

BLACK LESBIAN NEWSLETTER ON Y

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Staff

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*core members

Cover design by Sarita Johnson.

Special Thanks

Sleazy Cheryl Clarke

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.

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.

Outlets

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

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

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

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

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A Room of One's Own 317 West Johnson St. Madison, Wis. 53703 (608) 257-7888

L.O.C. Conference

Several members of the ONYX (BLN) staff attended the LOC conference. This was their report brought back from the conference.

A REPORT ABOUT THE LESBIANS OF COLOR CONFERENCE

The first National Lesbians of Color Conference was held Sept. 8th thru 1lth at the Cottontail Ranch in Malibu, Calif. Over two hundred lesbians of color gathered to carry out the theme "Sisters Bonding Together".

We were Afrikan American, Native American, Latina, Mexicana, Asian American, and Middle Eastern lesbians from many different parts of the country, who had come together to share our sisterhood.

As participants we attended workshops, cultural events, dances and spiritual rituals. For some of us, drumming late into the night became a ritual unto itself.

Bay Area Afrikan American lesbians were well represented at the conference as participants as well as workshop facilitators. These local lesbians presented workshops on black feminist therapy, body intelligence/yoga and stress reduction, co/parenting and lesbian family buiding, belly dancing as woman's ritual, and the legal rights of lesbians. We can be very proud of our sisters' contributions to this conference.

Even though much sharing occurred amongst the lesbians, we felt the very basic tenets of trust were never established amongst the different groups, therefore the expectation of cross cultural bonding was not realized. We believe that this was due in part to the need of each group to validate and reaffirm its separate right to exist.

Little time was set aside for us to come together as a whole body. The exception was a community meeting called to express the concerns of a number of womyn around two issues, the first being a debate of the presence of straight womyn as participants and more specifically as workshop facilitators. Some lesbians were of the mind that straight womyn were our allies and supporters and had a right to be present. Other lesbians felt that we didn't need straight womyn to be our teachers; that we were capable of facilitating our workshops in a lesbian only environment.

The second issue dealt with in the community meeting was the question, "What is a lesbian of color?" The most frequently voiced opinion was that a lesbian could define for herself whether or not she was a lesbian of color.

In contrast to other ethnic groups coming together, we must report the painful truth. In our opinion, bonding did not occur amongst the Afrikan American lesbians present at the conference. At no time during the conference did Afrikan American lesbians hold a caucus to speak to each other about our common concerns as Afrikan American lesbians. Many of the lesbians present wanted this, but for whatever reasons did not call for such a meeting.

Before we as Afrikan American lesbians attempt to bond with other lesbians of color, we are going to have to take that first step of bonding together with each other. We just have to look back on our herstory to explain why negative aspects exist in our lives. We are going to have to start talking to each other about those barriers that created the mistrust and alienation. We have been taught not to feel good about ourselves. This fact has been carried over in our dealings with each other. Subjects that need to be dealt with are; interracial relationships, self hatred, homophobia in the black community, feminism and economic responsibility. We also need to lay the groundwork for an Afrikan American lesbian conference.

If you are interested in participating in group discussions for Afrikan American lesbians concerning these issues, contact Marlene c/o ONYX at (415) 540-0671.

Theme Issues

ONYX (BLN) is now soliciting articles on the following themes for upcoming issues:

- 1. Love relationships between Afrikan American lesbians
- 2. Love relationships between Afrikan American and white lesbians
- 3. Love relationships between Afriken American and other lesbians of color
- 4. Sexuality
- 5. Afrikan American lesbian mothers
- 6. Afrikan American lesbians and separation
- 7. Homophobia in the Black community

WRITING AS A LESBIAN

Twenty years ago, at the age of 16, I went with my parents and a neighbor to the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. Though the idea and organization of the march was initiated from and by the grassroots, it became the political football of the reformist leaders such as King, Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins, James Farmer, Bayard Rustin and Ralph Abernathy.

By that time radical black leader, Malcolm X, was beginning to capture the imaginations of younger activists, many of them mambers of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, one of the major direct action -- sit-ins, freedom rides, votor registration in the South -- units of the Movement in the early sixties.

At the first march, many activists had been disillusioned by the accommodationist tactics of the "Big Six: (a term coined by Malcolm X in reference to the reformist leaders.) Malcolm X was extremely critical of the "Big Six" for allowing the issues to be diluted and called the March a "big Picnic". At the time I though Malcolm a fanatic. I saw integration as paramount. Thus, I did not see the "nightmare" of King's "I have a dream . . . " speech. I was too cought up in the narcotic of his rhetoric.

