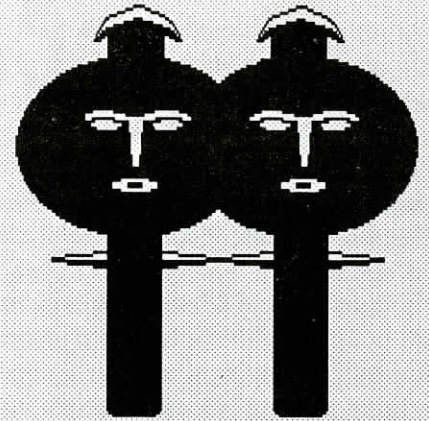


Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

BM Box 4390, London WC1N 3XX

071.732.3885 (office) 071-837 5364 (helpline: Thursday 7-10pm)

Newsletter: February/March 1993



BOOM BOOM BUJU BANTON BYE BYE!! VIOLENT ATTACK ON BLACK GAY SPOKES- PERSON

The controversial record Boom Boom Bye Bye continues to cause rage amongst black and white lesbians and gays and many others who support our cause.

Banton made no clear retraction, apology or admission that he may be wrongly inciting hatred and violence against lesbians and gays, when he was recently interviewed in Jamaica, by Terry Christian of Channel 4's "The Word".

Shabba Ranks, in the same show, vehemently endorsed the sentiments expressed by Buju; his comments were ridiculed by presenter Mark Lamarr.

Ted Walker Brown, of Black Lesbians And Gay Men Against Media Homophobia (BLAGAMH), talked about the dangers of these type of lyrics to our Community, eloquently expressing our view that we have had enough and will no longer sit quietly and take more.

Ted's appearance on the show, led to a frightening and vicious personal attack on him at his home in South London. Sadly, yet more evidence confirming what we are actually talking about.

We offer our support to Ted, wishing him a speedy recovery and thank him for his apt words on behalf of our Community.

For further information, please contact BLAGAMH, on 081-692 1312

HIV - ALARMING NEW FIGURES AFFECTING YOUNG GAY MEN AND LONDON

Figures from research carried out by Public Health Laboratory service, to be published later this month, show more diagnoses of HIV infection among gay men were reported in 91 than in any year, since 1987.

In London 13% of men under 25, attending STD clinics, tested HIV positive.

29% of newly reported transmissions, were in men under 25.

The Terrence Higgins Trust and Gay Men Fighting Aids (GMFA) urged the government and voluntary groups to work together, to help stop the spread of the virus. They called for more specifically targeted campaigns, which really communicate with gay men, including advertising which perhaps explicitly, eroticises what is safe to practice.

The researchers note that "It is likely that among homosexual men, both unsafe sexual behaviour and HIV transmissions have increased, after a period of decline. Recent HIV transmissions may disproportionately affect younger men."

The evidence suggests that many gay men are relapsing into old, unsafe sexual practices.

At the same time as noting the HIV rise, researchers noted a corresponding rise in other sexually transmitted diseases, such as Gonorrhoea and

Hepatitis B. Researchers are linking an increase in Hepatitis B, with a likely increase in unsafe sex.

They note with particular concern, the figures showing a rise of HIV among young gay men under 25:

"Because of the high background prevalence of HIV infection, risks to homosexual men practising unsafe sex, are greatest in London. Health promotion for all men who have sex with men, is important, but safe sex information aimed at young homosexual men and homosexual men in London, needs special emphasis."

The Department of Health refused to comment on the specifics of the document until it is officially published, but they said they would continue with their health education campaign, which runs inconsistently in the gay press.

Based on information from Capital Gay.

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 Ocean.

Centre Update

A Hive of Activity

The period leading up to and following Christmas, has been no less hectic for BLGC staff, MC members and volunteers.

Both Sakthi and Clarence (volunteer co-ordinators) have been busy contacting, recruiting and training volunteers. Since volunteers will always play a significant role in the success of BLGC - this is a job which will always be ongoing!

Hopefully, you will notice from our publicity cards and posters, BLGC is opening for drop-ins from February onwards. We will have mixed nights every Wednesday, 5.30-7.30, when we will show videos of films and comedy re-runs including Roseanne and the Golden Girls, to chuckle our way through the long and cold Winter months! We will also have board games nights.

There will be women only sessions, the first Saturday of the month, from 2-4pm; men only sessions on the fourth Sunday 4-6pm. There will also be men-only and women-only employment advice from 4.30-6.30pm on the first and the last Tuesday of the month respectively.

Please see the Events section for full details of dates and times.

This has all naturally taken a lot of organising and training.

1993 started on a very positive note, with a reward for all the hard work on grant applications - a small award from Telethon, which we will use to install an entry phone for the Centre. A lot more grant applications are in the pipeline and the fundraising drive is being stepped up with the appointment of an independent fundraising consultant.

There are very good indicators of success on a number of these.

As is fairly obvious, in a lean year where everyone is scrabbling for the same funds, Black lesbians and gays may not be at the top of funders' priorities, so it's going to be a tough fight to raise money. Nevertheless, we remain optimistic.

Naturally, there is considerable back

ground work that staff and MC are undertaking to make the targets achievable.

Early in January, we finally had heating installed, which really has made a phenomenable difference to the atmosphere of the Centre. We can now truly provide a warm welcome to BLGC!

Savi, the Outreach and Development worker has continued to obtain good coverage for BLGC in the press and radio, keeping our profile high, although of course, when the Centre opens (we are beginning with the drop-ins), we'll feel we'll have much more to offer and become much more recognised.

Equally, the publicity drive has increased, with the production and distribution of numerous cards, posters and flyers, keeping people informed of what we're doing and when.

The AGM took place in December. We discussed the achievements and problems of the past year and cemented our plans for the forthcoming one. Sadly, Dionne, the Chair of BLGC, resigned, although she remains very much involved with the Centre and is very instrumental in our future fundraising and strategy. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Dionne for all her hard work and commitment to BLGC for past and indeed future work.

Finally, we've all been kept very busy in responding to enquiries about us, sending out information, answering phone calls and taking note of numerous housing opportunities of different types, which come in for black lesbian and gays. So if you have housing needs, please call us, as we may well be able to help you.

In the meantime, a very happy and peaceful new year to you, from all of us at BLGC!

Come on Down!

Are you *bored* of fierce partying?

Have you had *enough* of working Queer Nation?

Are you *tired* of being a club tart?

Have you become *sick* of raving all night and waking up with a hangover?

No. Well listen up anyway.

I know and understand that that star-booting outfit must be seen at the Market or at Sauda (sad to see it go!) but *surely* you want to do something for your Black lesbian and gay community.

Sure you do.

Feed your skills back into some place that will appreciate them. Learn new skills while meeting new people.

At BLGC we need your help to make the centre work.

You can volunteer for a number of tasks to help the centre run smoothly: help staff the drop-in sessions which will begin soon; staff the helpline; respond to letters; cook; archives; driving; talks and training; publicity work; creche; newsletter production. The list goes on.

You know you want to and we will be glad. We'll offer travel expenses and a meal allowance and if you give us notice we will help with child care costs.

YOU HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE.

Call either Clarence of Sakthi on 071-732 3885.

INTERVIEW WITH JEWELLE GOMEZ continued from the last edition...

Savi Hensman: You're still involved in many activities beside writing aren't you as you say

Jewelle Gomez: In the United States I frequently call myself a cultural worker which always freaks a lot of people out cause they think socialism and I like that. I think that very much of my writing is being part of a social work, a cultural work, on behalf of human rights.

I was on the founding board of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), an activist group which media watches and harasses people when they produce television or magazines that denigrate lesbians and gays and encourages people when they've written or produced something positive. I'm on the board for the Open Medals Foundations, a very small women's foundation that raises money and gives it to projects that support women. I used to be on the collective for Conditions, a lesbian feminist literary publication. I helped to coordinate a number of events for the Anti-Apartheid movement in the States.

Right now I'm co-organiser of something called L.U.S.T., which is a two-day conference. L.U.S.T. stands for Lesbians Understanding Sexual Taboos. What we are trying to do is organise a group of women who will come together and talk about the sexual aspect of their lives. Women are really trained not to talk about sexual aspects of their lives. Before we become lesbian we are "trained" to focus all of our sexual identity on men, to be passive and that to be different is an embarrassment and a disgrace. I think that for lesbians that makes it completely impossible be-

cause when you have two women who have been trained not to talk about sex, to not be, shall we say, aggressive in pursuing sexual desire, what you have is two women asleep not having any fun. Frequently women grow up not knowing they are lesbian and they don't know what we're supposed to do. There are a lot of handbooks, so to speak, but I don't think they really touch on the emotional connection between sexual desire and how powerful sexual desire is in women and that this is okay. There are whole kinds of sexual desire and you don't need to be afraid by them. We don't need to be afraid of our various different kinds of desire. I may not pursue your view but it doesn't mean that I have to be afraid of it or think that it is dangerous to lesbian feminism.

