothing is ever simple. Each is very much her own woman. In the end, that is what they give each other. It is enough.

Note: The Color Purple is now available in paperback for \$5.95. Other books by Alice Walker are You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down, and In Love and Trouble (both collections of short stories and other prose pieces); Meridian and The Third Life of Grange Copeland (novels); Once, Revolutionary Petunias, and Goodnight, Willie Lee, I'll See You in the Morning (collections of poems); Langston Hughes, American Poet (biography); and I Love Myself When I Am Laughing . . . A Zora Neale Hurston Reader (Walker is editor). Walker has also published an essay entitled, "A Letter of the Times, or Should This Sadomasochism Be Saved?" in the book, Against Sadomasochism.

OLLIE'S UPDATE

As stated in the last issue of ONYX/BLN, we were in the process of negotiating the end to the boycott. However, the two "mediators" from the Pacific Center refused to present one of our requests, which we considered important, to the management of Ollie's. Due to this breach of the negotiation process, all of the negotiations have ceased. Therefore, we are asking our supporters to use their own good judgement and discretion in dealing with this matter.

of your friends and/or associates to do the same. No pledge or donation is too small.

Please make checks payable to "National Women of Color Conference Committee" (N.W.O.C.C.C.), P.O. Box 2344, Los Angeles, CA 90051. For more information or to make a donation, please contact any of the following LOC members: Selket (213) 738-7078, Ntianu (213) 701-5697 or Claudette (213) 291-7950. Your help in creating a successful conference will be greatly appreciated.

Calendar

BAY AREA BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS (BAYBLAG)

Formed in December, 1982, Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays (BAYBLAG) is an association of Black gay men and lesbians who meet regularly for social and educational activities and to address their common concerns as Third World/People of Color, Black people, gays and lesbians. It promotes activities to educate the Black community, the broader lesbian and gay community, and the general public about the concerns and positive contributions of Black lesbians and gays. BAYBLAG seeks to work in unity with other people and groups who are part of the struggle to overcome such problems as racial, economic, and sexual oppressions.

Current projects of BAYBLAG are: organizing a national Third World/People of Color Conference, developing several pilot film projects focusing on Black lesbian/gay achievers, and implementing a prison project.

BAYBLAG Has also endorsed the Bay Area Coalition of Conscience August 27th March for Jobs, Freedom, and Peace; the Merle Woo Discrimination Defense; the El Salvador Initiative; and the BWMT's Employment Discrimination Project.

As an organization which provides autonomous space for Blacks seeking support and cultural identity, BAYBLAG invites all Black lesbians and gays to join us at our "soul food" pot luck gatherings every 2nd and 4th Sundays at 6 p.m. Call 621-8078 (Billy) or 864-0876 (Midgett) for locaion of meetings and socials.

FOR INFORMATION regarding display or classified ads, contact Pandoura at (415) 540-0671

DEADLINES FOR CLASSIFIED ADS, DISPLAY ADS, AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:
Sept. 12th for the October issue;
Nov. 14th for the December issue.
(415) 540-0671

For classified ads, enclose \$1 per line (\$2 minimum per ad). There are 30 characters per line. Each letter, punctuation mark or space between words counts as a character. We reserve the right to use our discretion in the selection of advertisements.

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Wednesdays

Women of Color Health Clinic in South Berkeley - for information, call 843-6204.

Fridays

Midgett's Place. Lesbians meeting lesbians. Refreshments, dancing, entertainment. 864-0876.

A support group for lesbian mothers of color will meet monthly. If interested, contact Midgett, 864-0876.

Sundays (every 2nd and 4th)

Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays (BAYBLAG) meet for "soul food" potluck gatherings at 6 p.m. For info., call Midgett, 864-0876 or Billy, 621-8078.

Friday, August 5th

Avotcja and Luisah Teish (Poetry & Music) Artemis Cafe, 1199 Valencia at 23rd St., S.F. 9 p.m. \$4. Info. 821-0232.

Friday, August 12th

Party at Midgett's Place to celebrate going into her third year. RSVP (a must) 864-0876. FREE. 6-10 p.m.

Friday, August 26th

Avotcja (musician and poet) with Shelley Mesirow (oboe). Studio W, 3137 22nd St. at Capp, S.F. 8:30 p.m. \$4. For info., call 641-9299.

