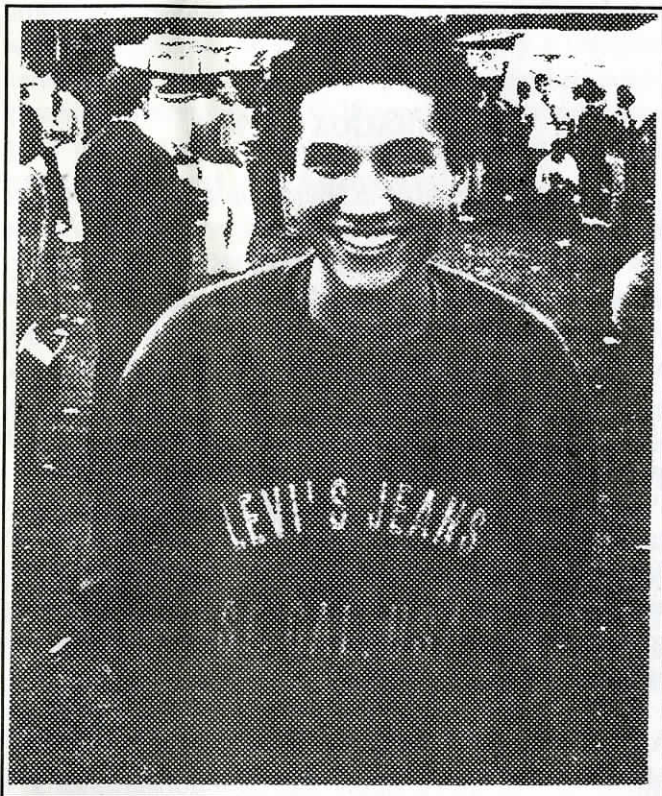
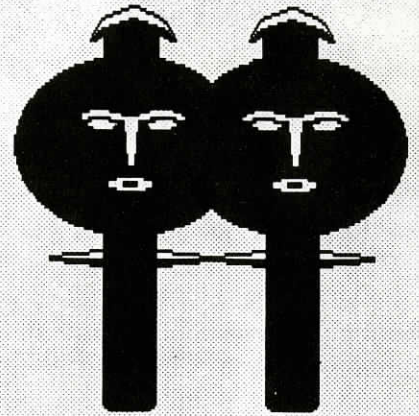


Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

Arch 196 Bellenden Road, London SE15 4RF

071.732.3885 (office)

Newsletter: August-September 1993



Pride festival, Brockwell Park, 19 June

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EDITORIAL POLICY

The BLGC Newsletter is published bi-monthly and aims to provide information on international news, as well as events and campaigns nationally, of interest to Black lesbians and gay men. News items, articles, letters (all written in simple language) or photographs and cartoons are always welcome.

In line with BLGC policy, we will not publish material that is racist, sexist, ableist or assumes readers are without childcare responsibilities, or of a certain social class, cultural/religious/British-born background. Individual articles do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the BLGC. Volunteers for the production of the newsletter are always welcome.

Tel: 071-732 3885.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

CLAMPDOWN ON PRIDE IN TURKEY

Turkey's first-ever lesbian and gay Pride celebrations were due to be held in Istanbul on the weekend of 3-4 July. But the organisers, who had previously been given permission by the government, were arrested on Friday night. The next day 26 overseas delegates were seized. With the exception of a Senator from Berlin, they were not allowed to contact their embassies, and were threatened with compulsory strip-searching and HIV testing. After ten hours without food and water, they were deported. Among the delegates was BLGC member Kim Mulji, who works for the Naz Project.

The International Lesbian and Gay Association is calling for worldwide protests. Letters can be sent to the Turkish Ambassador, Mr C Onhon, at the Turkish Embassy, 43 Belgrave Square, London SW1.

(sources include Capital Gay)

BERMUDA - LAW MAY CHANGE

At present, gay sex is a criminal offence carrying a penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment in Bermuda, which is a British Dependent Territory, like the Isle of Man. But unless the law changes, Britain may face prosecution in the European court.

According to Foreign Office Minister Mark Lennox-Boyd, political leaders in Bermuda are aware that the British government 'wishes it to bring its legislation into line with the European Convention on Human Rights. The subject is being debated in political circles in the Territory and this has illustrated the sensitivity of the issue amongst Bermudians.' Though the law is unlikely to change before the general election next April, 'we are keeping the matter under review and will remind the Bermudan Government of our views whenever the opportunity arises.' In July, British Prime Minister John Major raised the issue with Sir John Swan, Chief Minister of the Bermudas.

(source Capital Gay)

EUROPEAN COURT RULES AGAINST CYPRUS BAN

The European Court of Human Rights has ruled that the law prohibiting gay sex in Cyprus contravenes the European Convention on Human Rights. The current Attorney General of this island on the Asia-Europe border has a

European court (cont)

policy of not prosecuting men for this offence, as the judgement in April pointed out there was no guarantee that a future holder of this post would do the same.

Alexander Modinos, founder of the Gay Liberation Movement of Cyprus, who brought the case, said afterwards, 'I hope the Government will now honour the Court's decision and abolish this antiquated, unjust, colonial law.'

(source Gay Times)

NICARAGUA APPEAL

Lesbian and gay activists in Nicaragua are still waiting for the Supreme Court to rule on their appeal against Article 204 of the penal code. Under this law, passed last year, anyone involved in the 'induction, promotion or practice of scandalous form of homosexual sex' could be charged with sodomy and imprisoned for up to three years.

Under the Sandinista government, progress had been made on recognising the rights of lesbians and gays. But after the 1990 election brought in a right-wing leadership, these gains were reversed. Campaigners now fear that, unless the judiciary decide on the appeal soon, it will probably be turned down, since supporters of Article 204 may be encouraged by a visit to Nicaragua by the Pope later this year.

Anyone wishing to support the appeal against Article 204 of the revised Penal Code can write to Dr Rafael Chamorro Mora, Corte Suprema de Justicia, Plaza Espana, Managua, Nicaragua, or the Nicaraguan Consul, Roberto Bendana, 8 Gloucester Rd, London SW7 4RB.

(source Pink Paper)

MEXICO: AMNESTY SEEKS INVESTIGATION

Amnesty International has called for an investigation after concerns that two men, each sentenced to 13 years' and 9 months' imprisonment, had been framed because of their gay rights activism. The men, Gerardo Ortega Zurita and Jose Reyes Potenciano, both involved in AIDS prevention work and critical of the authorities for homophobia, had been charged with the rape and sexual assault of a minor. They were reportedly beaten while in custody.

(sources Pink Paper, Capital Gay)

INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL NEWS

A GAY GENE?

A researcher in the USA, Dr Dean Hamer, believes he has found a genetic marker in the X chromosome (inherited from the mother) which increases the likelihood that a man will be gay. This has stirred up a lot of interest from the mass media, and even suggestions from homophobes that abortions could be carried out on women to prevent them from having gay sons!

However some of the gays in the study did not have this genetic marker. Earlier research on a set of gay men, each with an identical twin, showed that about half of their brothers - whose genetic make-up was exactly the same - were heterosexual. So gayness is not simply a result of heredity, and while measures to 'persuade' mothers not to give birth to boys with the Xq28 genetic marker may cause great misery they will not succeed in guaranteeing that males will turn out to be heterosexual.

SERIAL KILLER IN LONDON

A suspect has been arrested, and is facing charges, after five gay men were murdered in London over the course of several months. Each appears to have gone home with a man who then killed them and, in three cases, took and used their cash cards before their bodies were found.

A man was filmed by a security camera in the company of Maltese chef Emmanuel Spiteri, the fifth victim, shortly before he died, and the picture was circulated. Also the police received several calls from someone claiming to be the killer.

The investigation was made harder by the mistrust of the legal system among many gays, especially after much-publicised instances of men being arrested for consensual sex. However in this case the police have sought to cooperate with the gay community in seeking to prevent further deaths, putting out an appeal for information and liaising with the Gay London Policing Group (GALOP, 071 233 0854).

(sources Pink Paper, Capital Gay)

AGE OF CONSENT MAY CHANGE

Three young men have asked the European Court of Human Rights to rule that Britain's law against sex between men under 21 - the highest age of consent in Europe - is discriminatory and an invasion of their privacy. They are receiving support from the Stonewall

Age of consent (cont)

lobbying group. The government may allow MPs a free vote later this year on whether the age of consent should be lowered to 18 or to 16, when heterosexual and lesbian sex is generally legal.

(sources Capital Gay, Stonewall News)

RACIST VIOLENCE IN BRITAIN

Britain has 135,000-140,000 incidents of racial violence a year, according to a survey commissioned by the Home Office. Many of these are acts of harassment, not physical attacks. Even so, the 8,000 attacks reported to the police in 1992 are clearly a small fraction of the actual number. Nevertheless a government minister stated in July that the Special Branch had told him that far right groups were insignificant.

Such groups are often deeply homophobic as well as racist, and Black lesbians and gays are an obvious target. In Britain as well as Germany, the failure of the authorities much (though not all) of the time to take the problem seriously, and even to keep the behaviour of racist public officials in check, increases the risk.

(sources include Searchlight)



This photograph of protesters outside Pentonville Prison is taken from CARF, an anti-racist and anti-fascist magazine. Over 10,000 people are detained under Britain's immigration laws each year.

NATIONAL AND HIV NEWS

GLORIA GAYNOR CONDEMNS HOMOSEXUALITY

Gloria Gaynor has told *The Sun* in an interview, 'I feel the same way as the Bible. It says that homosexuality is an abomination.' According to the Black singer, 'God loves homosexuals but he doesn't love what they do, any more than he loves me lying... But I always pray for all these people.'