The conference is really going to bring together all kinds of people talking about everything from what happens to sex in a long term relationship, how you maintain sex in a long term relationship, how you learn to be a healthy sexual person, physically, how do you go about

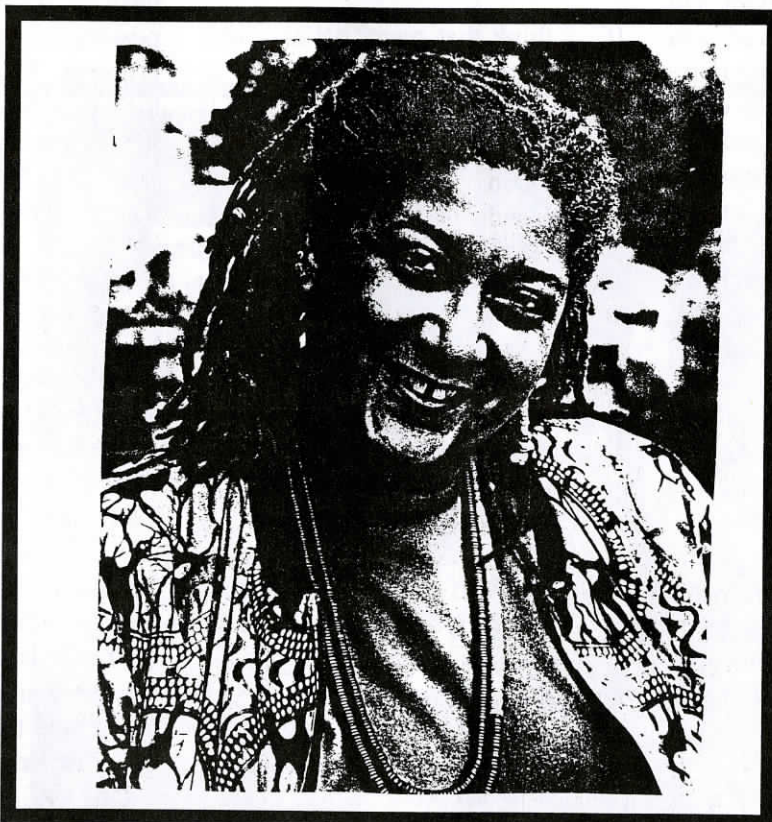
experimenting with sado-masochism, what's the safe things to do. We want to do everything. It's very political. It's kind of scary because there are people who don't want us to talk or if they do that don't want us to talk about certain things.

I am also on a committee that is organising a conference for leftist lesbian and gay activists. We really think it would be interesting to have a leftist philosophy become more of a part of lesbian and gay activism because there doesn't seem to be any more consensus about what we mean when we say lesbian and gay rights beyond human rights. We want lesbian and gay politics to have some kind

of social connection to the other movements.

SH: How high would you say moral is today? Would you say there's a lot of disillusionment after the major social movements of the last few decades?

JG: I think there is a very large cloud of disillusionment over many people. It's been hard for women of my age to have struggled with lesbian and feminist activities for years and have something like the Anita Hill, Clarence Thomas hearing, in which you see a women being



completely victimised. You think what have you been doing for the last twenty years as a feminist. The other side is we can say the fact that we were struggling for so long has allowed that kind of hearing to even happen. Though it was a tragedy, the end result is that now people are talking about sexual harassment. Feminism has paved the way on a certain level for the possibilities of those discussions.

I think that in the lesbian and gay movement there's a lot of growing up and we're at a crossroads in many ways. The lesbian feminist movement is at a certain kind of crisis because a lot of energy has been pulled off into the AIDS movement. A lot of younger lesbians will tell you they don't feel involved with feminists. The overwhelming number of gay men in the States don't regard themselves as leftist and certainly most don't regard themselves as feminists. To figure out how to bring together all these philosophies, or lack of philosophies, is kind of a crisis. I think it will make exciting, but not easy, politics. I think that some women who have been working with AIDS for the last several years are starting to feel disillusioned. After ten years many women have begun to see the discrepancies. They begin to see that women are not considered in the same way, when they get AIDS. They begin to see that we really have a hard time getting men to see that they can't just ignore those discrepancies.

They're many people now who have grown up with AIDS as a part of their life. Many people don't know life in any other way. It creates a rift in the lesbian and gay community because those of us who knew life for a long time pre-AIDS don't have AIDS as that centre in all our activities. I think that may be positive. I don't think that it is all negative, but I think it created a very different kind of vision about where we are all going.

I'm on a panel with 25 year-old university professors telling me they don't have any connection with the women's department in their

colleges when I know they would never be allowed to be there if it weren't for the Women's Studies departments. Getting them to understand how important the history is is not easy because I think it's that tendency to cut themselves off from history. I think a lot of white lesbians and gays are very willing to do that. It's going to be hard over the years to reconcile the past and the future.

SH: Going back to a point you made earlier do you think there are problems of talking about sex without falling into the trap of getting competitive or treating other people as objects or setting up ideals of so-called performance in this society

JG: I think that many beliefs think that sex is directly connected to procreation and if it's not, then it is sinful. That's one idea. Then there's the whole male concept, that sexual encounter is based on performance. We must get a concept of what sexuality is and try to redefine it and try to think about how sex is a natural part of our lives, even when it's not connected to procreation. Learning how to derive pleasure and give pleasure is not a performance skill but rather a sharpening of perceptions, a sharpening of your understanding of the other person as well as yourself. If we could do that we would actually have not only better sexual lives but better relationships. We would not be concentrating on performance so much but on how the sex is connected to our whole being physically and emotionally. That's not to say that I don't think people can have sex with people they're not in love with because that's perfectly likely and not a bad thing. You need to have a whole consciousness. No-one wants to have a consciousness about their sex acts. They'd rather just let it happen and either follow it without looking or examining it, or repress it because it's too scary. I think that, especially for women, who have been pushed to disclaim their sexual behaviour, there's a confusion about where it comes from

and either we end up completely defining ourselves in terms of our sexual desire or we end up saying sexuality is just a personal thing.

SH: Final question. Have you got any current projects in the pipeline?

JG: I'm collecting essays that I have written in the last ten years for a new book which should be out in fall '93. It's a collection of literary and personal essays. I'm doing another a fantasy fiction novel as well. It's set some years in the future and it involves tattooing. It's about a woman who's an empath who is being groomed by the government to be used as a weapon. She uses her powers and her feelings for the government. Her level of empathy is so high that the government tries to use her as a weapon against other governments, to go into a meeting of another government to subvert their intentions, so that the host government could take advantage of them.

Her big struggle is to learn how to be tough, as she's vulnerable to everyone's feelings, how to protect herself, and how to stay out of the government's clutches. She falls in love with a woman, a hard as nails executive. The story is told in flashbacks while she's under the needle having a tattoo done. During the course of the story it's revealed that the tattoo is actually the key to their salvation, in a way, how they end up being able to escape the clutches of Big Brother. I don't really know the details yet. They're going to be a motley crew with the empath, who has bright orange hair, which is the sign of the empath, the executive and the drag queen tattoo artist, whose ethnicity is to be defined. I'm trying to create a band of people who are on the margins but are really part of our future.

We wish Jewelle Gomez much success with her work and pass on our thanks to her for sharing her valuable insight, in this interview.

Research at the Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre (CDSC) has unfolded alarming figures about the incidence of new cases of HIV infection, particularly amongst young men between the ages of fifteen and nineteen. Also the number of other sexually transmitted diseases, which can be transmitted through unsafe sex, have increased since 1989.

It was found that the number of HIV positive gay men decreased between 1986 and 1988 but has increased since then. In 1991 more were tested positive than at any time since 1987. Also between 1987 and 1990, under three per cent of the gay teenagers who took the test were positive. In 1991 this figure rose dramatically to 4.7%

The incidence of rectal gonorrhoea, an indication of unsafe sex practices, which had been dropping between 1982 to 1989, increased five-fold in 1990 and remained at that level in 1991.

There is also a growing amount of gay men testing negative, who then have another test that returns positive. It is an indication that younger men may not have been fully exposed to the health education of the mid-eighties.

Nevertheless two thirds of the men who are known to have become infected between 1989 and 1991 were over twenty-five, which suggests that they may have changed

to unsafe sex practices after previously taking health advice.

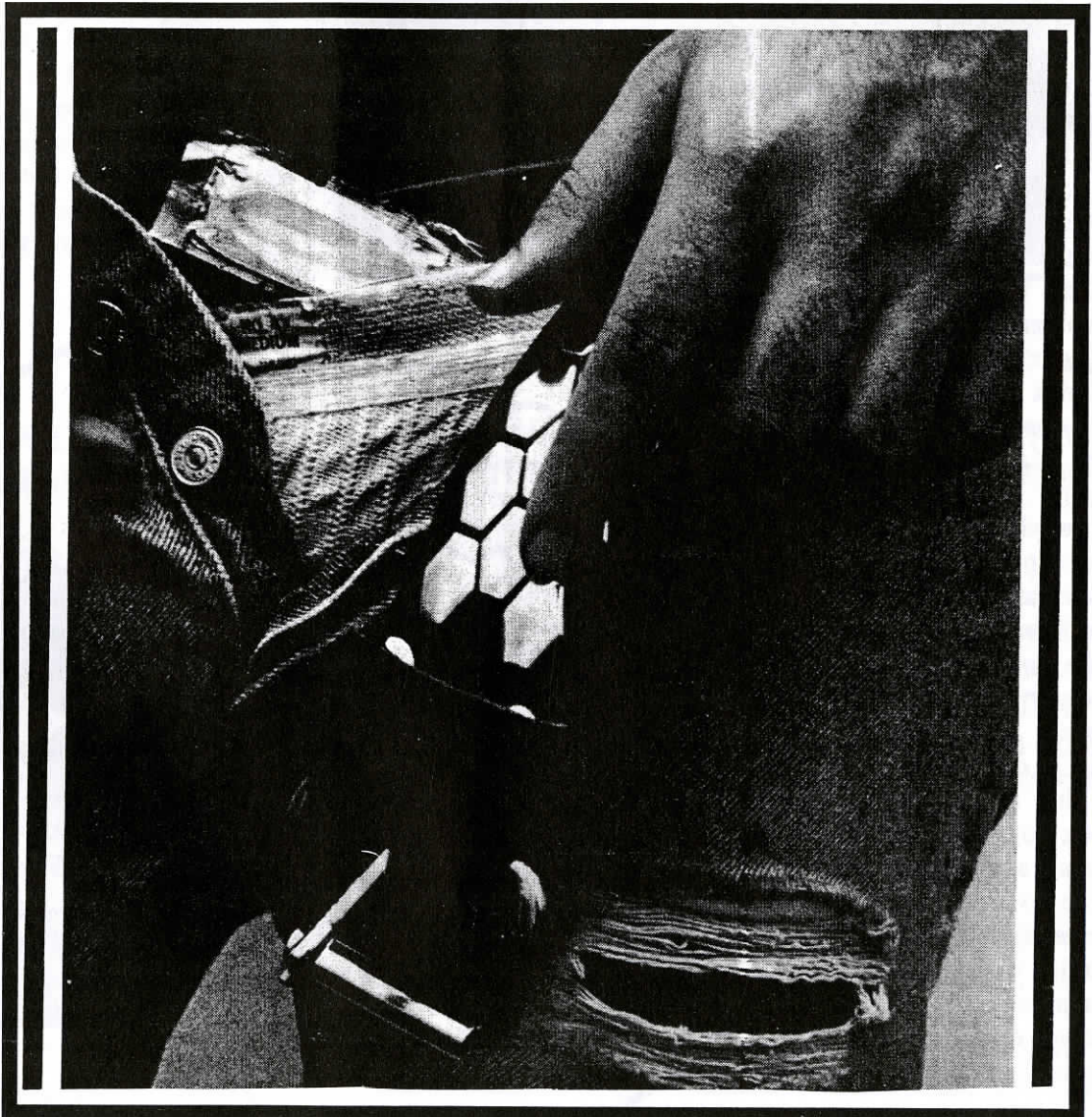
CDSC researchers believe that "special emphasis" is now needed on education campaigns targeting young gay men nationwide, as well as all gay men in London where the risk of infection is greatest.