Gay Rights was not even a thought, except as I was beginning to be anxious about my lack of sexual attraction to men. When I looked at the photographs of the March in Ebony and Look, it was the photos of Lena Horne, Diahnn Caroll, Josephine Baker that captured my imagination.

In 1965, I attended Howard University, which had become a "hotbed" of radical student activity as well as the catalyst for student activism on other black college campuses and white college campuses as well. I was deeply affected by this, and, needless to say, my politics changed drastically. I decided that America's version of integration was making me a cultural amoeba, reformist politics without a radical-progressive vision were suicide, and white people's institutions were bankrupt. I learned to appreciate Malcolm X as a rational, intelligent, powerful human being — and King no less. And both their lives were aborted at the precise moments that they began to envision an international struggle for freedom that would cut across color and class lines. But then there came the anger at how activists like Fannie Lou Hamer, Ella Baker, Daisy Bates were shunted to the background to give visability to the men. Anger at the emotional sacrifices black women in the later Black Power Movement made in terms of their own political development so that black men could flash their manhood. I wore a natural and celebrated the victory of the Vietcong.

The March on Washington,
August 29, 1963 and August 27, 1983

C . . . by Cheryl Clarke

In the seventies I became a feminist. Angela Davis captured my imagination, as did Assata Shakur a few years later. I spurned black nationalism as regressive, oppressive of women, and fatalistic. I examined sexual politics and had to confront how I repressed my desire for woman and my guilt about it. I looked for a political philosophy that would encompass my various political needs. Altman's Homosexual, given me by a political gay black man, helped tremendously. I saw the Black Movement, the Women's Movement, and the Gay Movement as having more parallels than not. I discovered Manhattan, the Fire House, and Black Lesbians.

In the sweltering Washington, D. C. heat and humidity, I celebrated the anniversary of the 1963 March on August 27, 1983. When I couldn't find the gay and lesbian contingent, allegedly under a brown balloon, I went home to watch the rest of the event on the television. I wanted to see Audre Lorde, the Black Lesbian speaker who'd been asked in the 11th hour to represent the Gay Rights Movement. I neither saw on the t.v. or heard on the radio Lorde's address. However, it was broadcasted. The media failed to give Lourde's speech the same king of coverage they did to Harry Belafonte or Jesse Jackson or Walter Fauntroy. A press conference had been held on Friday, August 26 at which the March coordinators, as individuals, voiced their support of Gay Civil Rights. But, as a group, representing the massive coalition of groups involved, they could not endorse the Gay Rights Struggle. And, it was not until Thursday, August 25, when Gay activists sat-in at Rep. Walter Fauntroy's (D.C.) office, that the coordinators conceded to including a Gay speaker on the platform. Fauntroy, a veteran Civil Rights activist, compared supporting Gay Rights to supporting "penguin rights".

Twenty years later, neither I nor the 1983 march for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom seemed to have the buoyancy of 1963. The economic condition of Black Americans, according to a recent report cited in the New York Times (July 18, 1983), is as bleak as 20 years ago. For example, the median family income for Blacks in 1981 was \$13,266 compared to \$23,517 for whites. This gap is wider than it was in 1960. In spite of the recent reformist political gains in Chicago and Philadelphia, poor Blacks are not even surviving.

CONTINUED OM PAGE 7

THEY SING LIFE INTO THEIR MUSIC

J. Casselberry and Jaque DuPree, two beautiful Afrikan American lesbian vocalists and musicians, are about to embark on a year long tour. Their travel will take them to many U. S. cities as well as parts of Europe and West Indies, including Jamaica.

What was to be two weeks of gigs snowballed into a year long tour. They will leave the Bay Area in Mid October for St. Paul, Minn. and several other midwestern cities.

Followed by a club date at New York's Tin Pan Alley on October 29th, other cities on their itinerary include Boston, Atlanta, and Wash. DC.. They are hopeful that they will pick up additional engagements along the way.



CASSELBERRY-DupreE

Photo by Oxlanda

Casselberry's baritone/alto and accompaniment on acoustic guitar combines with DuPree's contralto/soprano and guira playing to create soulful blends of harmony and rhythm. Their music style embraces, gospel, reggae, blues, folk and many things in between. Casselberry states, "our music comes from the many places we've been as Black women in America. We want to sing, we want to be heard, we want you to listen..". And listen we did at the recent First National Lesbians of Color Conference in Malibu, Ca. where they lifted our spirits and drew us into their music. Their performance was made more powerful by the flexibility and control they both have to sing lead, solo, or harmonize together. Both womyn feel that they have been greatly influenced by Nina Simone's approach to music.