(source Pink Paper)

FURTHER GAINS FOR 'FAMILY VALUES' CAMPAIGNERS

The government has accepted an amendment to the Education Bill, removing teaching about HIV, AIDS and sexually-transmitted diseases from the national curriculum. Secondary school governors are required to ensure that sex education is taught. But critics point out that schools could provide just one lesson and allow parents to withdraw their children. The amendment was passed in the House of Lords after lobbying by groups such as Family and Youth Concern.

The Education Secretary had already issued draft guidelines for sex education under which teachers are expected to help young people 'appreciate the benefits of stable married and family life' and forbidding 'teaching which advocates homosexual behaviour'. Some schools, already overloaded, may decide to drop in-depth education on sex and personal relationships; at others, parents may come under community pressure to refuse to allow their children to attend.

The results will probably be drastic and include more unwanted pregnancies among young women growing into adulthood without the information and support they need to make informed choices (including young lesbians acting straight to avoid discrimination). In September, the USA-based anti-abortion group, Operation Rescue, is due to arrive in Britain. In the past, while some anti-choice campaigners have focused on arguing for what they regard as the right to life, others have intimidated or physically attacked people staffing or using abortion clinics. The National Abortion Campaign can be contacted on 071 923

Further gains (cont)

4976 or at the Print House, 18 Ashwin St, London E8 3DL (send an sae for its new set of leaflets or details of its other resources).

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Two lesbians who have recovered from violent and sexually abusive relationships with women are seeking contributors to a book on abusive lesbian relationships. This is due to be published by Scarlet Press in 1994. Anyone interested should contact Fighting Spirit, PO Box 3046, London N17 0AJ. All material and correspondence will be strictly confidential.

Bad Attitude, the radical women's newspaper, is seeking more Black collective members and volunteers. They would also like women to send in articles and cartoons. If you are interested in helping in this or any other way, you can get in touch with the collective at 121 Railton Road, London SE24 0LR or on 071 978 9057.

LONDON APPRENTICE PICKETED

The London Apprentice pub in central London was picketed on 3 July by the Lesbian and Gay Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (LGCARF) on the grounds of racism. Those running this gay men's venue have denied that racist harassment of customers is tolerated, but this is disputed by some Black gays.

DAY REPORT OUT

A report published by the Public Health Laboratory Service in June predicts that the incidence of AIDS in England and Wales will level off in 1996-97. By the end of this period, the author Professor Day estimates, there will be about 4,200 people living with AIDS and a similar number with severe HIV disease.

(source Body Positive)

BLGC DEFINITION OF BLACK

All lesbians and gay men descended (through one or both parents) from Africa, Asia (ie. the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, and lesbians and gay men descended from the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

BLACK HIV GROUPS



BHAN has produced a new range of posters.

BLACK HIV/AIDS ORGANISATIONS

BHAF LEICESTER (Black HIV AIDS Forum)
29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE. Tel: Leicester 559995

BHAF MANCHESTER (Black HIV/AIDS Forum)
c/o AIDS UNIT-Room 6003, Town Hall Extension, Manchester M60 2JB.

BCAT LEEDS (Black Communities AIDS Team)
50 Call Lane, Leeds LS2 6DT Tel: (0532) 423100.

BHAF WEST MIDLANDS (Black HIV/AIDS Forum)
9 Anstruther Rd, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 3NN.

BHAN (Black HIV/AIDS Network)
Support Asian, African and Afro-Caribbean people affected by HIV and AIDS. 111 Devonport Road, London W12 8PB.
Tel: 081 742 9223 (helpline) 081 742 2828 (admin)

SOUTH EAST ASIAN HIV/AIDS GROUP contact BHAN (above) for details.

BLACKLINERS
Helpline for Black people, offering advice and information on HIV/AIDS. Unit 46, Eurolink Buildings, Effra Road, London SW2. Tel: 071 738 5274

NAZ
A HIV/AIDS project for the Muslim and South Asian Communities.
Contact NAZ c/o BM 3167, London WC1N 3XX. Tel: 081 993 9001.

SHARE (Shakti HIV/AIDS Response)
Advice, information and counselling for South Asians with/concerned with HIV/AIDS. BM SHARE, London WC1N 3XX

CENTRE UPDATE

The last few months, as ever, have been very busy for BLGC. Most of these months' activities were focused on trying to generate much needed funds for developing the centre space and inquiring into potential sources of income.

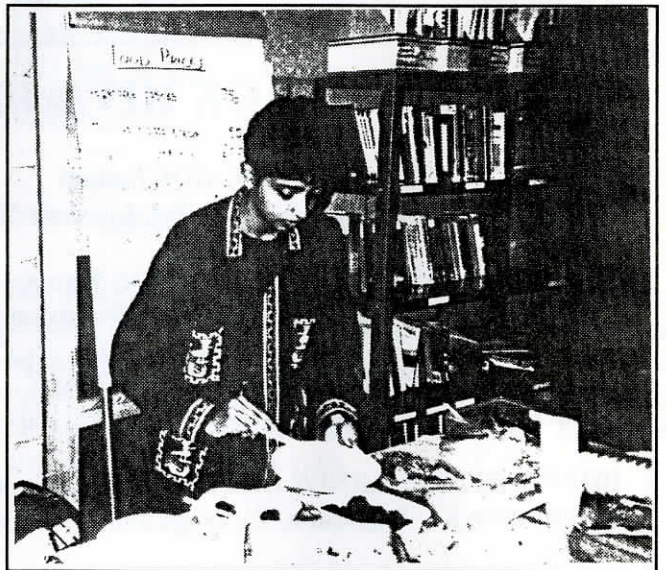
June had Pride, always a busy time for BLGC, and we felt that it would be a great time to focus ourselves on fundraising. We organised a number of events, the first of which was reported in the June/July 93 newsletter. Following about ten days later was an Internations event at the centre, in Peckham, which had people mixing and discussing topics as varied as coming out and community. The second event held at the Brixtonian Backyard was poorly attended for reasons we remain ignorant of. Maybe Thursday is a bad night to party. Nevertheless those who did show had a pleasant and relaxed time although the music was too low.

The day of Pride was exciting and BLGC was both present on the march as well as having a stall in the People of Colour focus area, near to the Shegun disco tent organised by the Black Experience. It was great to see so many Black lesbians and gay men in the park (although not nearly enough joined BLGC).

Maybe everyone had such a great time on the night of Pride itself that they were unable to make it to the Proud Picnic that BLGC organised on 20 June. However, the twenty or so people who gathered in Hyde Park, eating brutally good food (vegan, vegetarian and meat) had a great time. An impromptu game of softball wore people out a bit and it was nice to relax to mellow sounds from a ghetto blaster. Unfortunately some people arrived late which meant that they missed out on this enjoyable day out for Black lesbians and gay men.

The BLGC's Arts and Craft exhibition at the centre on Sat 26 June was very well attended. There were stalls selling jewellery, clothes, books, cards and posters. There were also performers reciting short stories and poetry, as well as a video on lesbian and gay parents. The food on sale went down well and our thanks and gratitude go to the woman who cooked it all for us.

Towards the end of July two workers from BLGC were invited to Hamburg and Paris to take part in gay and lesbian gatherings happening in these cities. We were asked to run workshops on racism within the lesbian and gay community, take part in a panel discussion on minorities within the lesbian and gay movement, as well as give an insight into the situation in England as we saw



Arts and Crafts exhibition at the centre, 26 June

it. This was also an opportunity for BLGC to research the possibilities of generating income outside England.

Beside all this, we have continued to do the work that we had undertaken to do at the centre. The weekly drop-in on Wednesday between 5.30 and 7.30pm continues to take place and is open to all Black lesbians and gay men. You can meet others, talk, relax and watch videos in a safe and comfortable environment. Women only drop-ins happen on the first Saturday of the month from 2-4 and men only drop-ins on the fourth Sunday from 4-6pm. Let's Rap, the discussion/social group for Black gay men, also began meeting at the centre. For more information ring 071 737 3881 or BLGC.

CENTRE NEWS

EGM REPORT

Centre update (cont)

LAGER (Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights) also have advice sessions at the centre so if you need advice call us at the office to arrange an appointment.

Telephone calls from isolated Black lesbians and gay men are still being answered as well as calls from individuals and organisations interested in our work. We have continued to respond to many letters requesting information.

We are still receiving housing opportunities for Black lesbians and gay men but the uptake is surprisingly low. If you, or a Black lesbian or gay man you know, is looking for accommodation then give us a call.

We have kept up our media work. Letters from BLGC expressing concerns about topics as diverse as the homophobia of Shabba Ranks to expressing our concern and voicing our protests about the vicious attack on a Black gay man in Brixton have appeared in the press targeting Black audiences. We have been approached by television production companies wanting to find Black lesbians and gay men willing to appear on a programme about cross-racial relationships, which will appear on Channel 4 later this year.

Savi, the outreach and development worker has been rushing around raising the profile of BLGC and has completed a number of lucrative training sessions. Her latest piece of work is doing some consultancy work with London Friend.

Bryan, the centre's administrator, has taken two months sabbatical leave from BLGC and we hope to see him back here soon. In the meantime the administration is being done by the remaining workers and devoted volunteers. So please bear with us if we are a little slow in responding to requests.

Our most recent piece of work was attacking the growth at the back of the centre. It was sweaty, at times difficult, but rewarding, work. Although it was not completed a lot of the clearing was done. Another day is planned so come down and help. Even if you can't help with this, get involved with something else. Call either Sakthi or Clarence, the volunteer coordinators, on 071 732 3885 to discuss how you can help BLGC.

We would like to thank all those who have volunteered and who have been instrumental in the running of BLGC.

Cheers!