Gay Times

For information on HIV and AIDS and safer sex call:

Black HIV and AIDS Network
081-749 2828
Blackliners
071-738 5264 or
BLGC
071-732 3885

HIV & Aids Update



HIV c'tued...

Lesbians Talk (Safer) Sex
Sue O'Sullivan and Prat-
ibha Parmar, Scarlet Press
1992, £4.50

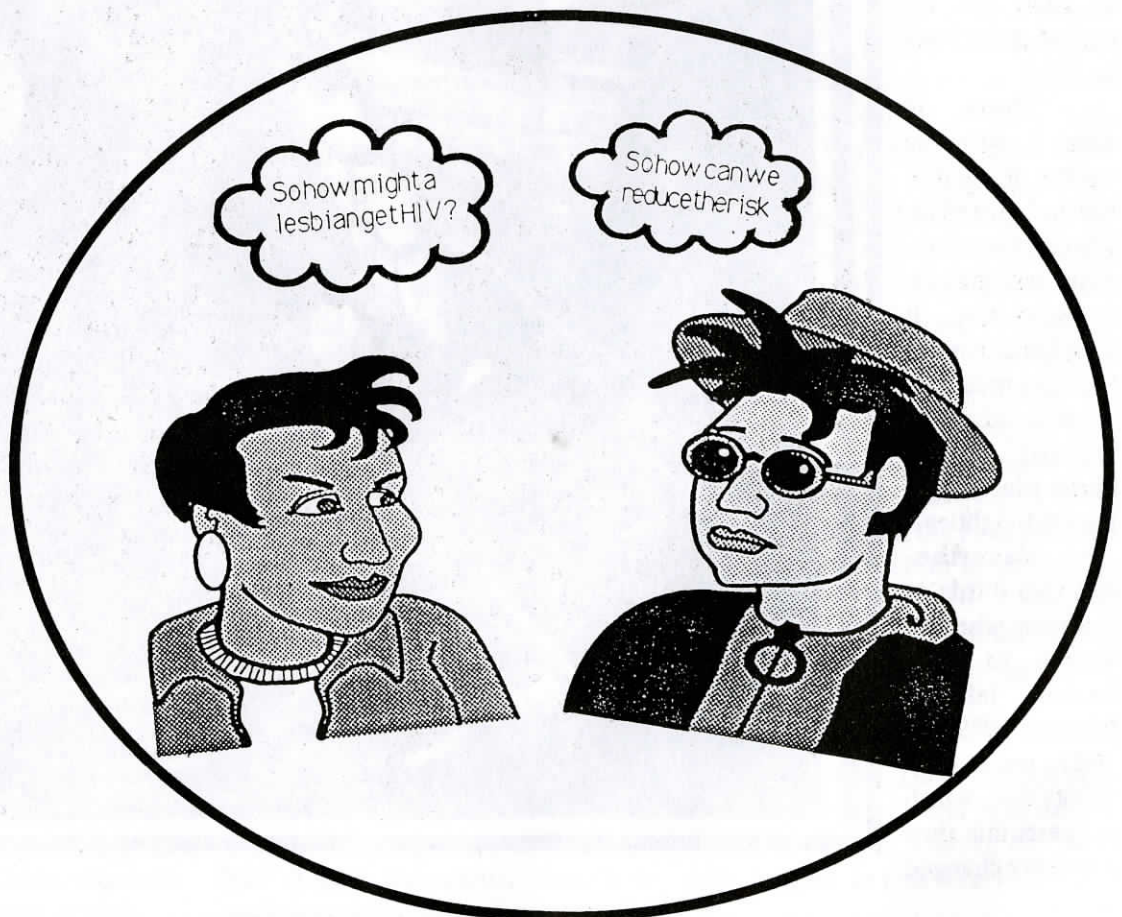
What does safer sex mean to lesbians? Is HIV relevant to us anyway? This thoughtful and very readable book tackles these controversial questions, and suggests ways in which the lesbian community can talk about, and act on, the issues raised by the spread of HIV.

The authors set out some of the background against which the discussion is taking place, and point out the variety of who lesbians are and what we do. In the early days of the AIDS crisis, most lesbians in western countries saw it as an outside problem. Then a shift in attitude took place: even if lesbian sex were entirely safe, there were many lesbians who had been, or would be, at risk in other ways. Activism grew. Meanwhile certain groups of people - Africans, gays and others - were being used as scapegoats, while other members of the public were encouraged to think of AIDS as someone else's problem. As with other health problems, those who were already oppressed, exploited and marginalised in society tended to be worst affected. Women's needs were, as usual, largely disregarded. In this setting, the book suggests, lesbians are called upon to be involved. Some of the debates within the lesbian community are explored, on the risks (or not) of woman-

to-woman sex, the priority which should be given to HIV activism and the impact of racism, and different points of view aired. Talking about sex is not something which many of us find easy, and in one chapter, 'What's Going Down?', Beth Zemsky from the USA draws on her experience of leading workshops for lesbians on sex. Amidst all the weighs down on and hems in our sexuality, from our own or our partner's history of sexual abuse to issues about our body image, the possibility of HIV being passed on may seem too much of an additional worry. However, in the 1990s, the issue is one which needs to be faced. Instead of the attitude that only certain types of lesbians who act in 'deviant' ways need to consider safer sex, which can lead to the ostracism of those who already have HIV, she suggests that we weigh up the levels of risk and possible results of unsafe sex, and try to think of safer sex positively.

The authors go on to examine what lesbian sex is, in all its variety. Lesbians are afraid of talking explicitly

about what we do, they argue, because we are afraid of being treated as politically incorrect, repressed and boring, odd or ridiculous; but particularly in an era of HIV and AIDS we should avoid being judgmental about sexual behaviour. I found this questionable: surely it is possible for us to talk about sex and sexuality without rejecting one another but not regard all types of behaviour as equally constructive provided no violence is used? For instance safer sex work among men needs to take account of machismo (by persuading them, for example, that their manly prowess will not be diminished if they wear a condom or do not penetrate), but this does not necessarily imply that machismo is a good thing. And does not being born into a largely unjust and acquisitive world affect the way we treat others, in and out of bed? While there ought to be times and places where we can talk frankly about what we do and enjoy, perhaps on other occasions - and in an atmosphere of mutual respect - we can talk through our different approaches to sexual



ethics.

The authors go on to discuss the basics of safer sex, and point out that safer-sex techniques may protect us from sexually transmitted diseases in general - which may be especially important for lesbians with HIV who are trying to take care of their health. Whatever we decide to do, we need to know about safer sex both to make informed choices and to be able to deal with the issue when it comes up in conversations with friends, family members and colleagues.

The book ends with lists of useful contacts, books and films. A lively and balanced treatment of an often difficult subject, it is recommended to anyone interested in lesbian health.

Savi Hensman



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)
Leeds City Council, Health Unit, Selectapost 14,

2nd Floor Annexe, Civic Hall, Leeds LS1 3AQ. Tel: Leeds 462431

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 Davenport 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. Brixton Enterprise Centre, 444 Brixton Road, London SW9 8J. 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.

International News

YEMEN JOURNALIST IMPRISONED

In Yemen a journalist has been given a year long jail sentence and has been banned from working as a journalist after writing a story naming a college student as a lesbian.

The weekly paper Sada-al-Sha'abi, for which the journalist in question, Abdullah Nasser Hussein al-Qasham, was the editor, has been closed down by the court. The named student, the University of Saani and the public prosecutor had for libel. The student of the university staged a three-day general strike demanding a severe punishment for the journalist.

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Turkish Kurd Treatment of lesbians & gays

Gay activists from Turkish Kurdistan made their first international appearance at an International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) conference, reporting that attempts to start a lesbian and gay movement have proved very difficult.

Police frequently raid gay bars, even after receiving bribes and bar owners tend to ban political gay meetings.

"Effeminate" men are also randomly taken in for questioning by the police. Their names are "reg-

istered", which affects the men's chances of work and so, the delegates say, men choose prostitution as a career, many becoming transvestite prostitutes.

Unfortunately this has led the public to equate homosexuality with transvestism.