Sunday, August 28th

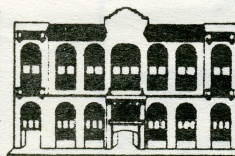
CARIBEANA, ETC. with Avotcja, Luis Cespedes, Mark Brazil, Maria Cora & Val Serrant. We come from Puerto Rico, Cuba, Trinidad, and the U.S.A. This program will reflect all we are and all we hope to be. Valencia Rose, 766 Valencia near 18th St., S.F. 8 p.m. \$5. Info. 863-3863.

Saturday, September 10th

Avotcja, Valencia Rose (address above). 8 p.m., \$4.

Saturday, September 17th

Avotcja in a solo concert. Artemis Cafe (address above). 9 p.m., \$4.



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SELF DEFENSE FOR WOMEN/TAE KWON DO Korean martial art beginning class opens August 1st. Phone 552-3829 or 540-5427 for more information.

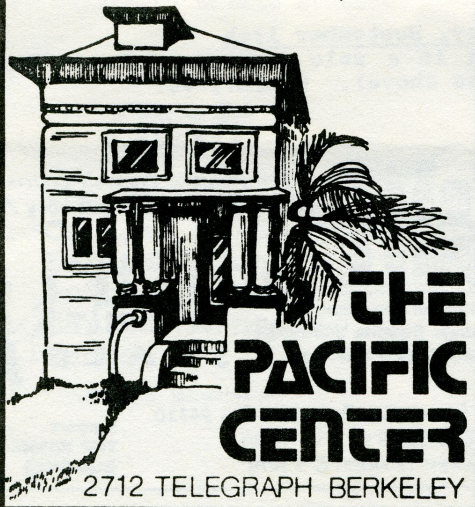
CONFERENCES

1983 National Lesbian of Color Conference, "Sisters Bonding Together," Thurs.-Sun., Sept. 8-11, 1983. Cost is \$75 and includes food, lodging; \$60 low income; \$35 children. Male Children 12 years and under. For info: Ntianu (213) 701-5697, Selket (213) 738-7078. Write: Lesbians of Color, P.O. Box 2344, Los Angeles, CA 90051.

"Household Workers Getting Stronger," a conference on household workers organizing, sponsored by Household Workers' Rights. Sept. 24, 1983 at El Instituto Laboral del la Raza, 1855 Folsom at 15th St., S.F.

Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference. To be held in the Bay Area over the Thanksgiving weekend. Look in this issue of ONYX (BLN) for further information.

- mental health services for lesbians & gay men
- special interest rap groups
- gay switchboard 841-6224



POLITICAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

TRUDIE ROGERS - Berkeley Rent Board '84 Campaign. Please phone 540-6900.

PERSONALS

Lesbian Introductions (Fridays). Midgett, 864-0876, res. & ans. svc.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY PAULA. Keep on writing. Your novel is awaited. Miz P, J.A., and M.B.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY DSB. We gonna find you a do right woman sooner or later. We love you. Your buddies.

COUNSELING

Pacific Center now has Third World counselors and groups available. Sliding scale. Call switchboard, 841-6224 for info. and appointments.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES

WAVPM STAFF POSITION
Women Against Violence in Pornography and the Media seeks feminist woman as staff/volunteer organizer. \$484/mo., p/t. Send resume by August 15 to WAVPM, P.O. Box 14635, S.F., CA 94110. EOE; WOC and minorities encouraged to apply.

LET THE KID IN YOU OUT! Demonstrate toys, gifts thru December. Free trng. Unlimited income opportunity. Ongoing support group. Advancement potential. Call in a.m. 540-6900.

NOTICES

Rape Survivors
I want to hear from other womyn who've had the experience of being raped and at the same time physically attacked in some other way or mortally endangered or both. I'd prefer interviews, but written or taped accounts would be helpful, too. Please write: Boxholder/200 9th St., #403, on/S.F., CA 94103.

Ethnic Lesbians/Lesbians of Color:
We encourage your participation and perspective in book by/about/for lesbian survivors of incest. All responses confidential. For questionnaire and more information, write: Susan Marie, P.O. Box 304, Oakland, CA 94668.

Womancrafts West

1007 $\frac{1}{2}$ VALENCIA STREET
SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94110
648-2020
Wednesdays thru Sunday
HOURS: 11--6