BLGC held an Extraordinary General Meeting on 15 July 1993, for the purpose of electing new MC members, updating the Black lesbian and gay community on the centre's funding situation and looking at ways forward. It was felt that with the upcoming cut in our London Boroughs Grant Scheme fund in March 1994, the need to discuss these issues was vital.

The meeting began with the Company Secretary briefly outlining the history of the centre Project, and how we came about moving into the centre after a long and arduous search for suitable premises in the face of homophobia and racism. Our funding from LBGS had been cut at this point, and was reinstated for a period of three years on the basis of BLGC having found a Centre. Funds were raised to renovate the front part of the arch, which now serves as the office/drop-in/phoneline area. However, the back of the arch still needs to be renovated and this requires the raising of more funds as well as energy and enthusiasm from the Black lesbian and gay community. The current Management Committee, having guided BLGC through three years of change and hard work, felt it was time to hand over this responsibility to other members of the community.

Sadly, the attendance at the EGM was low and a new MC could not be elected (although later a handful of members came forward to keep the organisation going). Disappointment was expressed at the lack of interest and involvement of Black lesbians and gay men in a resource that exists to serve our needs. This is doubly disappointing at a time when other mainstream and international organisations are becoming aware of our existence and recognising our importance as the only such resource in all of Europe. Savi, our Outreach and Development worker, is inundated with requests for talks and training, we are frequently asked for statements on issues that relate to Black lesbians and gay men, and we are in contact with organisations all over the world and are often asked to attend conferences eg. the international lesbian and gay youth conferences in Hamburg and Paris.

Questions were raised about the kind of events we should organise at the centre, and how relevant these would be to the many Black lesbians and gay men out there. Again this requires active involvement from the community, to be on our Management Committee, to volunteer at the centre. We need input from as many Black lesbians and gay men as possible to realise our potential as a valuable and unique space for all Black lesbians and gay men.

If you are interested in joining BLGC's Management Committee, or would like to volunteer, please contact Clarence Allen or Sakthi Suriyaprakasam on 071 732 3885.

PRIDE - A DEEPER LOVE?

Was I the only one who left Pride in Brockwell Park feeling that somehow we had all missed the point. I am finding it difficult to pinpoint exactly what it was that made Pride not work for me. Last year, 1992, was the first time that Pride had a People of Colour focus area and tent, under the banner of Shegun - a Yoruba word for victory. It would be false to say that this ran smoothly: stalls were too close together, the music too close to the stalls which rendered stall holders and those wanting information difficult; the music system misbehaved from time to time; the area was positioned quite some distance from the main stage and many people could not find the space.

However it cannot be denied that most people had a good time. It was so positive to see so many Black lesbians and gay men together enjoying themselves and celebrating a common unity.

Pride in Brockwell Park on 19 June of this year saw many more Black lesbians and gay men than last year, possibly hundreds more. The People of Colour tent was packed with bodies and deep tunes. In the rest of the park itself there were still more Black lesbians and gay men listening to performers on the main stage, milling around the stall area in search of that special gift or in the other disco tents. Yet I still came away feeling a bit distanced from most of the people there.

Without a doubt my mood was affected by the DJ playing Shabba Ranks when testing out his records.



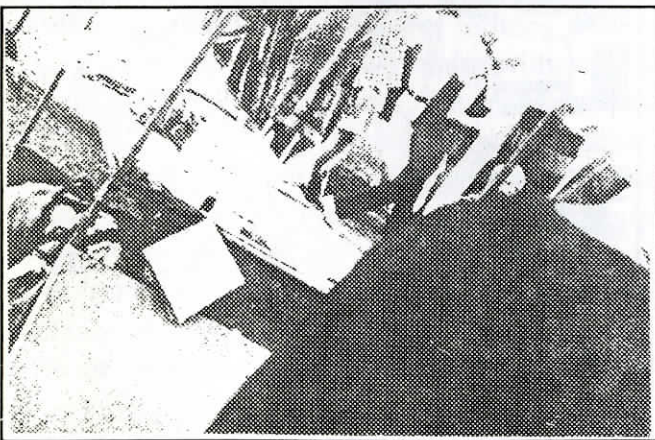
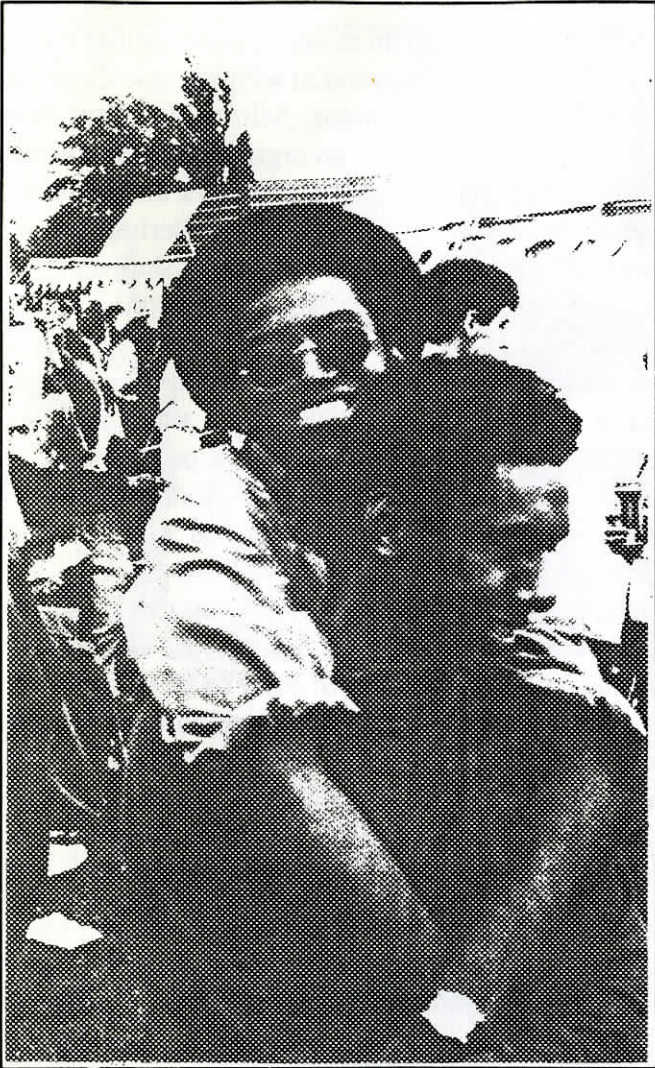
Clarence in Brockwell Park, 19 June

When I challenged him I got a rude and non-apologetic response. ``Tough'' was all he said. I was later equally disheartened to see many people in the tent dancing merrily along to him. I feel it sad in the light of his obvious homophobia. It is sadder that the work of Black Lesbians and Gays Against Media Homophobia, letters and statements from the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre and groups such as Outrage appear so unappreciated. There are records which are as danceable, if not more so, as Shabba Ranks's and simply because he is fashionable we should not drop our protestations about homophobia. Yes, it is true that campaigners need a day of rest and a time to celebrate but we do not need to loose our integrity to enjoy ourselves. Ranks is making a mockery of the Black lesbian and gay community. We ought not support him by playing his music in what is supposed to be a safe environment, created for us and by us.

I also noticed (and quite alarmingly) a level of contempt being directed at cross-racial relationships with comments not as harsh as ``sell-out'', but meaning that, being bandied about. It is so sad that we still do not see Blackness as a fixed identity. We cannot be more Black by being with a Black partner or less Black for being with a white one. I may not agree with many of the things that, let's say, a Black tory supports but I would never be arrogant enough to say they are not Black. This is little more than forcing us into a stereotype of what Black people are *supposed* to be like and act like etc. I do not want those sort of limits put onto me and don't feel they should be imposed on others. The Black people who had white partners are as Black as me and have experiences and opinions that are valid which need to be respected. These views, and more importantly these Black people, cannot be dismissed with a flippant comment. There are many reasons why people have cross racial relationships and these cannot be ignored.

I was alarmed by the lack of involvement of a political level from the Black lesbian and gay men there. By political involvement I mean a willingness to become part of an organisation that fights for our needs as Black lesbians and gays. Few joined BLGC at the festival, and I don't think that we have priced ourselves out of the market as far as membership is

Pride - a deeper love? (cont)



Pride festival at Brockwell Park, 19 June

concerned. Even without the special half-price Pride offer, £8 and £2.50 per year is not a lot to ask. BLGC cannot survive without both active involvement from people as volunteers, but we also need to generate some income which is why we need membership and for people to make a decision, a political decision, to join us.

There was also a very poor Black contingent on the march itself although there were many in the park. We moan that we never see ourselves in the press when we were not on the demonstration. It got boring hearing ``I couldn't be bothered to go to central London only to have to get down to Brixton''. Especially from people who are out enough not to have to worry about family, friends and neighbours seeing them. For an isolated Black lesbian or gay man who happened to be near the march their sense of being the only Black lesbian or gay man would not have been removed. Nor would it have convinced the many Black people who think that we do not exist that there are, in fact, many Black lesbians and gay men. Marching together would not only have been a political act but an empowering one. Sadly as far as Black people were concerned it remained relatively apolitical.

I think attitude has its place and time but it must always be positive. In contrast to last year's positivity there seemed to be a lot of negativity around. There was too much bad attitude for me at the park and it seemed to be the rule of the day. I wasn't prepared to play the game. It was awful to see people almost coming to blows because the crowds meant that people were brushed or feet were trod upon - accidentally. The people were more concerned about picking up trade than creating a good atmosphere. I just thought what is the point of us being there.

I left Pride early with a nasty taste in my mouth and a feeling that something needs to change to save next year's celebration from becoming a mass of apolitical partying and bad attitudes.