The social situation is also very frightening, said delegates. Families inform authorities of their gay sons who are then taken to psychiatric hospitals.

However male-male sex in Kurdistan, even after marriage, is "customary and common", although this happens in secret. There is also the common belief that only feminine and the sexually passive men are considered homosexual.

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NO CHINESE LESBIANS?

Police in China have failed to prosecute two women living together on charges of indecent behaviour after the authorities discovered the country has no specific laws on lesbianism.

According to Xinmin Evening News it seems that this is the first time that the authorities have been faced with lesbianism, as traditional thinking believes that homosexuality is a western import that only affects men.

The China Daily claimed "one of them dressed like a man while the other played

the role of virtuous wife". The police tried to detain them because of this on grounds of indecent behaviour but referred the case to the Ministry of the Public Sector in Beijing. As Chinese law does not recognise lesbianism the case could not be dealt with. Gay sex between men in China is taboo and considered an "offence against public harmony".

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INDIAN ANTI SODOMY LAWS

In India many gay groups are getting together to organise an international campaign to put pressure on the government and its anti-sodomy laws. Section 377 of the Penal Code is used by police to harass, intimidate and extort money from gay people. Anyone who is seen to violate this section can be sentenced to life imprisonment.

You can express your opinions by writing to Prime Minister P.V. Narsimha Rao, 7 Racecourse Road, Prime Minister's House, New Delhi, India and to S.B. Chavan, Minister of Home Affairs, North Block-1, New Delhi, India.

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US BAN HAITIAN REFUGEES

The Interactional Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission Emergency Response Network is targeting President Bill Clinton over the Haitian refugees detained at the Guantanamo Bay naval base because of the US ban on HIV positive immigrants. The refugees have otherwise been judged by the Immigration and Naturalisation Service to have a claim to political asylum. The border ban violates World Health Organisation policies and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which the USA have signed.

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Audre Lorde - a tribute

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Audre Lorde, black lesbian, poet, mother and activist, died on 17th November 1992 after a fourteen-year battle with cancer.

Many will mourn the loss of this brave warrior woman whose words, whether in poems, essays or fiction, were a powerful source of inspiration and hope. She used her own personal experience to demonstrate that the personal is the political, as shown in this quote from 'A Burst of Light':

The struggle with cancer now informs all my days, but it is only another face of that continuing battle for self-determination and survival that black women fight daily, often in triumph.

Although born in New York (1934), Audre Lorde was of Caribbean descent: her mother from Carriacou/Grenada, her father from Barbados. She worked for many years as professor of English at Hunter College, New York, as well as lecturing widely throughout Europe, Africa, Australia and the US.

Her published works include *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Sheba, 1984); *The Cancer Journals* (Sheba, 1985); *Sister Outsider* (The Cross-

ing Press); *The Black Unicorn* (WW Norton); *Chosen Poems, Old and New* (WW Norton); *Our Dead Behind us* (Sheba, 1987) and *A Burst of Light* (Sheba, 1988).

Audre Lorde leaves a partner, a son and daughter, and a generation of black women who will all miss her deeply.

SHEBA FEMINIST PRESS

For further information contact:

Michelle McKenzie or Julia Tipton on 071-254 1590

A BURST OF LIGHT by AUDRE LORDE

A BOOK REVIEW by TRISHA

I first came across this book on 1st of June 1990. I happened to be at my first Lesbian and Gay Pride '90 event. At this event there was a raffle to win a bottle of Nicaraguan rum or two books by Sheba Feminist Publishers. One was 'A Burst of Light' by Audre Lorde, and the other was 'The Things That Divide Us', a collection of short stories and women's writings.

I happened to have come second in the raffle and

was happy to have won the books (honestly).

I took them home and slowly peered through Audre Lorde's book, first; mainly because she was a black Lesbian poet, something I described myself as, and also because a colleague of mine had read her works and highly recommended it to me. I was pleased to see the contents page mentioning subjects that I had wanted to know about.

1. A Lesbian feminist's view of sadomasochism.
2. Black women's unity/strength across sexualities.
3. Apartheid and the links outside South Africa.
4. Lesbian Parenting and it's politics.

Essay 2: Black Women's Unity /Strength across Sexualities

Audre wrote about black women she had encountered through colleges, talks she had given, lectures and conferences she had been asked to.

She says something that sums up the whole essay and the point we have to make to each other if we are going to work together to recognise and stamp out (or try to) the oppressions we as women face.

She says, 'It is not easy for me to speak here with you as a black lesbian feminist, recognising that some of the ways in which I identify make it difficult for you to hear me. But meeting across dif-



Audre Lorde(1934-1992)

Audre Lorde c'tued..

ference always require mutual stretching, and until you can hear me as a black lesbian feminist, our strengths will not be truly available to each other as black women."

Through most of the essay she talks about her involvement in black women's struggles, black men's struggles, our rights in society, and that she was sure her participation in any fight was that of a black lesbian. When she fought for black civil rights in the 60's she did so as a black lesbian, but never known as that, as she did not identify as such (nor did any other lesbian).

She celebrates the difference in people as it is recognising that there *are* differences and that is good. It is good because if we can recognise difference in our communities (and in those communities where some think there aren't any) we can begin to understand how to meet the needs of those people and the diversity of those needs. Also we may be able to accept that diversity is a positive thing and that it's potential to be a "learning" in life is immense: diversity is real, is all around us, is the thing that makes life less boring.

ESSAY 3: Apartheid and the Links Outside South Africa

In 1985, when Audre Lorde sat at home one day trying to write these essays, and heard the radio report on the "state of emergency" from the United Nations, in South Africa, she said:

"So much Black blood has been shed upon that land, I thought, and so much more will fall. But blood will tell, and now the blood is speaking. Has it finally started? What some of us prayed and worked and beleived would/must happen, wondering when, because so few of us here in America

ever seem to know what was happening in South Africa, nor cared to hear. The connections have not been made and they must be if African-Americans are to articulate our power in the struggle against a worldwide escalation of forces alligned against People of Colour the world over: institutionalised racism grown more and more aggressive in the service of shrinking profit-orientated economies."

After educating me on the businesses and money making organisations that support the "death machine" in South Africa, and how we must be aware of where our monies must be going and that we *are* supporting this "death machine" through ignorance of this situation, she makes the connection between South Africa's apartheid/oppression and the apartheid/oppression experienced in America (and in the rest of the world).

"As African-Americans we must learn to use our power to establish the connections instantly between consistent patterns of slaughter of Black children and youth in the roads of Sebokeng and Soweto in the name of law and order in Johannesburg, and white America's not so silent applause for the smiling white vigilante who coolly gun down four black youths in the New York City subway. Or the white policeman guarding the store of a Middle-eastern shopkeeper who had killed three Black children in Brooklyn in a dispute over one can of Coca-Cola. The multicorporate financial connections are a matter of record, it is the emotional ones that must become inescapable for each of us. We are members of an international community of people of Colour, and must see our struggles as connected within that light."

Her acute insight into the deeply political, social and economic factors racism has is awe inspiring.

Not at any time in my life have I seen (read) just how deep racism goes and how it actually works and in such subtle ways. Sometimes I feel the learning and awareness I have had is mind blowing.

She writes about the African/American, African/Asian, African/European peoples' connection being their Africanness and that they should join their differentness so that we can recognise the level of "our" oppressions, to gain strength and to concentrate on how "we" can acheive a voice, a power and a part in the world power and priveledges that are currently not "ours".

When reading through this book again to jog my memory I noticed that she put a capital 'B' in front of the word Black. I never noticed this before when first reading the book, but now I have suddenly realised the political statement she is making with that capital 'B', the importance she is giving to a "Race" of people of colour! We are here. Not only from Barbados, St.Lucia, South Asia, Nicaragua...: But Black!...and from these places. And in all my Blackness I celebrate my (and others) past struggles, and the future struggles still waiting to happen, to be able to say that I was aware of my part in this Fight, and that I have used my Power to effect for myself and for my Black Sisters.

LETTER FROM MANCHESTER AND LEEDS BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUPS:

AUDRE LORDE FEBRUARY 18 1934-NOVEMBER 17 1992 BLACK LESBIAN WARRIOR As black lesbians we are disappointed and angered at the poor coverage of the death of Audre Lorde, the black lesbian writer. We are particularly disappointed by the women's and lesbian and gay press.

Quest

Audre Lorde is one of the first black lesbians who has openly and honestly written in the English language, about her experience as a black lesbian. She has written accurately and with courage about the struggles we face and survive as black lesbians. Audre Lorde has been instrumental in providing courage, inspiration, encouragement and determination to black lesbians in particular, and to all black women, other lesbians and indeed to all women worldwide.

Audre Lorde has created a vital part in black lesbian history through her speeches, essays, poetry, fiction, journals and life experiences. Her documentation of black lesbian history is vital because as black lesbians our history is often hidden, denied and taken away from us. She represents an important chapter in our lives.

Audre Lorde has the ability through her writing to enable all black lesbians, young and old, to identify with her and her experiences. This continues through the presence of her books in libraries and in bookshops, and the readings, performances and discussions of her works. We are all responsible for ensuring that her words and wisdom live on.

No tribute can be too great, too long for this great black lesbian.

We need to recognise that the only reason that black lesbians are omitted from the history books and ultimately news coverage, by the media, is because of racism, homophobia and sexism. We need also to ensure that this discrimination does not affect the way we pay our tribute to that great black lesbian sister, Audre Lorde.

For further information contact:
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Box no.26, 1 Newton Street, Piccadilly, Manchester,
M1 1HW. Tel. 061-226 0787

.....