The duo has performed in many places, including the Great American Music Hall in S.F., CA, the Sylvan Theatre in Wash. DC, and the Rainbow Tavern in Seattle, Wash.. They have shared the bill with noted entertainers such as June Jordan, Linda Tillery, Taj Mahal, Sylvester and many others.

If you are fortunate enough to be in an area of the country that they are planning to tour, do yourself a favor and don't miss them.

We wish them success, love, and good health and safety. Bon Voyage!

Final West Coast Performance

CASSELBERRY-DUPREE

and their

URBAN GORILLA BAND featuring

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Mimi Fox, guitar
Bonnie Johnson, drums
Jessie Ortiz, keyboards
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Coming Soon...Black Lesbian Herstories

In up coming months we plan to present herstorical profiles on many different black lesbians past and present. We understand the need for us to start really documenting who we are so that our sisters after us will not have to hunt and search for positive role models of black lesbians as we have had to do. Yet we will be doing the documentation for ourselves as well. We will be able to look around us and proudly claim our identities as black lesbians. We urge you to help us in thie endeavor by sending us materials on women you would like to see us present, send us suggestions, and work with us to make this an important focus of the newsletter.

While I was reading The Color Purple, by Alice Walker, my dirty dishes sat in the sink for two days, I let my one-year-old's laundry outgrow the hamper, and the clutter finally overtook my apartment. This book captured my interest so thoroughly because it confirmed something I've sensed for a long time: that womyn (Black womyn in particular) are capable of creating a community without jeopardizing their own strengths and while making room for other human traits.

To say that one can't ignore the presence of strong womyn in The Color Purple, is an understatement. Most of the characters are womyn who've gotten fed up with man-made methods of maintaining "peaceful" relations between human beings (i.e., men's emotional, physical and spiritual domination over womyn). The story is told through Celie's poignant letters to God & her sister Nettie, and through Nettie's letters to Celie.

For these womyn in <u>The Color Purple</u>, the key to making a community unabusive to them is, of course, the bonds they form amongst themselves. This bonding between these womyn comes as naturally to them as death itself, for they know they can rely on each other. No questions asked.

At times the spontaneous decision to care for one another is a difficult decision for the womyn to live with. After Sophia is beaten and thrown in jail for valiantly slapping the white mayor and his wife; Mary Agnes, once Sophia's rival, picks up where Sophia leaves off: "She look a little haggard with all Sophia and Harpo children sprung on her at once, but she carry on. Hair a little stringy, slip show, but she carry on."

In West Africa where Nettie, Celie's younger sister, has become a missionary, the bonding between the African womyn is so strong, they eventually overturn the sexism-steeped tradition that barred all girls from formal education.

Although for years Nettie's letters from Africa never reach Celie, the love between the two sisters remains unaffected. Their love and the hope of Nettie's return is what keeps Celia afloat in her miserable life, and it is this particular bond that motivates Celie to finally release her hidden rage toward

For me, the most fascinating bond between the womyn and the one that accelerates Celie's anger into action is her lesbian relationship with Shug Avery (with whom Albert, Celie's Husband, is hopelessly in love). Celie's initial infatuation with Shug is one of Celie's first steps toward living her life apart from men. Celie's instinctive distrust of men launches her into a true emotional and physical independence from them.

It was through her bond with Shug that Celie learned not only the pleasures of her own body but also that her husband, Albert, had been withholding Nettie's letters, violating the sisterly bond without which she could not live. I was ready for the blood to flow when Celie, upon hearing this news, attempted to slit Albert's throat with his shaving razor.

During a moment of intimacy between Shug and Celie, one of the most heartwarming transformations takes place: Celie learns to fight against spiritual abuse...the abuse wrought by that punitive, bearded, blue-eyed white man in the sky. Shug successfully directs Celie to an alternative view of God:

My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all...

...Man corrupt everything, say Shug. He on your box of grits, in your head, and all over the radio. He try to make you think he everywhere. Soon as you think he everywhere, you think he God. But he ain't. Whenever you trying to pray, and man plop himself on the other end of it, tell him to git lost, say Shug. Conjure up flowers, wind, water, a big rock.

This view, with its non-male emphasis on nature, is tailored for womyn while not denying that there is an omni-present life force.

With God on her side more than ever, even Celie feels powerful enough to control her own life. Now, it's time for the womyn to move on and create a community agreeable to them—one that allow them freedom to grow to their fullest potentials with all the support and comfort needed to fuel such an endeavor. After all, why stick around and stagnate with the men?