Clarence Allen

CONFERENCE REPORT

YOUTH GATHERING

How can I be invisible. I am the only Black person in a room full of two hundred white people.

It is strange that the organisers (all men) of the European Gathering of Gay and Lesbian Youth in Hamburg, Germany, tried to ensure that workshops reflected different members of the wider lesbian and gay community, with workshops on Queer Latinos Unidos, panels discussions on minorities within the lesbian and gay community, a workshop on racism and homophobia in England run by BLGC, yet trying to get Black lesbians and gay men to the conference as participants as opposed to workshops leaders appeared to be overlooked.

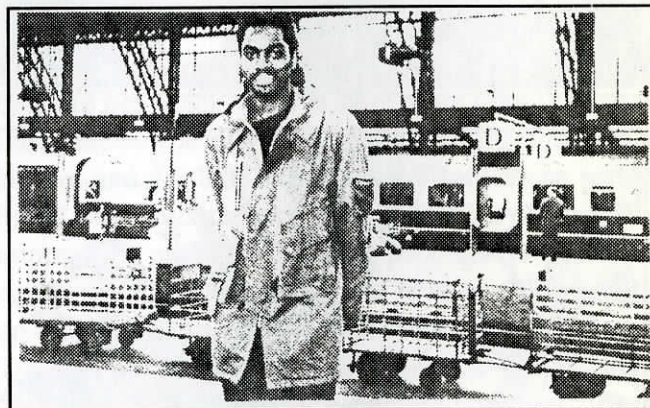
In total there were no more than five Black people. I was the only person of African Caribbean descent. The others were of Asian, Kurd and Chinese descent.

When I asked where the event had been advertised I received the reply that it was mostly in the gay and lesbian press and in further education colleges and universities- places that many Black people don't have much access to. But that is another tale.

Most of the workshops were run in German with simultaneous translation into English. All the same, the discussions got confused from time to time because the interpreter was not professional (actually he was one of the conference participants who kindly agreed to step in after the paid interpreter did not show).

There were a number of interesting panel discussion especially the one on lesbians, gay men and their parents. I was however saddened that a young woman who was not out to her parents asked the panel for advice. She was told quite forcefully that she should tell them as soon as she got home. I had to jump in and say that the panel was in no position to say that and that it was not their right to tell anyone to come out without taking into account the support mechanism that were in place, the very real consequences of a negative reaction, e.g. homelessness which is very real to a number of lesbian and gay men.

The panel discussion on minority communities within the lesbian and gay movement with Enrique Castrejon from Queer Latinos Unidos, Selman Arikboga from Schwule Internationale - an organisation for Kurdish lesbians and gay men - and members of L'Chaim a Jewish lesbian and gay group from Berlin, saw the panel accused of separatism. It was disheartening to see that the audience was having problems grasping the concept of us needing our own space because of the racism and anti-semitism on the lesbian and gay scene. (Maybe I thought the scene was more integrated in Germany and that Black people were allowed the same access to clubs and were treated equally. This thought was crushed quickly when Ricardo, a Puerto Rican guy, and I went to a gay bar, cloned in the gay uniform of the summer. We were asked if we knew that this was a gay bar. Yes, we said, we are gay. We were denied entry by them saying that it was for members only. We couldn't really argue with this until we saw a white French man who was also at the conference, first time in Hamburg, get into the club without any hassle. My friend and I could not be bothered to complain and went some place else.



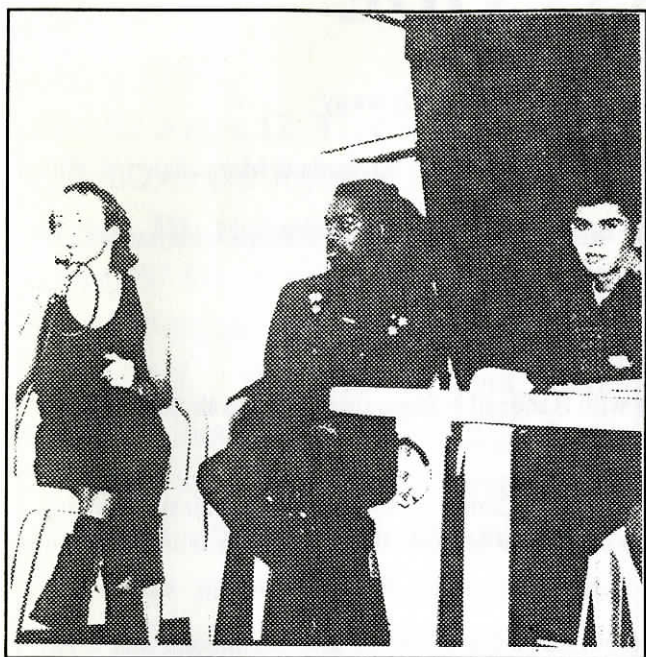
Clarence in Cologne station

This club, although allowing us access after asking if we were gay, had us receiving contemptuous looks and even having chewing gum thrown into my hair. We left quickly.)

Anyway back to the panel discussions. I sensed that

CONFERENCE REPORT

Youth gathering (cont)



Panel discussion at conference in Hamburg

the audience were too afraid to ask questions for fear of not being politically correct. When it was mentioned that it was not our responsibility to educate about racism someone said but how will we learn if you don't come to us. A sad state of affairs really. Ideas raised by the panel about the exoticising of Black people on the scene, stereotyping of Black people, of Jews and the avoiding of forming friendships or even striking up conversations with us, fell on ears that did not want to listen. When I asked why the only people who came to the workshop on racism were Black people, and L'Chaim mentioned that the only people who came to the anti-Semitism workshop were Jews, we received no answer. We said that it was indicative of the lack of interest or, at best, the reluctance to talk about race issues. The discussion had scope for a wider debate but time ran out and we had to leave.

The last panel discussion, about gay men and women (whether lesbian or not), got lost all over the place

and moved on to bisexuality, where one man defined himself as gay but slept with women, which was fortunately, I thought, badly received by the audience.

``We've been struggling for ages to accept our gayness and fight for the right to sleep with men on our own terms as *gay*,'' said a gay man, ``and now you tell us it's not okay to limit ourselves and to express ourselves heterosexually.''

The workshop did not explore gay misogyny at all. How many women were involved in the planning of the event? When the organisers of the event were asked on stage to receive bottles of champagne for their troubles only men got up. Also as far as I was aware there were no women only workshops.

One final comment. The final evening's entertainment at the Curio Haus was all in German, with no translation, which came as a nasty shock to those of us spoilt all week by simultaneous translation. Also German entertainment seems to be trapped in a time warp. People came from all over Germany to see acts as diverse as a magician with a ventriloquist dummy, a hat juggler and a Hinge and Bracket-esque cabaret act, grand piano and all.

I feel that the conference on the whole was a success. It would be difficult to negate the hard work of all those involved in it. The accommodation, food and conference space as well as the marquee in the park where both panel discussions and discos took place, must have taken some organising. The workshops I attended were all prepared excellently and it was a shame that some were not repeated as I had to make the choice over those that clashed.

I was saddened that I spoke no word of German and to a degree I can understand more the difficulties of others coming to a country not knowing the native language. It was very scary. It made me realise that I have the power to make that person feel welcome and less afraid.

Clarence Allen

SAD ACCESS CODE

A PARKING 1-Outside entrance 2-Less than 50 yards away 3-More than 50 yards away

B PUBLIC TRANSPORT 1-Tube 2-Bus 3-Rail 4-Less than 50 yards 5-More than 50 yards 6-More than 1/4 Mile

C ENTRANCES 1-Level 2-Ramp without rail 3-Ramp with rail 4-Steps without handrail 5-Steps with handrail 6-Steep steps 7-Shallow steps 8-Curved steps

D DOORS 1-Width 2-Heavy 3-Light 4-Revolving 5-Opens inwards 6-Opens outwards

E INSIDE BUILDING 1-Level 2-Steps without handrail 3-Steps with Handrail 4-Steps steep 5-Steps shallow 6-Steps curved

F LIFT 1-Dimensions 2-Controls high 3-Controls low 4-Controls flush 5-Controls protruding 6-Handrail 7-Seating 8-Smooth 9-Jerky 10-Doors automatic 11-Doors manual heavy 12-Doors Manual light 13-Doors concertina 14-Doors straight

G TOILETS 1-Dimensions 2-Doors open inwards 3-Doors open outwards 4-Rails 5-Air driers hand operated 6-Air driers foot operated 7-Air driers automatic 8-Taps hand operated 9-Taps foot operated

H DIMENSIONS OF PREMISES 1-Large building 2-Small building 3-Corridors

J FLOOR SURFACES 1-Smooth 2-Carpet 3-Slippery

K LIGHTING 1-Bright 2-Dim 3-Flexible(eg. movable)

L SEATING 1-Hard 2-Soft 3-High 4-Low 5-Plentiful 6-Static 7-Movable

M HEATING 1-Warm 2-Cool 3-Variable

N PARTICIPATION 1-Braille 2-Tape 3-Large print 4-Signers 5-Induction loop. 6-Finger spelling 7-Lip speakers 8-Note takers

P HELPERS 1-Transport 2-Meeting & escorting. 3-General help.