For a long time, partnered with a mocking wind, the rope that held me to my foundations danced a frenzied bogle and I floated not knowing who I was, what I wanted from my personal life or who I wanted to share this life with. My head throbbed, without mercy, from too much thought, my body ached from too many emotional beatings. Is this what happens when one has to dismantle values, beliefs, morals, stereotypes, prejudices, thoughts, feelings, the very apparatus used to build your sense of self? This was how it began for me, my journey to find my sexual identity, something which had (consciously) remained undefined, and yet so clearly defined it had become blurred to me.

Up until the age of twenty-three, playing hide-and-go-seek with that part of me that held my deepest and most sensual secrets was the only way I could function. However, I only managed to play the first half of this game...up until now that is.

Being the type of person I am, I began my search by jumping into quicksand and, of course, although not immediately, I began to sink, at the age of twenty-three I had my first sexual relationship with a Black male, at twenty-three I thought this was what I needed, at twenty-three I thought that this would be the answer to many of the questions I thought demanded an answer, at twenty-three I was abused, misused and discarded, at twenty-three who the hell was I? I felt/feel the abuse was my fault, taking the blame was easier than admitting to myself that my body, that I once viewed as sacred, had been taken advantage of, and that I felt powerless to do anything about it. I was, and still am, disturbed by the fact that I have no emotions pertaining to this period of my life, there is no anger, no guilt, no fear, no remorse, no pleasure. The irony

of the situation being the answers I sought to solve the mystery of my sexual identity still cruelly evaded me.

The world where men and women became intimate partners was an enigma for me, a place in which, on most levels, I functioned more than adequately, but relationship-wise I was an anomaly. Simply asking myself who was I attracted to bore no visible fruits, for me the question did not make any sense. You see I am not aware of my sexual attractions, I find both men and women of intense interest, but I do not recognise that initial desire to sleep with either of them, sex just isn't and has never been [high] on my agenda. The same world that had nurtured me into manhood now misunderstood me, now betrayed me, now confused me, now labelled me strange. This, I believe happens to anomalies. I have now posed threat to Black males who were unlike me and treated me as an honorary female by the women I came into contact with because I was unlike the "typical Black male" (decoded this means I am sensitive and can talk on an emotional level). I desired nor cared for either of these labels.

Thus I entered the Black gay world hoping to find some insight, believing I would find Black men whose experiences reflected mine, men with emotional stability, men whom I could obtain the affection I was seeking, men who could accept the affection I thought I was willing to give. I was only setting myself up for disappointment. You know, looking back at the see-saw of emotions I laugh at the extent of my naivety, my glasses were not only rose-coloured but rose-scented, yet at the same time I find myself mourning the loss of my innocence.

To me the two worlds were not mutually exclusive, one replicated and simultane-

c'tued

quest c'tued

ously reproduced the other, with the players being the most significant difference. The Black gay world is so committed in its quest for redefinition that it fails to see just how similar it is to the heterosexual world, how instead of redefining and creating it just perpetuates in disguise.

This is a world where, because it was brother dealing with brother the common denominator between all men became obvious to me...fucking and being fucked. What I saw was not unique, but a more blatant and even a more honest facsimile of the sexist behaviour that occurs between men and women. Men being appraised by the size of their dicks, thighs, bum, chests etc... Men using the feminine pronoun as put-downs, men not owning or accepting their derision of women, men who because they labelled themselves gay did not believe that they could be, or were being, sexist...

Was this the world in which I could find the answer to my quest? A world in which I was immediately told I was gay and labelled as such? I was never asked this

question and I didn't feel empowered to dispute it, a world in which you were frowned upon if you were closeted, a world in which it seemed the Black gay men had forgotten the pain caused by not knowing your sexual identity, and the confusion of being told what you are, but not believing it.

I did not want to be part of a world in which I was viewed as trade, where my smile was seen as an invitation to invade my personal space, where a look always had to be loaded with some lustful intent. I did not want to be part of world where I was constantly slapped across the face with sexist language, where men felt they had the right to learn how to imitate women, where women were not objects of desire, but vehicles of desire on which rode the legitimation for the expression of that side of a male which is rarely seen. A world in which women and/or the traits of women are used as props for male egos.

I found myself in a world where I expected too much, a world which not only confused, surprised and even excited me, but

also so closely mirrored the one that I had mentally escaped from, it frightened me.

At twenty-five my quest is far from being complete, but somewhere along the line I touched upon a sense of who I am, after floating for so long I am beginning to feel that my rope is being tethered to some stable sense of self. I have a new foundation. I now refuse to label my sexuality as I find this restrictive to my development as a Black male, remaining label-less has allowed me to begin to acknowledge my sexual attractions without guilt, by sifting out the things and people which matter to me. Am I happy? I have been damaged, I now realise this: I have been and, to some extent, will continue to be naive, I now realise this; I still can't see the danger signs clearly, but this is changing; I have the ability to give and accept affection, but this is still a problem for me, I know this. All I can say at this point is that I'm happier than I was at twenty-three.

A review of Erotic Rites by Ajamu

To be brutally honest I was disappointed.

Probably because I sense that Ajamu can produce (and has produced) work that is much more striking in its originality, work that does not look contrived and work that does not lack the freshness of his work in *From Where I Stand*.

Probably because the title, *Erotic Rites*, and the publicity blurb which said that it explored "the influences of pornography, erotica, pleasure and desire", set me thinking about the multifarious sides not only to the items, thoughts and pornography that make up my own personal erotic rites, but to the paraphernalia of all my Black gay friends and acquaintances, which includes sado-masochism, cross-dressing, transsexuality, body piercing and

water sports, amongst others.

Was this what I wanted to see? I don't think so as I know it is always hard to show and please the full scope of Black gay erotic rites and it would be foolish to think it possible. Even more foolish to think of doing the above stated task in the small confines of First Out cafe. (It was hard to appreciate the photographs fully whilst leaning over someone and their cappuccino).

There were a lot of props that would not seem out of place in an exhibition of sado-masochism (leather mask, leather harness, leather bull whip, leather cockring). Ajamu is to be admired for bringing Black gay desires out of the proverbial closet. The problem for me was that no-one seemed to be enjoying themselves.

In *Aura* the masked guy and

partner (in the photograph) look painfully self-conscious and seem more aware of the presence of the camera than interested in the fun of the (I hope) consensual act of submission/domination that could follow.

His self-portrait, *Miss Honey*, has the photographer in a wedding gown, putting on the bridal veil. He looks uncomfortable, uneasy, and embarrassed. Maybe that was the intention. Maybe the notion of cross-dressing is still so much of a contentious issue, that the character he was playing was meant to look wary, as if afraid of being caught. However there was none of the joy that some men experience when they cross-dress and this, to me, seemed really sad. Once again we are dwelling on the negative responses of others to our sexuality rather than revelling in the positive, pleasurable responses

that it brings out in ourselves.

Sacrifice showed simulated oral sex, and admittedly was very beautiful but the title causes a shiver of disappointment to run through me. Is it really such a sacrifice to take a lover's cock into your mouth? Yet again I get the feeling that there is some embarrassment within the picture, or the feelings that it brings up for the photographer who titles it *Sacrifice*. Feelings of guilt and embarrassment. Why feel apologetic for sucking dick?

It is good to see that Ajamu has

not lost his sense of humour. In *Loyalty* an erect penis is encased in a cockring that covers the length of the penis, harping back to the days of chastity belts, when sexual fidelity was forced unto the partner. *Futch* has the subject dressed in a wedding gown, but showing his genitals, so obviously a man, beard et al, questioning the definitions of men, "woman's" clothing and drag. The title an amalgamation of "femme" and

"butch", highlights the duality of his sexuality and a refusal to be labelled.

Yes, within the exhibition there are images that prove to me that Ajamu has the ability to produce an image that is more than technically perfect, as almost anyone can take a photograph that is in focus. Ajamu went further than this, for me, in two of the photographs. In *CJ* and *Initiation* the subjects both seem to forget the photographer and be totally engrossed in what they were doing, sucking their fingers and putting on a cockring respectively. Both seemed to be enjoying what they were doing, did not seem guilty about their actions and were happy with their joy and not at all self-conscious.

I felt the whole exhibition showed me nothing new about Ajamu, and it seems like it was a step backwards for him. Was he trying to shock but got cold feet? I felt so.

I can sense people saying, "Then you go do something better!" I know that I cannot. I was just a little sad because I know that Ajamu can.

Oh pur-lease!

Issac Julien, speaking at homoIMAGES, a public discussion on sexuality in the cinema, In Ladbrooke Grove told the audience that, "There are plenty of queers in powerful positions."

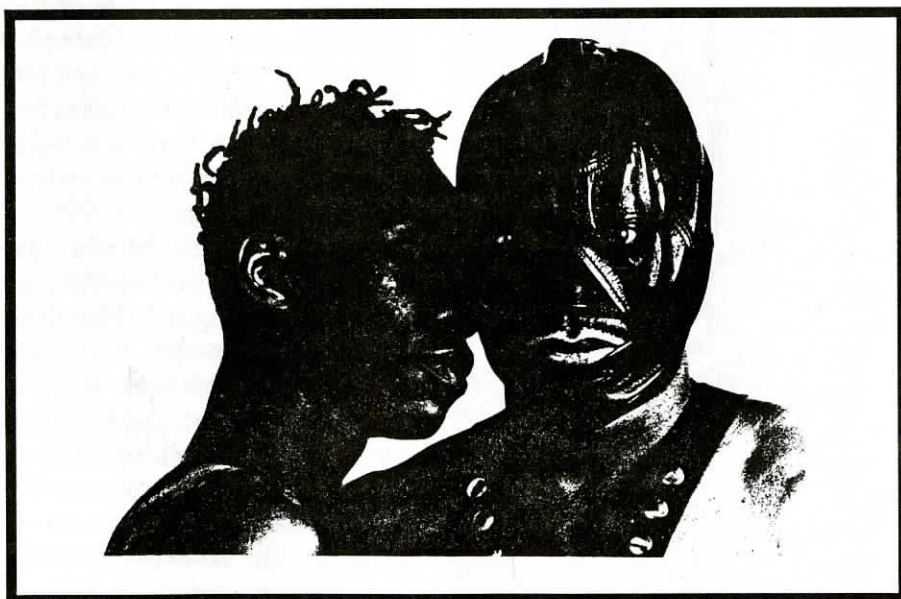
Tell us something we don't know!