I find that the men are comical and, of course, angering. The sexist social structure under which men choose to hide, dragging their womyn behind them (or pushing their womyn in front of them), discourages human expressions that are both strong and unique. Because of the

WRITING AS A LESBIAN (FROM PAGE 4)

The U. S. continues its imperialist aggression in Central America, in the Middle East, covertly in Southern Africa. And there is no visible black progressive movement, i.e., a movement of blacks which speaks to the need for a radical restructuring of the political arrangement here. Jesse Jackson does not inspire me, needless to say, with all that narcotizing, "pretty preacher" rhetoric. A quarter of a million people converged on D.C. this August as in the August of 1963. The '83 March did hold forth a vision of coalition politics and it did support the Women's Movement and reluctantly allowed a Lesbian to address the marchers. But judging from the homophobic comments I heard from various marchers, we're a long way from accepting the fundamental human right of sexual choice. Embracing the anti-nuclear, the labor, and women's struggles for jobs, peace, and freedom does not strike a sufficient blow against the empire as long as lesbians and gay men, who have fought for everybody's rights, are oppressed legally and socially because of who we are.

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).

DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

November 4th for the December issue; Janyary 5th for the February issue. (415) 540-0671

THE COLOR PURPLE (FROM PAGE 6)

conflict between this structure and human nature, these characters have a hard time practicing what they preach.

Because of my unforgiving nature, I would've been content to end the book right there, with the womyn getting it all together and the men still fucking up.

But Celie is about as surprised as I am when she returns to claim her house left by her stepfather (who, by the way, remains an asshole up to his dying day) to find that Albert, too, begins to acknowledge womyn as fellow human beings with qualities worthy of his respect! Threatened with Shug's permanent disappearance, Albert must either die bitterly of acute tunnel vision or begin to notice and appreciate the things right under his nose. Choosing the latter, Albert reveals the amazing transformation—Albert, the once abusive, self-centered man—can now sit on the porch sewing and talking sensibly with Celie.

I believe that the setting of The Color Purple was ripe for the changes Celie writes about. If the characters were not poor, Black people in the United States, who knew that survival of their community ensured their personal survival against white predation, I doubt that the men would've taken the womyn's demands seriously enough to change their own behaviors. Nor do I feel that such a cohesive community would've withstood so many human differences. After reading The Color Purple, I am especially proud to be a Black womon agreeing more than ever that Black womyn have the potential for altering significantly the way people are told to live. Celie sums it up well when she says to Shug:

If he (God) ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you."

Note: The Color Purple is now available in paperback for \$5.95.



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Calendar

Mondays

Lesbian "Drop In" Rap at Midgett's, free. Call (415) 864-0876.

Wednesdays

Women of Color Health Clinic in South Berkeley - for information, call (415) 843-6204.

Fridays

Lesbians Meeting Lesbians. Music, entertainment, food and exciting fun. Call Midgett for info. (415) 864-0876 6 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.

Sundays (every 4th)

Bay Area Black Lesbians and Gays (BAYBLAG) meet for "soul food" potluck gatherings. 6 p.m.-9 p.m. Call Midgett for location, 864-0876.

Sunday, October 2nd

Mary Watkins, Clementina's anniversary party, buffet and dancing. \$8 adv.; \$10 at the door.

Saturday, October 15th

Lesbians of color potluck, for Lesbians of Color who attended the LOC conference, and those who did not, but would like to begin and/or continue meeting. Pacific Center 5-9 p.m. Alcohol free, CC appt., WA, for Lesbians of Color/Third World Lesbians only. \$2 donation. For more info., (415) 548-8283.

Sunday, October 23

Slightly older (35+) Black women's group forming. The group will be social and educational. 12 noon til 3:00. Pot luck brunch. 437 Webster St., S.F. Call Midgett (415) 864-0876. (6 a.m.-9 p.m.)

Mary Watkins, with Jackie Robbins, cello, Mojo, flute. Valencia Rose, 766 Valencia near 18th St., S.F. 8:30 \$5.

Friday, October 28th

Avotcja, AIDS fundraiser, with Tina Walters, Michelle Marchioli and Shanna Ritter, at Studio W, 3137 22nd at Capp. \$6. 8 p.m. Call (415) 641-9299 for info.

Lesbians party to meet new friends. A party is "what it is". Come over and make it live, where else but at Midgett's. Dinner, refreshments and good music. RSVP only (415) 864-0876.