Q CRECHE 1-Run by men 2-Run by women 3-Run by both sexes 4-Facilities for children with disabilities 5-Under fives only 6-Up to 12 years only 7-Girls only 8-Mixed

R FOOD & DRINK 1-Drinks only 2-Vegan 3-Vegetarian 4-Non-vegetarian 5-Self service 6-Table service 7-Licensed bar 8-Specific alcohol free areas 9-all space alcohol free

S SMOKING 1-Not allowed 2-Allowed 3-Specific areas 4-Specific times

T STRUCTURE OF ACTIVITIES 1-Formal meetings 2-Informal 3-Continuous 4-Frequent Breaks

U TELEPHONE

1-In an accessible area 2-Private phone 3-Call phone

ACCESS

BLGC (Black Lesbian and Gay Centre)

Arch 196 Bellenden Road, London SE15 4RF

Access details

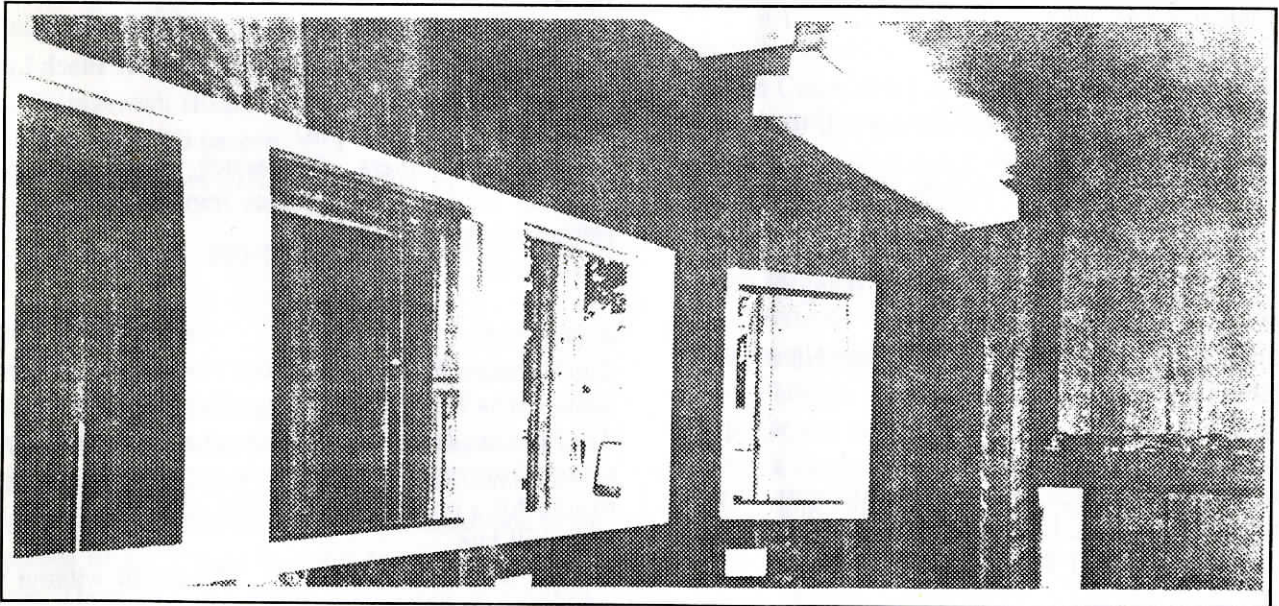
A1. B2,5 no's 12, 37, 63, 78, 312, P2, P12. B2,6 no's 36, 36b, 171, P13. C4 steep. D1 entrance and two internal doors 35" D3, 5, toilet 29" D3, 5, back door 29" D2,6. E1. F none. G1 42"x 61.5", G2. H1. J2 in front, bare concrete floor in back. K1. L1, 2, 3, 4, 7. M3. N2, 3 BLGC publications, 4 advance notice needed, 5. Q-none, child care costs provided. R-light refreshments. T1, 2. U1, 2

CLC/BLG (Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group)

54-56 Phoenix Road London NW1 1ES

Access details

A single yellow line outside entrance B1, 3, 5 nos 14, 14a, 18, 30, 73 stop on Euston Rd, near Shaw Theatre. C1. D main door 32.75", 3, 5, fire exit door 31.5", other doors 31.3". E ground floor building, 1. F none. G two toilets - door to 1st 30.5", 3 dimensions 5.75'x4.5', turning distance 3', door to 2nd 29.5" 3 dimensions 3x5.5', turning distance 2' H2 front door to meeting room 8', meeting room to office 7', meeting room to large WC 11.5', meeting room to other WC 22', meeting room to creche 18' creche to fire exit 13.5. J1. K1, 3 in meeting room, creche & office. L1, 2, 4, 5, 7. M3. N8 some info on large print & tape, BSL stage 2 communicator, minicom. P3. Q2, age limit 11, 8. R non alcoholic drinks available. S3. T1, 2, 4. U1,2, minicom in office.



Black Lesbian and Gay Centre

Please remember, when sending in information about groups, events and courses, include access details if possible.

EVENTS

Saturday 21 - Sunday 22 August

Hackney Lesbian Strength and Gay Pride Festival

Venue: Clissold Free Festival

Clissold Park, Stoke Newington

Saturday: music stage, cabaret, film and women's tent, kids space, circus events

Sunday: fun day, sports, music, performers, ceilidh, football, poetry

For info: contact Hackney L&G Festival Group, Box No 9, 136-138 Kingsland High St, E8 2NS.

Tel: 081 533 1346

Sunday 22 August

Let's Rap Social event/Black Gay men only drop-in

Venue: The Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF.

5-9pm

Bring food and drink to share with others. Come mellow out to music, chat and chill.

For info tel: 071 732 3885

Saturday 4 September

Women only drop-in at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF.

For info tel: 071 732 3885

Sunday 5 September

Harringey Women's Group present Stress and how to deal with it

Venue: Women and Medical Practice, 40 Turnpike Lane N8.

2-4pm.

Full access. Childcare and lifts available. Bring food and cushions.

Write to PO Box 2474, 44 Tottenham Lane, N8 8NA.

For info tel: 081 348 8765/809 4110

Sunday 19 September

Let's Rap meets at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF. From 2 until 6pm

Tel 071 737 3881 or 071 732 3885

Sunday 26 September

Black Gay men only drop-in at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF. From 4-6pm

For info tel 071 732 3885

Friday 1-Sunday 3 October

The Eleventh National Bisexual Conference.

Venue: Derby Hall, University of Nottingham.

A conference for all bisexual people, their partners, friends

and anyone with a positive interest in bisexuality.

Write to: BICON, c/o The Rainbow, 180 Mansfield Road, Nottingham, NG1 3HW.

For info tel: Jo on (0602) 703553

Saturday 2 October

Black lesbian only drop-in at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF. From 2-4pm

For info tel: 071 732 3885

Sunday 17 October

Let's Rap takes over Brighton.

A day trip to the south is planned.

For info tel: 071 737 3881 or 071 732 3885

Sunday 24 October

Black Gay men only drop-in at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre, Arch 196, Bellenden Road, SE15 4RF. From 4-6pm

For info tel: 071 732 3885

CONTINUING

Every Wednesday evening

Black lesbians and gay men's drop in at the Black Lesbian and Gay Centre

between 5.30 and 7.30pm.

Come to meet others, chat, watch videos, play games, listen to music, discuss topics important to us. Light refreshments available.

For info tel: 071 732 3885

Every Friday

The Pressure Zone

Venue: The Vox, Brighton Terrace, Brixton.

The Pressure Zone goes from strength to strength. Upfront sounds from ragga to rare groove, garage to house, hip hop to soul for a predominantly Black audience.

11pm till late

£3 with flyer before midnight. £5 after or without flyer.

Until Saturday 18 September

Elegies for Angels, Punks and Raging Queens

Venue: The Criterion Theatre, 213-223 Piccadilly.

Performances: Mon-Thurs 8pm. Fri 6pm and 8.45pm. Sat 4.30 and 8pm.

Tickets £7.50-£18.

Play exploring the effects of HIV/AIDS on many different characters, Black, white, gay, heterosexual, older and young.

Box office: 071 839 4485

COURSES

Thursday 19 August

HIV/AIDS and Our communities

A one day seminar presented by the Naz Project (a HIV organisation for South Asian, Turkish and Arab communities) which is an introductory course for those interested in developing HIV/AIDS resources for ethnic minority communities or are involved in policy developments on service provision for these communities.

maximum 60 people

Venue: Palingswick House, 241 King St, London W6 9LP from 9.30am-5pm.

Cost £40 statutory sector/£20 voluntary sector, individuals.

For more info telephone 081 563 0191/0205/0208

Wednesday 23 - Thursday 24 September

Men from our communities - HIV, Sexuality and Safer Sex

A men only course presented by the Naz Project (a HIV/AIDS organisation for the South Asian, Turkish and Arab communities). Participants must have a basic awareness of HIV/AIDS and related issues and must be able to show a knowledge and understanding of HIV/AIDS before acceptance.

Venue: Palingswick House, 241 King St, W6 9LP

Maximum number 20 people

Cost £125 statutory sector/£60 voluntary sector
9.30am-5pm

For more info phone: 081 562 0191/0205/0208

Thursday 30 September

Counselling and support course for gay men with HIV

The course aims to enable gay men with HIV to acquire skills which can be used to support themselves and others around the issues raised by HIV/AIDS. Maximum of 10 participants and they are asked to commit themselves to all the sessions of the course in order to create safety for everyone. There will be a cost of £1-3 based on a sliding scale for each session.

This will be the first session of a twelve week course, with all sessions meeting on Thursday evening.

Meeting at the Palmieri Room, 52a Philbeach Gardens, Earls Court, SW5 9EB. 7-10.30pm.

071-835 1495.

There will be a fortnight of lesbian and gay films on Channel 4 from Sunday 15 August

Saturday 2 October

Black Lesbian's Creative Writing Workshop The Printed Word

Workshop to be facilitated by professional Black Lesbian poet, writer, performer and workshop facilitator, Quibilah Montsho. No prior experience needed, just bring yourself, paper and pen. All Black Lesbians welcome.