Did you know that we, as lesbians and gay men, will be sick until April 1994. According to the government that is. Following the example set by the World Health Organisation (WHO) the government has declared that homosexuality will be struck off its central computer list of mental illness. Bizarre but true.

The Israeli Ministry of the Interior, from January 1993, has announced that immigrants and visitors who wish to stay in the country more than three months must prove that they do not have HIV. Yet another reminder of the fear of HIV in the world we live in! Sad really.

A group of Christian extremists held a four-day conference showing how gays can be "cured" by therapy.

"Reformed" gays at the conference said that they have left the "gay life" to be found again in Christianity. One said, "The gay life seems to promise what the homosexual person needs. But it only lasts while you are young and good-looking." Yeah right! I think I prefer to stay uncured.



Aura by Ajamu

The Fire Next Time James Baldwin, Penguin, first published 1963

It is thirty years since this much-reprinted book by a famous Black gay author was first published. This short, powerful study of the plight of, and choices open to, African-Americans was made up of two parts: 'My Dungeon Shook' and 'Down at the Cross'. How relevant is it today, and to Black lesbians and gays outside the USA?

The past year has delivered the Los Angeles riots and a rise in religious supremacism which has put many Black gays, lesbians and assertive women in general at risk and caused horrific destruction in India. The book is worth reading, not only as an historical document and for the beauty of Baldwin's writing but also because, dated though the language sometimes is, it does not shy away from issues which are still deeply important - and hotly controversial.

'The Fire Next Time' begins with a letter to Baldwin's teenage nephew, living in a country in which, a hundred years after the emancipation of the slaves, he was treated as being of lesser worth because he was Black. In a society ordered in such a way as to crush him, he could survive only because of the love which surrounded him in his own community. White Americans had, for the most part, based their own identity on the shaky foundation of believing in their superiority to other humans, ignoring all evidence which contradicted this. As Baldwin put it, 'Any upheaval in the universe is terrifying because it so profoundly attacks one's sense of one's own reality. Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations.'

It was up to his nephew, also named

James, to believe in his own self-worth and try to create new relationships based on justice: 'Please try to be clear, dear James, through the storm which rages about your youthful head today, about the reality which lies behind the words *acceptance* and *integration*. There is no reason for you to try to become like white people and there is no basis for their impertinent assumption that *they* must accept *you*. The really terrible thing, old buddy, is that *you* must accept *them*. And I mean that very seriously. You must accept them and accept them with love.'

But why not reject them, treat white people as racist society has treated Black people? This is explored in the second, longer, part of the book.

This starts with an account of the writer's own religious crisis and conversion. He was fourteen when, frightened of succumbing to hopelessness like his friends and ending up amongst the prostitutes, pimps and racketeers he passed on the streets, of his own desires and those of others towards him, of the lure of crime which offered a way of winning respectful treatment, of the consequences if he dared to go beyond the boundaries set for him in a racist world, he turned to the church. Other people found other means of escape: he was 'saved' and became a preacher like his father, helping to break the older man's authority over him.

At times worship and church fellowship could bring a deep sense of togetherness and rejoicing, but at the root of all the piety was fearfulness, loneliness and lack of self-awareness, not love.

The church was 'for a long time, in spite of - or, not inconceivably, because of - the shabbiness of my motives, my only sustenance, my meat and drink. I rushed home from school, to the church, to the altar, to be alone there, to commune with Jesus, my dearest Friend, who would

never fail me, who knew all the secrets of my heart. Perhaps He did, but I didn't, and the bargain we struck, actually, down there at the foot of the cross, was that He would never let me find out.

'He failed His bargain. He was a much better Man than I took Him for.' The young Baldwin began to question the notion that all non-Christians were damned, the passivity towards social injustice that was encouraged, the enrichment of ministers at the cost of their congregations, the absence of generosity of spirit.

The spread of the gospel, despite the integrity of some missionaries, had been closely linked with colonialism. 'God, going north, and rising on the wings of power, had become white.' All these deserved to be challenged: 'if the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer and more loving.'

When Baldwin had become an established writer, the Nation of Islam movement, which sought to establish a separate country within North America, had become prominent. It was deeply appealing: as crowds gathered around its sincere and impassioned speakers, even white policemen could not treat Black people in the usual insulting way, it touched on listeners' own experiences of brutal oppression, it offered a hope that changed the lives of those who accepted its teachings.

This was, to some extent, a sign of the times: the anti-colonialist movement was challenging the supremacy of 'Christian civilization', indeed the very term had been called into question by the holocaust; Black ex-servicemen were no longer prepared to put up with mistreatment after all they had been through; with the development and use of the atom bomb, the threat of universal extinction overshadowed the world.

The white God appeared to have failed. The Nation of Islam seemed to fill the void, with a Black God, who would save his chosen people, and a faith which would rule the world. 'The dream, the sentiment is old; only the colour is new.' After taking part in a television programme which reminded Baldwin of how little most white liberals understood about their own country, he was invited to have dinner with the leader, Elijah Muhammed.

Baldwin was drawn to him, with his winning smile and simple warmth towards his followers: 'He made me think of my father and me as we might have been if we had been friends.' However, though ownership of a land could indeed bring respect, Black people were at present part of the economy of the USA; becoming separate would not be easy, and might involve giving up much that was taken for granted.

More importantly, Baldwin could not endorse the belief that white people were damned, the emotional tone of which was 'as familiar to me as my own skin; it is but another way of saying that *sinner's shall be bound in Hell a thousand years.*' In a society which 'by its nature, seems determined to cut you down - that has cut down so many in the past and cuts down so many every day - it begins to be almost impossible to distinguish a real from a fancied injury. One can very quickly cease to attempt this distinction, and, what is worse, one usually ceases to attempt it without realizing that one has done so.' There were some white people he loved and trusted and who were struggling 'to make the world more human'.

The sense of freedom which the movement brought to many people's lives was a powerful achievement. However it failed to offer a truer, more individual, sense of identity. At a Muslim rally, the leader of the American Nazi party 'made a point

of contributing about twenty dollars to the cause, and he and Malcolm X decided that, racially speaking, anyway, they were in complete agreement. The glorification of one race and the consequent debasement of another - or others - always has been and always will be a recipe for murder. There is now way around this. If one is permitted to treat any group of people with special disfavour because of their race or the colour of their skin, there is no limit to what one will force them to endure, and since the entire race has been mysteriously indicted, no reason not to attempt to destroy it root and branch... I am very much concerned that American Negroes achieve their freedom here in the United States. But I am also concerned for their dignity, for the health of their souls, and must oppose any attempt that Negroes may make to do to others what has been done to them. I think I know - we see it around us every day - the spiritual wasteland to which that road leads. 'The need for justice for African-American people was an urgent one, with implications for the rest of the nation; though they might not be able to rise to power 'they are very well placed indeed to precipitate chaos and ring down the curtain on the American dream', based on pretence about the USA itself and its often destructive role in world affairs. To accept the truth about their lives, and celebrate their dignity and courage in the face of terrible oppression, would mean confronting the painful truth about the nation, no longer clinging to what is not constant - safety, money, power - and accepting change, and would offer the chance of genuine freedom. The handful of relatively conscious people, Black and white, were faced with the chance 'to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world'; the alternative was chaos and destruction.

I found the book occasionally grated,

especially in its apparent acceptance of traditional gender-roles; and did not explore the economic patterns which often underpin racial injustice. However, much of what was said has been borne out by what had happened over the next three decades.

Despite the change of presidency, itself a result of dissatisfaction with the way the USA is, its deep indebtedness and high levels of poverty and violence, the USA is still embroiled in a brutal and seemingly unending overseas war. As the newly independent countries were sucked into the prevailing world system, many Black people found a sense of identity and purpose through ethnicity or religion. But, though nationalist and communalist movements have claimed to affirm Black people's long-suppressed culture, in practice they have tended to reinforce injustice - and sometimes lead to horrific violence - among Black people, and to act in ways which bolster up the position of those with most power in the world. Here in the West, many of those who try to demand our support simply on the basis of race or religion are strongly homophobic. Nevertheless, it would have been surprising if the increasing strength of such movements and ideas had not affected Black lesbians and gays at all.

Those of us who are 'out' probably do not, for the most part, go along with the extreme brutality, the apparent piety which in fact betrays the highest ideals of the faith it is supposed to uphold. We have had these turned against us all too often. But, when we are within community settings, there can be pressure on us to go along to some extent with prevailing attitudes, to lump whole sets of people together ('what happened is terrible but in some ways 'they' brought it on 'themselves'''). And even in Black feminist, lesbian and gay circles, there can be as much snobbery based on the circumstances

c'tued on page 18

Five words for you...

There once was a question.
There were several answers.
Chaka Kahn is without a doubt.

Paula Abdul isn't because she tries too hard. En Vogue epitomise it. Kylie isn't, no, no, no. Naomi is but of course. Dannii Minogue isn't period. Anita Baker is simply. Whitney Houston isn't simply. Sharon Redd is and Lor' help them in diva heaven. Bananarama are not but are waste of space. Patti Labelle is quintessence.

The question is "Who is a diva?"

The diva list is not endless and new ones come

along and oust old ones. So goodbye, Iman. Hello, Tyra. The non-diva list, on the other hand, is long and almost anyone can be on it.