Saturday, October 29th

Black lesbian conference planning committee forming. Lunch provided. 12:00 til 3 p.m. For info. call (415) 864-0876.

Friday, November 4th

Avotcja, with Val Serrant, drums. New College/New Space, 762 Valencia, S.F. 8 p.m. \$3.50 For more info. (415) 626-1694.

Saturday, November 5th

Avotcja, with Max Swartz, Gallery Space, 934 Brannan St., S.F. 8 p.m. \$3.00 For more info. (415) 282-4172.

Saturday, November 12th

Avotoja, Artemis Cafe, 1199 Valencia at 23rd St., S.F. 8:30 p.m. \$4.

Sunday, November 27th

Avotoja, Afro Latina Filipina extravaganza with Allelulea Panis, Robert Kikuchi Yngojo. 8 p.m. \$4.



DEADLINES FOR CLASSIFIED ADS, DISPLAY ADS, AND ANNOUNCEMENTS:

November 14th for the December issue; January 14th for the February issue. (415) 540-0671

FOR INFORMATION regarding display or classified ads, contact Pandoura at (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.

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Classifieds-

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PERSONALS

A new Black lesbian dating service, one to one, beginning October 1, 1983. Interested? Call (415) 989-0495.

DSB ... and so little time! Love, your buddies.

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, Sharon Page-Ritchie, Vicki Randall and Avotcja.

HELP! The staff of ONYX (BLN) needs a file cabinet. If you can donate one please call 540-0671.

Please send subscriptions, ads, correspondence, or donations to:

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

Subscribe!

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NOTICES

FAT WOMEN WANTED to organize a national fat women's conference. Meetings are open to fat women who support the basic concepts of fat liberation. (Namely: this is not a pro-weight loss/maintenance conference.) For information call Carol, (415) 826-1444.

The Creative Women's Group of Orange County will be holding its Annual Christmas Bazaar. We welcome everyone to come and support this event. Dates: Nov. 19 & 20; Nov. 26 & 27; Dec. 3 & 4. Time: 8 a.m. -6 p.m. Place: 2713 S. Center, Santa Ana, CA. For further information please call Jonnette (Je) (714) 960-7287 or Dorothy (714) 540-4723.

If you are a lesbian and you have never had sexual experiences with men, I would like to interview you. Interested participants please write MJA c/o BLN 1442A Walnut St., Berkeley, CA 94709.

Matrix, the women's newsmagazine in Santa Cruz, publishes 10,000 free copies a month. We are always seeking more poems, essays and articles by women of color. Please send poems with short biographical note. For other writings call (408) 429-1238 or drop us a line telling us what you have in mind: Matrix, 418 B Cedar St., Santa Cruz, CA 95060.

Part II of the JEWISH FEMINIST CONFERENCE, for Jewish and Non-Jewish women, will be held on Sunday October 30 at Berkeley High School, located at Milvia and Allston Way.

There will also be a multi-cultural event in the evening.
Sliding scale, wheelchair accessible, ASL interpreted, childcare provided. For more information call 285-7510 and TTY 644-0181.

The Black Lesbian Theatre Ensemble is currently seeking new members. We are also looking for scripts (plays, 1-3 acts, skits, etc.). All interested actors and writers, please contact us c/o ONYX, 1442A Walnut St., #307, Berkeley, CA 94709 or (415) 540-0671.

ATTENTION ARTISTS/PHOTOGRAPHERS

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

COUNSELING

<u>Pacific Center Groups</u> - see ad for address

Pacific Center has three closed groups (not drop-in):

Lesbian drug and alcohol recovery group

Lesbians overcoming violence
 Lesbian incest survivors group

For information about these groups, call(415) 841-6224.

Lesbian Mother's Support Group: Drop-in group for lesbian mothers and co-mothers every Tuesday; 6:30-8 p.m.; \$2 donation.

Women with Physical Differences or Disabilities: Drop-in support group; for women only; every Tuesday; 8-9:45 p.m.; \$2 donation.

Lesbian Support Group: Drop-in group; every Tuesday; 8-9:45 p.m.; \$2 donation.

Under 21 Lesbian Rap Group: Drop-in support group for lesbians under 21 only; every Friday; 4-6 p.m.; \$2 donation.

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

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



In Celebration of the Jewish Feminist Conference
Part 2

jewish feminist conference

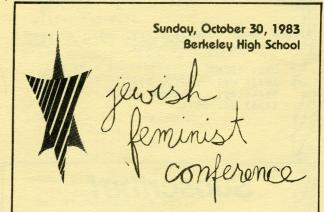
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