Venue: Commonworld Offices

1st Floor Cheetwood House

21 Newton St,

Piccadilly, Manchester M1 1FZ

1-3pm.

Cost: £10/£1 (unwaged) per day. For more information Tel:

Quibilah on 061 226 0787 or write to

Flat 11 Marcus Garvey Court,

151 Withington Road

Manchester,

M16 8FB

Workshops on The Spoken Word and on The Written Word follow on 6 November and 4 December respectively. Same venue and cost.

Monday 4 October

Lesbian Counselling Project

Meeting to discuss the setting up of a service offering counselling around sexual violence, physical violence and ongoing emotional abuse.

The definition of the project is open to discussion. All lesbian skills and experiences are valuable and no counselling experience is needed.

Meeting at Camden Lesbian Centre/Black Lesbian Group, 54-56 Phoenix Road, NW1. 7.30-9pm. Sign language interpreter and induction loop. Wheelchair accessible venue. For more details phone Marion 081 607 9440 (voice and answerphone) or 071 720 8175 (minicom)

Friday 29 October

Drug Use and HIV prevention

within the South Asian, Turkish, Irani and Arab communities

Venue: Hammersmith School

The Curve, W12

From 9.30-5pm.

Cost £15 including lunch and refreshments

For more info phone 081 563 0191/0205/0208

BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUPS

LESBIANS AND GAY MEN

SHAKTI LONDON - South Asian Lesbian and Gay Network. The group meets every 2nd Sunday of the month from 3-6pm at **LONDON FRIEND**, 86 Caledonian Rd, London N1 (wheelchair access, nearest tube Kings Cross). Disco with bhangra music on last Friday of month from 10pm-2am at The Dome, Tufnell Park. For more information tel: 071 837 2782.

SHAKTI BRADFORD - Tel: 0274 723802 /722206.

SHAKTI BIRMINGHAM - Tel: 021 622 7351. Ask for a Shakti contact.

SHAKTI MANCHESTER - Tel: 061 274 3814.

MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP - Meetings 1st and 3rd Thursday of every month at Manchester Gay Centre. Further info from: PO Box 153. Manchester M60 1LP.

ORIENTATIONS - Chinese and South East Asian lesbian and gay group meet at **LONDON FRIEND** (see Shakti).

CYPRIT LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP meets on the 1st Sunday of the month 2.30pm-5pm at **LONDON FRIEND** (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

IRANIAN LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP meets at **LONDON FRIEND** (see Shakti). Ring for more details.

LEICESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP - For details write to c/o Michael Wood Centre, 29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE.

BIRMINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP (KOLA) - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Tel: Friend 021 622 7351.

BLACK LESBIANS AND GAYS AGAINST MEDIA HOMOPHOBIA (BLAGAMH) - For more information write to **BLAGAMH, FREEPOST, London SE8 5BR.** (No stamp needed.)

MOSAIC - a group of Mixed Race Lesbians and Gay Men holds discussions every month and runs socials. For further information contact **BLGC** on 071 732 3885.

BRISTOL BLACK LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL GROUP (SAFAR) - Meets the first Tuesday of each month. For more information Tel: (0272) 639 789 (men), 427 731 (women) or Bristol Switchboard (0272) 425 927.

LESBIANS

CAMDEN BLACK LESBIAN GROUP runs socials, discussions and workshops for Black lesbians. For details contact **CLC/BLG**, 54-56 Phoenix Rd, London NW1 1ES (wheelchair access, minicom, creche available; tel: 071 383 5405).

LAS DIVINAS - Latinamerican Lesbian Group, for details contact **CLC/BLG** (see Camden Black Lesbian Group).

YOUNG BLACK LESBIAN GROUP at Lewisham Young Women's Project meets the last Wednesday of every month 7-10pm at Lewisham Young Women's Project, 308 Brownhill Rd, Lewisham. For further details ring 081 698 6675.

NOTTINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN GROUP - Meets first Friday evening of the month in Black Lesbian Room, Nottingham Women's Centre, 30 Chaucer Street, Nottingham, NG5 1LP. Tel: 0602 411475.

BLACK LESBIANS IN SOLIDARITY - Write to PO Box 11, 124 Vassall Road, SW9 6JB.

ZAMIMASS (group for working class black lesbians) - For details contact **CLC/BLG** (see Camden Black Lesbian Group) or **BLGC** on 071 732 3885.

BLACK LESBIAN CULTURAL WORKERS COLLECTIVE - For Black lesbians producing cultural materials, from sculpture to hats to music. For details contact **Zamimass**.

OLDER BLACK LESBIAN GROUP (over forty) meets 1st Sunday of every month between 3-6pm at West Hampstead Women's Centre, 55 Hempstal Rd, NW6. Tel: 071 328 7389.

COMMENT AND GROUPS

CUSTOMER SERVICE?

These days, the word 'customer' is in. It often replaces terms like 'passenger', 'client' and 'service user'.

This has some good points. It suggests that people who provide services should take account of what those who seek them actually want, not fob them off with someone else's idea of what is best for them. It has overtones of courtesy, efficiency, a willingness, if necessary, to adapt.

But it also suggests a certain kind of relationship. Salespeople (who often have little say in what goods or services are provided) compete with those from other companies to encourage people with money to part with as much of it as possible. Customers, meanwhile, shop around individually for what seems the best deal each can get for what he or she can afford. Advertisers may spend huge sums to make a firm appear appealing, customers may exchange a few words with those who provide them with products or services, or use them as targets for frustration if what is on offer appears too costly or of low quality, but there is little real human contact.

This is not because of some flaw in the characters of those involved in buying and selling. Sometimes those who buy go out of their way to be considerate, those who sell to be kind, especially to customers who are vulnerable in some way. But in the end, customers who are too nice risk being fleeced, while those they deal with, if they are too soft-hearted, may get into trouble for losing their company money or, if they are self-employed, be driven out of business.

We now live in an often glossy but cold world, where those who cannot afford to pay or whose needs are judged difficult to meet - such as chronically ill patients, or passengers on routes which are not heavily used - are increasingly left on the

outside. The old ideal of 'public service' was often tainted by patronising attitudes and an unthinking acceptance of the way society was run. But in what has replaced it, the contents tend to matter less than the packaging, promoted by people with good manners learnt from a training course and kept in check by the fear of being discarded.

What is the place of organisations such as BLGC in this setting?

The project for which I began to work in 1985 set out to create a space where Black lesbians and gays could care for and support one another and challenge some of the falsity



Savi

Lesbian groups (cont)

ZAMI (MANCHESTER BLACK YOUNG LESBIAN GROUP). To get Black women together so that they are not alone. Advice, counselling and support. For more information tel: 061 834 7256 or 061 236 6205 Mon-Thurs 6-9pm.

LEEDS BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP. c/o Harehills Housing Aid, 188 Roundhay Rd, Harehills, Leeds 8.

GAY MEN

LET'S RAP - Black gay men talking to Black gay men. Activities or social/discussion on the third Sunday of each month. Tel: 071 737 3881 or BLGC office.

NEWCASTLE-UPON-TYNE BLACK GAY MEN'S SUPPORT GROUP - contact 091 233 1333 before 6pm or 091 261 7768 after.

LONDON BLACK MESMAC GROUP - For African and African-Caribbean gay or bisexual men under 25. Meets Thursday evenings. Tel: 071 831 2330 for venue.

LEEDS BLACK GAY MEN'S GROUP - for African, Asian, Caribbean and other black gay men, meets fortnightly on Thursdays 7.30pm onwards. For further information contact David/Michael on 0532 444209.

COMMENT

Customer service? (cont)

and injustice in the world. I myself had come out thanks to numerous lesbians and gays, some of whom patiently supported me as I adjusted to what was new and bewildering, others some of whom I had not met but whose courage had made it possible for me to acknowledge who I was; and thanks also to other Black people who had helped me to develop a sense of my human worth despite racism and to believe that genuine change could be achieved by people working together. This love was freely given, with no exchange involved, though it was not a matter of 'do-gooding' with hidden motives. There was a sense of connection based on a shared experience: what happened to your neighbour had something to do with you. Many believed that they themselves could not be fully liberated while others were degraded, and passionately sought a better world.

Like many community organisations, BLGC has changed a great deal over the years. There is much more planning, a clearer notion of what each person involved is meant to be doing and better ways of making sure that they have the resources they need to do it and are accountable. There are some areas of overlap with the principles of 'customer care', but also major differences.

To begin with, commercial bodies can (indeed usually must, to stay in business) concentrate on lines of work which are profitable. It may take considerable skill to find out which these are, and determination to dispose of what is currently not required. But there is one basic criterion: making money. What happens to prospective customers who do not find what they want on the shelves, or who cannot afford the price, is not the company's concern. It is harder to ignore those in dire straits who need a lot of time or other resources but who cannot so much as publicly acknowledge BLGC's support and add to its reputation: people struggling to come to terms with their sexuality who may ring up several times before they even begin to speak of their problems, for instance, or those under threat of violence or deportation.

And those who respond are not disinterested salespeople, but other Black lesbians and gays, with the backing of those whose own experience is different but who want to help build a more just and caring society. A handful of these are employees, most are not. Four part-time workers can try to make the Centre run relatively smoothly and provide a few basic services. But however versatile they are and however many hours of unpaid overtime they put in, they cannot on their own make contact with tens of thousands of men and women of different ages, cultures and interests, largely closeted and scattered from Heathrow Airport to Hornchurch, Ponders End to Purley; advise, counsel and entertain them; and challenge prejudice and discrimination against Black lesbians and gays whenever they are found. Certainly service standards can be set, in some ways higher than for customers - care must be taken to make sure that advantage is not taken, even unwittingly, of people when they are vulnerable. Again, while salespeople and advertisers may go to the limits of the law in foisting their products on customers, BLGC and other

organisations are more concerned with enabling and encouraging people to make carefully-considered and well-informed choices. While the ideal customer may always use the same garage or same brand of soap-powder, BLGC's success can be better judged by whether those seeking help grow in independence, allowing them to break off contact if they want to do so.