It is always good to know who is a diva to save you from that embarrassing faux pas at the dinner table by asking "Linda Who?" It is possible to learn all the names of every diva ever but it would be easier to be able to spot a diva. So there follows a simple five point guide. Take note Mandy Smith.

1. Have (a) style

Anyone can be fashionable. It

is such a cliché that I am rather ashamed to say it albeit very true. A pair of Vivienne Westwood platform boots can be bought or stolen by anyone who needs them. (NB Divas never want but need. Irrespective of how many dresses there are in the wardrobe, you always need another). But if the Westwood heels wear you and not the other way round that is no good at all. If you are constantly apologising for your style and for daring to be different



then you will carry nothing off with any finesse or fierceness at all.

Has Chaka Khan ever been sorry for wearing thigh high suede boots with heels high and sharp enough to pierce through four inches of aluminium? Has she ever apologised for hot pants so tight the audience held its breath? No, I don't think so. Sharon Redd appeared live on stage at the Fridge, Brixton, wearing a skin tight red dress, the front of which was slashed into a giant keyhole covered by 7 dernier american tan which did not, and probably could not, disguise a less than firm, and let's be honest here, rather ample abdomen. Did she say sorry? Not to this day she hasn't. Star to the end.

So Sue Lawley may want to be taken seriously and be the bad,

B.I.T.C.H. (But In Total Control of Herself), go-getting woman of the



then you will carry nothing off with any finesse or fierceness at all.

Has Chaka Khan ever been sorry for wearing thigh high suede boots

BBC but if she is too concerned about her mini skirt riding too high up her leg and always looks uncomfortable as a result this is doing her cause no good at all. A suggestion? Wear trousers.

2. Have a voice

Madonna admitted that she has not got the best singing voice in the world but that she is an excellent entertainer. Well, Ms Ciccone, thanks for the frankness but frankly, ma'am, this will not do.

Patti Labelle can sing. Whitney Houston must be glad for Patti's seconds. No-one can convince me that Patti's *More Love Than I Ever Need* is not definitive. I am not going to say that Whitney can't sing that would be like saying Joe Simmons has no definition. But Patti has an energy that scares. She causes goose pimples. She makes you beg out for more. Patti Labelle sings.

Who can keep still after the first beats of Rufus and Chaka Khan's *Ain't Nobody* start playing? It is not just the brutal beat but Chaka's dynamism, so obviously singing because she enjoys it, which is the most

important reason for her. Terri from En Vogue held a note so long the other three members had time for a complete costume change and make-over.

Billie Holiday can sing the numbers from a telephone directory and not only would people not care, they would probably weep at the emotion of it as well. Style over content to its most extreme.

A voice must hit notes that cause jealousy, a voice must hold notes that would cause hernias in most, a voice must make you tingle.

O yes, bad diction never did anyone any harm. Did it Aretha, Chaka, and Martha?

3. Have a sense of humour

Divas can laugh at themselves. And often do.

Only Patti (told you she was the quintessential diva), only Patti could fix it for a Black Gay man to come onto stage pretending to be a fan, who then proceeds to do an impression of her, arms undulating by his sides, eyelashes beating so fast you could have whipped up a soufflé. Sure it was staged. But no-one cared.

Who else but the funky divas of soul could change from one hot outfit to another on stage? Modestly changing behind screens that bore their four names, they chatted and gossiped like four adolescents going to their first prom.

``Theses aren't my shoes. There are too big.'' exclaimed one of the quartet.

``Goddam. No wonder my feet have been hurting so much,'' came the response.

Among requests to borrow everything from lipstick, mascara to wigs (working for points!) the four women, sorry four *divas*, stars to the end, emerged resplendent in red slinky dresses, split to the thigh and red elbow length gloves. Who else?

Naomi Campbell in *Elle* commented that her favourite drink is

``Dom Perignon, Cristalle...Oh, and Moet. Moet's nice.'' You can almost see the diva from Streatham, star enough not to hide this, gagging all the way to another runway show.

4. Have Hair

Patti Labelle. Hair. Chaka Khan. Hair. En Vogue. Hair times four. Omi (those in the know will know!). Hair.

If it is not your own then so much the better.

Cyndi and Terri from En Vogue appeared live on TVAM with hair just covering their ears. By the evening of that same day, at their concert, the weave was swishing below their shoulder blades. En Vogue change their hair with their outfits, and own the falseness as if it were their own real hair. Only Rupaul, in his video for *Supermodel* does it better. You tell him that he is not a natural blonde.

The queen of the weave has got to be Ms Campbell. In the video for *In The Closet* in which she out styled Michelle, sorry Michael, Jackson, the weave was worked for days. Crimped, the ``hair'' cascaded down her fierce head, past her fierce shoulders and ended just above her coccyx. She has taken the trend of art-ificial hair to an Art form.

5. Don't patronise your fans by pretending to care.

A diva will never love one set of fans more than another. Or at least will not say so. Jocelyn Brown can, and probably does say, to each and every audience for whom she does a personal appearance that they are the best ever, with the sincerity of Bob Monkhouse but she makes it seem unimportant whether what she said was true or not. No-one really cares anyway.

Kylie has said that she loves her gay fans but committed the political mistake by being outraged when four gay Kylie-ette drag queens followed her into a club. How soon the record sales fell. Remember Donna Summer? Exactly.

Divas champion causes without making an issue of it. Madonna may want to be the HIV spokesperson for the often silenced and politically impotent gay community (though who asked her?) but at the risk of becoming trite and repetitive. How much of it is because of her ego? Diva-spotters aren't stupid. Dionne Warwick sang perfectly on *That's What Friends Are For* without making the issue a personal publicity campaign.

I am sure that divas care about society and all events political or social that take place within that milieu. Divas support causes by appearing at benefit concerts and not acting like prima (Ma)donnas. Was it really necessary for Whitney to drag Stevie Wonder from the stage at the Nelson Mandela Birthday concert, because he was eating into her stage time? No, I don't think so either. Especially when it was so obvious that she could barely remember his name. Her appearance not only looked insincere but was.

Divas help because of altruism and not for material gain or credit, like Oprah Winfrey silently feeding money back into the Black community, not through financial donations which often doesn't help the long term problem, but through social help and educational programmes.

Divas may wear Gucci but they never tell people that they do. Conspicuous consumption is out. They refer to C.K.s as underwear, the JPG jacket as a jacket, the DKNY suit as a suit. True divas would know Calvin Klein, Jean-Paul Gaultier and Donna Karen.

6 (So I lied) Have Attitude

``Not shady just fierce.''

Sharon Redd during a personal appearance stopped mid-Can You Handle It, turned to the vogue-iste who had come on stage to dance behind her and said, ``Do I look as if I need a dancer?'' No-one would have taken much notice of the man anyway as eyes were glued to the star herself. C'tued

This took it that much further. Patti Labelle kicks her sling-backs off into the audience. Grace Jones comes on stage topless. Both metaphorically scream, ``This is my show I can, and believe me I will, do whatever I want.'' We love them more for it.

Who remembers Alison Moyet, she with the great voice but who always looked miserable because she was not thin. Chaka has never looked as if she cared if she had one cream cake too many. Bessie Smith neither. Jocelyn Brown jumps about the stage like a child on tartrazine and does not stand still hoping people won't notice that the black smock has not really disguised the fat.

Naomi flicks that weave with such brutal attitudinacity as if it is her own, knowing full well that it is not, we know that it is not but it does not matter because she is so outrageously audacious.

Six easy steps. Or not so easy really as there would be many more divas. Many should give up trying.

Like sad-assed actress turned pop singer(?) who think bad spelling will help. But did it work, Dannii?

Like those who try too hard to improve on nature. We saw the selotape, Kylie.

Like that trio turned duo who lipsync worse than a tired drag queen on poppers. Stock, Aiken and Waterman have a lot to answer for.

Like nude singers who rip off Black gay creativity and never really credits us. She knows who she is.

Like the ``friend'' of nude singers who scorns the day that she was born white. Sandra, get over it.

Like the tired daughter of a high N-R-G chanteuse jumping on the HIV and AIDS bandwagon. It's sad really.

Some got very close.

Linda Evangelista got near but was fool enough to try to bad mouth Naomi for appearing on the cover of Time magazine. ``The week the

[Berlin] wall comes down, they have a model on the cover of Time.'' Go choke on those sour grapes, Linda.

Siobhan Fahey gets points for the hair and the attitude. But no amount of re-inventing herself will get rid of her past.

The closest is Annie Lennox. Enough style to cross-dress and still be taken seriously (take notes, Pete Burns), the voice of one of the angels she so much worships, humour enough to kiss herself in the video for *Who's That Girl?*, hair that changes colour more than Linda Evangelista's, who doesn't patronise her fans by saying she supports causes but actually gives up a year of her career to help homeless people without using this as a publicity stunt, who has enough attitude to strip down to a fire-engine red brassiere.

She failed, sadly, as no diva would ever appear in a video without their make-up!

So I have five words for you. There *are* no white divas.

Stop Press

Whitney returns to Divadom. The video for her cover of Chaka Khan's *I'm Every Woman* features divas new and long established, including her mother, Voices, Mica Paris, Valerie Ashford (or is it Simpson?) and the one and only Chaka Khan. Whitney credits Chaka as ``My Girl!'' at the end of the song. Divas aren't threatened by competition. And Whitney looks great pregnant in a black swing dress, no apologetic Mothercare smock, revelling in her pregnancy.



Continued from page15- A review of The Fire Next Time

into which people were born and over which they have no control - their caste, for instance, or whether both their parents were Black - as in nineteenth-century Europe, where so much emphasis was placed on race and heredity. Again, rage at what white-dominated society has done to us can easily be turned against the white people closest to hand, who may be insensitive or annoying but who may be trying, in some way, to challenge racism. And Black people in `our' communities who reach out and make links beyond the boundaries we have set may be treated as unreliable or even treacherous.