But BLGC is not just about enjoying leisure and dealing with problems: people are brought together to share what they think and feel and make decisions if they wish. Dissatisfied customers may criticise, storm off in annoyance, even complain if a firm has not lived up to pledges of quality it has made. They cannot decide on its product range or sales practices. Black lesbians and gays, though, can join BLGC, join in shaping its plans and policies, even put themselves forward for nomination to the management committee. Instead of just grumbling with dissatisfaction or shopping around for something better, it is possible to change the way the organisation is run and what it does. This is not easy: it means relating to the others involved, the paid and unpaid workers and members in general, and so dealing with the uncertainty, pain and joy of human relationships. But it can be far more fulfilling.

In a world where the values of the market-place are often held up as an ideal, where salespeople are trained in, and advertisers rely on, simulating what is personal, even intimate to boost their employers' profits, can organisations like BLGC survive? Many people have never developed, or have lost, confidence that they are able, by cooperating with others, to make a difference. As large numbers of people who previously thought themselves secure find themselves unemployed, or homeless, or destitute, or at the receiving end of violence, others often cover up their own fear of being next by cutting themselves off from their neighbours who are in obvious need. All the same, at any time many women and men can be found acting not out of fear or immediate self-interest but for longer-term aims and the good of others (even if people behaving in such ways may be embarrassed, even ashamed, for moving outside society's norms).

Certainly BLGC should take account of the wants of those Black lesbians and gays who are relatively secure and have money to spend, and should continually seek to improve the quality and variety of its services, to strive to make the Centre increasingly comfortable and inviting. But, though on the outside it may sometimes resemble a commercial operation, at a deeper level it is different; and if it tried to offer Black lesbians and gays what they can obtain from the private sector, it would probably end up as an inferior - and unnecessary - imitation. Imperfect though BLGC is, it has certain strengths, and one of these is that it is founded not on the impersonality of buying and selling but instead on mutual concern, solidarity, love. And even if it fails to survive the next few years, as numerous small organisations (both businesses and community groups) are folding all over the country, it will have made a difference.

Savi Hensman

VOLUNTEER FORM

Volunteer Details

Date

Name.....

Address.....

.....

Tel:.....

Do you mind us contacting you by post? Yes / No.

Do you mind us contacting you by phone? Yes / No.

Please tick alongside the areas in which you can volunteer.

Counselling* Helpline

Advice/Information work Library

Archives Publicity

Newsletter Creche work*

Driving* Fundraising/events*

Talks/training* Performing

Cooking Centre maintenance

Staffing the centre

Interpreting/translating (please specify language(s).....

Other (please specify)

.....

*We may have to make checks for these areas of work. (This will be done with your knowledge).

.....

Please tell us about yourself and why you want to volunteer for BLGC, what are your skills and interests and in what work are you interested. (This is not obligatory but it will help the volunteer coordinators when allocating task to volunteers).

.....

.....

.....

Names of references (if applicable). We will not contact them without your permission.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thanks again for your interest in BLGC.

UNSENT LETTER TO D

Dear D,

Can I tell you that...? Would you understand if...? Is it possible that...? Will we continue to...?

Let me try to explain.

Days of unhappiness had really been days of nothingness, and although I had promised myself sorrow I had not really got it in the same way that I once promised myself joy.

But here you came and entered my room, with that unwitting and unconscious arrogance that is so attractive, and sat upon the bed where I, naked, sleep. The hairstyle, new to you, became your face and had given new dimension to its shape. It made me realise that, yes, your eyes are few shades darker than your skin.

I wanted so much to thank you, physically, for the beautiful card you had made on my behalf. The gift that I had cherished from afar is now mine because. Although I had said that I would have it one day, I had little intention that this day be so soon. You gave it to me. That I was so touched would have been greater registered had I touched you, to thank you, to reflect how moved I was that you cared, and cared enough to care that the present be appreciated. A hug, a kiss, would have said more than my genuine but seemingly affected enthusing.

But could I hug you, could I kiss you without cupidously wanting more than I know you would honestly give and I could happily receive? Yet I tried and am trying still to put reality and desirability into their separate contexts or, to be more accurate, trying to separate the realness of your sexuality and my desire for you that arises from my sexuality.

Did I attack you that night? Verbally abuse you that night? Belittle you? Sadly, but honestly, I did it selfishly to help me to cope. If I can convince myself of your lack of worth, if I can put you down, play up or magnify your faults (if they are, in fact, faults) then it could aid me in my destruction of my adoration of

you. I adore, and extol, the qualities of perfection and you embody the perfection I could be happy with, or unhappy without. You have a physique that makes me weep when I imagine nights with you. You have the talent of being able to draw and make it look as you want it to be. You have the artistic flair that I so want to be in me and, when I see it as impossible in myself, I seek it in others. And I find it in you. But you are bisexual. I am not.

Logically I can see the futility of lust.

But my desire surpasses all logic. Reason does not dictate to desire.

Logically I can see the pain I inflict on myself

But my masochism surpasses all logic. Reason does not dictate to self-hate.

Look at the way I pushed C and you softly together. I love you both and am happy to see you both happy. Beauty deserves beauty.

``Don't waste you time with bisexual men,`` I tell myself. You should tell me that. But your ability to recognise male and masculine beauty and your ability to express, unashamedly, your appreciation causes me to hope for that chance of maybe. But I am homosexual and see and recognise female beauty. Do women hope for me in the same, but opposite, way? Sadly I know that to be true.

You laughed at my goodbye, my macho arm slap that was almost a punch. It's my way of coping with you. I wanted to hug you but I would have been sad to see you hug me in return. But maybe I should not deny you emotion without reason, that is, without telling you why. You would, I'm sure, understand.

I will cope. I have to. I will be comfortable with you and love you. Just time.

Post birthday blues but I like it.

Love, lust and all the rest.

Clarence

POEMS

GETTING IT TOGETHER, BUT...

Airborne
flying on your love
swimming
in a pool of intimacy
couldn't see it any other way
you could make or break my day
and the wanting for you!
left me breathless at times
drifting
on the passion of remembrance

*But she doan love me
that way no more
she doan love me*

An' when I hear an' see you
in your new love
make me want to
cry
sometimes
overtimes
leaves me feeling happy
for you
for her

soft hints of togetherness
say you are each others

*and she doan love me
no more
that way*

For us to weather the storm
love and respect intact
is our miracle of our own making
there was no one to bail us out
and this
this has taken me
on a journey
around loves complexities
can bring me to say
One Love

*but she doan love me that way
no more she doan love me*

In a house that is who I am
I add the touch of you
to my foundation
what still might have been
clutters my mind
only temporarily
for I am on my way
I can take that love
share it around
I can make that lovesomething
more than an idle memory

our love filled me
with light
and I am not too dazed
by its glare
to see a new me

*but she doan love me
that way no more!*

Dorothea Smartt

SISTAH

The desire
to be
with you
talk
with you
is strong
If
we could have
pulled away the facade
been with each other
as we have been
intimate friends...
the `power of the erotic'
explored
sparked
by the magic tempo -
like
being lost in music
the patterns of the rhythm
synchronizing feelings
on a wave of possibilities
the music
tempting
powerfully seductive
a surge of the erotic

Dorothea Smartt

Dorothea Smartt is a performance poet and writer. Her poetry appears in Black Women Talk Poetry (Black Woman Talk, 1987) and Intimate Wilderness (Eighth Mountain Press, 1991). Most recently she co-edited Words from the Women's Cafe (Centerprise, 1993).

SUMMER BREEZE

You bring:
Songs to my lips
about sweet-soft-sensous
you
who wraps herself about me
whose caress can be like a whisper
yet still creams me
whose air and vibrations draw me
who moves beautifully in her silent strength
whose light fingers tripping anywhere
on my skin
can release tides of desire in me

Dorothea Smartt

POEMS AND REVIEWS

THE BEGGAR CHILD

She stands before me,
a child of her time,
bedraggled,
wretched refuse of the Earth,
with outstretched hand,

Small, fragile,
with glistening eyes,
that pierce through grimed face,
and strands of filthy hair,
that fall to shoulder bare,
her dress now torn,
a century old,
the pattern shaped by dirt and grease,
yet all the while,
a human beauty,
tries to escape,
to show the dignity of her life.

She waits expectantly,
with forlorn hope of reward,
while mournfully she casts quick looks,
to either side,
perhaps for a better prospect
than I.

Contemptuous glances cast aside,
time has scabbed her wounds,
no scorn, but filled with despair,
this beggar child awaits,
while her eyes they speak of ancient hate,
of loneliness and fear,
with a dark hope that perhaps,
tomorrow will not arrive.

Malformed in mind, her body arches,
no care, no love to heal,
the wound inflicted upon her,

from the moment she was revealed,
as emotions curtailed, what use were they
to the life that she lived,
but yet, unknown to her,
she weeps a silent tear.

And now my heart responds
to this child of the Earth,
in the agony of compassionate embrace, while my hand moves
to bundled notes,
a guilt-ridden exchange.

But what of all the countless others,
in cities across the Earth,
these children of the life
that is denied them,
a destiny unfulfilled,
by those who claim more
than is their right,
from Earth's table,
what hope for tomorrow?

So how to ease my pain,
my disgrace,
that such should exist
on our beautiful, bounteous world?

The notes pass furtively,
hands grasp quickly,
in case of changed intention,
a quick smile, a beauty revealed,
now gone,
removed from my presence,
perhaps to find another victim,
or perhaps, a reminder
that I have created her,
this beggar child,
as my victim.

Shivananda Khan

The Adoption Papers

Jackie Kay

1991, Bloodaxe Books, £5.95 ISBN: 1-85224-156-X

Jackie Kay was born and raised in Scotland. *The Adoption Papers* is her first collection of poetry. In 1986 Theatre of Black Women presented her first play, *Chiaroscuro*, in 1986, and in 1988 Gay Sweatshop put on *Twice Over*. Her other work includes a poetry documentary for television, *Twice Through the Heart*, and a recent book of children's poems, *Two's Company*.

In *The Adoption Papers*, Jackie uses poetry to tell the story of a Black girl's adoption by a white Scots couple - in three different voices: the adoptive mother, the birth mother and the daughter. The sequence is divided in three parts covering the years 1961 to 1990; from conception to a first meeting between birth mother and daughter, twenty-six years on.

Each of the voices is quite distinctive (helped along on the page with different type for each viewpoint). The poems cover a complex range of emotions in simple, honest and beautiful language. My favourites include 'The Waiting List' where the anxious adoptive mum 'too poor' and a 'communist' has a visit from the agency. Later there's 'The Telling Part' where a young

Glasgow child's voice, tries to make sense of the news that her mum isn't her real mum, in the funny way that only kids can.

Some of the poems in this collection may seem familiar, many have been broadcast on Open University programmes, the *Bandung File*, and on Radio Four. There are also new poems apart from this title sequence.

My favourites among the others include 'Pounding Rain' about meeting up with a childhood sweetheart and acting on a fantasy. 'Photo in the Locket' takes on some of the issues of being in a mixed-race relationship. 'I Try My Absolute Best', is a funny poem about the contradictions of trying to raise kids on a 'green diet'. 'Close Shave', about a married miner and his male lover, is full of tenderness, friendship and longing.

We can look forward to her second collection later this year (again with Bloodaxe), as Jackie was recently awarded an Arts Council Writers' Bursary. This is an excellent collection that deserves your appreciation. Jackie is skilful and measured in her use of words, each one precious in effect.

Dorothea Smartt

REVIEWS

FRAGMENTS THAT REMAIN

Steven Corbin, GMP, 1993, £8.85

I'd like to think that this review is irrelevant: that the mainstream media coverage of Steven Corbin's second novel *Fragments that remain* has been so widespread and exhaustive that a piece like this need not exist. Alas, this is not the case. Since it will no doubt be a long time before a Black Gay writer finds his way into the minds (much less the shortlists) of Pulitzer and Booker Prize judges I'm doing my small bit to hurry things along.

Before reading the book I had some misgivings as to what I would find: how could I voice my opinions in print if I didn't like it?

Would I abandon the idea rather than 'diss' a brother in print? Fortunately none of these problems had to be dealt with: *Fragments that remain* is a spellbinding trip of rage, exhilaration, humour and self-discovery from start to finish.

At last I feel as if I've discovered a writer talking to me about us; not only as a man, but as a Black Man; not only as a Black man, but as a Black Gay Man. Corbin takes the separate strands of race, sex and sexuality and weaves them into a powerful whole.

The central character is the blue-eyed, brown-skinned Skylar Whyte - a successful, talented Hollywood star with an Oscar nomination and a beautiful, blond boyfriend under his belt. Sellout, Buppie, 'Snow Queen'? Not quite. It's not that simple and Corbin shows us that it never is. Eschewing the traditional chronological format, Corbin darts and weaves, back and forth through five decades (the fifties through the nineties), lulling us into perceiving a character as a familiar stereotype in the present day only to oblige us to see the same character in a different and more ambiguous light as we delve back into their past and are confronted with the events and circumstances that moulded them. And so it is that we are

presented with, say, Skylar's father as a stern, drunken, homophobic 'yalla-assed nigger', who apparently despises his son's 'sissyish' ways and dark skin, only later to see him being rejected and psychologically abused by his own mother who inculcated in him the belief that the lighter-skinned you are the more superior you must be. She in turn sees all her ex-husband's faults in him and so the chain of pain and abuse continues. Darting back to the future, we see the father thinking about the love he always felt for his son but never knew how to express as he had no role model in his own infancy.

The truth in Corbin's book is never black or white (figuratively and literally) and thus all the central characters are drawn sensitively and honestly as victims and, sometimes, victors of their circumstances, be they black or white, gay or straight.

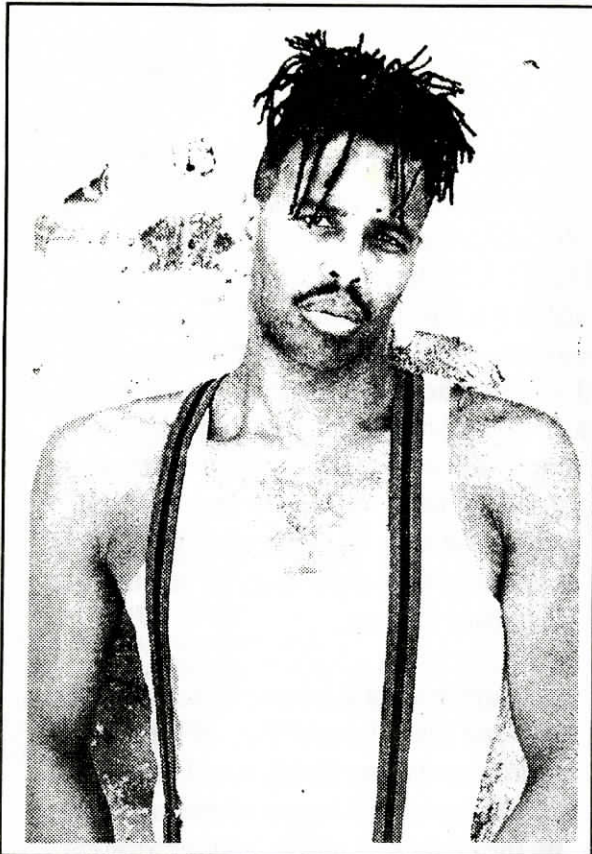
Corbin shows a searing and accurate sensitivity to the subtleties and intricacies of both Black and Gay cultures, which transcends the North American setting and will be familiar to readers from Brooklyn to Brixton to Bridgetown.

The author's insight is not limited to male characters either; Skylar draws much of his courage from the strong women in his life such as his mother, Althea, and his grandmother, Nanna. Indeed the story is as much about Skylar's escape from a harsh, homophobic background as it is about his mother's own rise from repressed, silenced mother-of-two who is deemed too dark and too ignorant for her own good, to independent, self-confident career woman in control of her own life.

The complexities of being black, being gay, the battle of the sexes and interracial relationships are all dealt with here in a moving and compelling way, and if you only plan to read one book this summer this is THE fierce read. Buy it. Read it. It matters.

Haydn Kirnon

REVIEWS AND INFORMATION



Steven Corbin, author of Fragments that remain, reviewed inside.

BLGC DEFINITION OF BLACK

All lesbians and gay men descended (through one or both parents) from Africa, Asia (ie. the Middle East to China, including the Pacific nations) and Latin America, and lesbians and gay men descended from the original inhabitants of Australasia, North America and the islands of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

* For your diary - Jackie will be reading in London at the Voice Box on Thursday 30 September at 7.30pm with Pakistan-born poet Moniza Alzi. Tickets £2.50 (£1.50 concs). For info call the South Bank Centre on 071 921 0906. (If you're early you can pop next door to the Poetry Library and take home some other Blacklesbian and Blackgay poets of the 20th century!)

The Issues: Black Lesbians & Gay Men

Anne Hayfield, LAGER, £2.50/£2.00 (Affiliates)

Lesbian & Gay Employment Rights have published the first pamphlet about the oppression of Blacklesbians and Blackgay men. Written by a Blacklesbian, it focuses on institutional oppression and looks at employment, housing, the legal system, the media, health services and immigration.

This simple, attractive ten-page booklet is a much needed attempt ``to combat the lack of written information about how these issues affect [us]'' offering an overview of these services in relation to the needs of Blacklesbians and Blackgay men.

Under the heading ``Immigration & 1992'', Anne touches on the situation for Black people in Europe. I have been shocked at the level of everyday racism and just plain ignorance of other so-called radical/alternative Europeans. To the extent that I would almost be looking forward to dealing with the average British racist! So it came as a startling reminder that, ``Impotent as the Race Relations Act has been, no other member of the European Community has such a law.''

In the final section, ``Nevertheless...'', she offers a reminder that living as a Blacklesbian or Blackgay man isn't all problems (and you may feel that after reading through the booklet). She points out that our lifestyles are fun, our relationships (possibly) unfettered by heterosexism, and that we do carve out spaces for ourselves to live as we choose.

Under ``Contacts'' the selection is brief and very general. I would have liked to have been able to follow up some of the points raised under the headings, with contacts for more specialist organisations.

Depending on who you are, where you've been, and how much you can take your lesbianism or gayness for granted, you may find this small offering a gross over-simplification and generalisation of complex and wide-ranging issues. However, I believe it is useful for young and ``new'' Blacklesbians and Blackgay men as it offers written acknowledgement and affirmation of the possible difficulties we can face in our lives. Also for other groups in society (``...those who are working in the voluntary and statutory sectors...those concerned with equal opportunities. Trade unionists...'') it will be a useful tool, providing answers to basic questions and for stimulating wider discussion and refinement of the points raised.

The booklet is available direct from LAGER (Lesbian & Gay Employment Rights), 21 St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Rd, London E2 9LP Tel: 081 983 0696 (general & minicom).

Dorothea Smartt

**Deadline for next issue:
15 September 1993**