Of course, when we face humiliation, fear and loss, it can be hard not to lash out at those around us. And since many of us have been unfairly treated by other Black people (or warned that we might be) because of our ancestry or cultural heritage, for being too dark or too light, for having a particular religious background or faith or not being religious enough, it can be tempting to get at others before they get at us! But, as James Baldwin argued so powerfully three decades ago, genuine freedom cannot be built on the debasement of others. And, in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the West, we have witnessed the beginnings of the devastation when people fail to relate to one another with love and mutual respect, the final results of which could be hard to imagine: 'God gave Noah the rainbow sign,

No more water, the fire next time.'

Savi Hensman

Events Events Events

WHAT'S ON

Henrietta's Weekend of Fun
Black Lesbians' space
Workshops on: Relationships
with white lesbians, erotic creative
writing, erotic massage, lesbians with
disabilities celebrate sex.

3 St Mary's Rd, Moseley, Bir-
mingham 021-442 4467

Accessible venue, sign language
interpreters.

Fri 12th to Sun 14th March.

Women's Voices

Six week course of informal
workshops for Islington women in-
terested in developing their involve-
ment in community and public af-
fairs.

Town Hall, Upper St., Isling-
ton. 071-477 3134

1st March to 5th April. Mon-
days 7.30-9.30pm

Wheel Appeal. International
Womens Day.

Performers, artists, education-
alists, campaigners, designers, sup-
port services, craft makers.

London Womens Centre, 4 Wild
Court, WC2. 071-831 6946

All day 8th March 93

Audre Lorde Memorial

Open invitation to free memo-
rial supper in celebration of the life
of Audre Lorde. Readings, music,
drama. Donations welcome.

Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq,
WC1 071-254 1590

18th February. 7-10pm

Tribute to Audre Lorde

Sisterwrite, 190 Upper St, Is-
lington

29th January 7-9pm

Black lesbians over 40

West Hampstead Womens
Centre, 55 Hempstal Rd, NW6 071-
328 7389

Meets 1st Sunday 3-6pm

Camden Black Lesbian Group
54-56 Phoenix Rd NW1 071-
383 5405

3rd Sunday 2.30-5.30pm

Erotic Rites

Latest body of work by Ajamu,
exploring the influences of pornog-
raphy, erotica, pleasure and desire in
relation to Black gay imagery.

First Out 52 St Giles St WC2
071-359 3561

12th January - 14th February.

Black writers workshop

Centerprise, 136/138 Kingsland
High St, E8. 071-254 9632 Jan 14, 28
Feb 11, 26 March 11, 25 6.30-8.30

Mesmac

For young African and Afro
Caribbean gay or bisexual men

THT 52-54 Grays Inn Rd WC1
071-831 0330

Every Thursday 7.30-9.30pm

Orientations

Chinese and S.E. Asian lesbian
and gay group.

London Friend 86 Caledonian
Rd N1 071-837 2782

3rd Sunday 2-5pm

SHAKTI

Open to all South Asian lesbi-
ans and gay men

London Friend 86 Caledonian
Rd, N1 081-993 9001

Sunday 24th Jan 3pm

LIFT at Bar Industria

9 Hannover St W1

"The best in black dance"?

DJs Paul (Parallax) and Junior (WKD)

Opening January 29th. Every
Friday, till late.

Theatre Royal Stratford East.

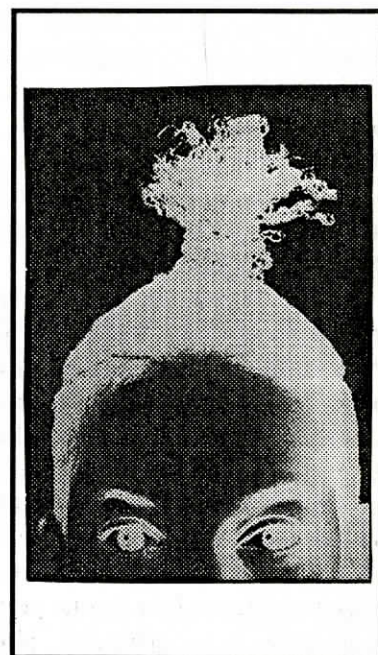
"Worlds Apart"

Gerry Raffles Sq, London E15
081-534 0310

An African, an Asian, a black
American, a Tibetan and a Spaniard
at Immigration Control,

Heathrow...

Jan 28th - Feb 20. 8pm. £12,
10, 8, 5, 3.



Self Portrait by Lola Flash

Lola Flash, photographer
and AIDS activist, is exhibiting
photographs at First Out, 52 St
Giles St, WC2, until 13th
February. Her work tackles
issues such as racism, sexism
and homophobia.

"These are the main
reasons the AIDS pandemic has
grown to such reprehensible
proportions."

Flash has been active with
ACT UP New York for years
and believes she's part of the
solution

starting February
Drop-ins at the Centre
every Wednesday 5.30-7.30pm
black lesbians & gay men welcome
videos - films - comedy favourites -
Roseanne - Golden Girls - board games
Women only 1st Saturday 2-4pm
Men only 4th Sunday 4-6pm

Employment advice sessions
4.30-6.30pm Men 1st Tues Women last Tues

Black Lesbian & Gay Centre

BMBOX 4390 London WC1N 3XX Telephone 071-732
3885

Special Events
Audre Lorde Commemoration Tues 23rd Feb 7-9pm
performance/discussion all black lesbians & gays wel-
come

Open Day Tues 16th March 7-8.30pm
everyone welcome refreshments available
come and see the Centre

DATES IN FEBRUARY AND MARCH

2 Feb 4.30-6.30pm *men's employment advice*, **3 Feb** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with film*, **6 Feb** 2-4pm *women's drop-in*, **10 Feb** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with board-games*, **17 Feb** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with comedy favourites*, **23 Feb** 4.30-6.30pm *women's employment advice*, 7-9pm *Audre Lorde commemoration*, **24 Feb** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with music*, **28 Feb** 4-6pm *men's drop-in*, **2 Mar** 4.30-6.30pm *men's employment advice*, **3 Mar** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with film*, **6 Mar** 2-4pm *women's drop-in*, **10 Mar** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with board games*, **16 Mar** 7-8.30pm *open day*, **17 Mar** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with comedy favourites*, **24 Mar** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in with music*, **30 Mar** 4.30-6.30pm *women's employment advice*, **31 Mar** 5.30-7.30pm *mixed drop-in*.

To be certain of talking to an employment adviser, please book in advance by contacting the Centre by 4.30pm the previous Thursday.

CENTRE DETAILS

Parking outside entrance; near Peckham Rye BR station; buses 12, 36, 36B, 63, 171, 185, P3, P12; ground floor only; steep ramp to front door; two large rooms with counselling/advice space in front, toilet (not wheelchair-adapted) in back; lighting and heating adjustable; seating varied; if childcare or interpreter required please contact Centre at least a week in advance; full details on 071-732 3885 (2-4.30pm Tuesdays and Thursdays or leave message on answering machine) or BM Box 4390, London WC1N 3XX.

BLGC DEFINITION OF BLACK

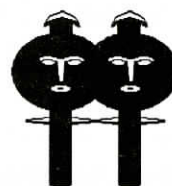
Those descended, through one or both parents, from Africa, Asia (including China, the Middle East and Pacific nations) and Latin America and the original inhabitants on North America and Australasia.

B

L

G

C



S.A.D. ACCESS CODES

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 AC-**
TIVITIES 1-Formal meetings 2-Informal 3-Continuous 4-Frequent Breaks

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

REGULAR 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 (SEE PANEL). A Bhangra disco for lesbians and gay men is held on the 1st Friday of the month at the LONDON LESBIAN & GAY CENTRE, 67-69 Cowcross Street, London EC1, from 10pm. The group produces a quarterly newsletter. There are other Shakti groups forming around the country. For more information Tel: 081-993 9001.

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 PANEL).

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

LEICESTER BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP Support/Socials/Meetings, for details write to c/o Michael Wood Centre, 29 New Walk, Leicester LE1 6TE. Tel: 0533-559995.

BIRMINGHAM BLACK LESBIAN AND GAY GROUP (KOLA) - Meets 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month. Tel: Clint on 021-506 0222 or 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.) Tel: Ted on 081-692 1308.

BLACK LESBIAN, GAY AND BISEXUAL GROUP - Meets every Monday at The Venus Project, The Old Laundry, Hornsey Road, London N7 7QT. Information, advice, resources, counselling for 16-25 year old people. Tel: 071-281 2121 or 071-272 8467.

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 425 927.

LESBIANS

CAMDEN BLACK LESBIAN GROUP runs socials, discussions and workshops for Black lesbians. For details contact CLC/BLG (SEE PANEL THIS PAGE).

LAS DIVINAS - Latinamerican Lesbian Group, We meet the last Friday of every month, 7pm at CLC/BLG (SEE PANEL).

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) - Meetings are held on the second and fourth Wednesday of every month at 7pm at CLC/BLG (SEE PANEL THIS PAGE).

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.

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.

MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN SUPPORT GROUP. c/o Box No 26, 1 Newton St, Picadilly, Manchester, M1 1HW.

MANCHESTER BLACK LESBIAN WRITING GROUP. c/o Box No 26, 1 Newton St, Picadilly, Manchester, M1 1HW.

GAY MEN

LET'S RAP - Black gay men talking to Black gay men. London group meets every fortnight on Sundays from 3-6pm. At St Margaret's House, 21 Old Ford Road, E2. Tube: Bethnal Green. Buses: 15, 106, 253. 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.