

The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays

Rousing New Presence in the Bay Area

by Reggie Williams

Riding the momentum of the highly successful National Conference of Black Lesbians and Gays, which was held in Los Angeles earlier this year, Black men and women are coming together to form a San Francisco Bay Area chapter of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. Local organizers, many of whom are already well established in the Bay Area gay community, feel that the time has come for Black lesbians and Black gays to stress the beauty of Black culture and lesbian and gay culture to the broader communities.

NCBLG is the only national Black lesbian and gay organization in existence. It began in 1978 by former Bay Area resident A. Billy S. Jones who was then living in Washington, D.C. and Reverend Dolores Berry of Baltimore Maryland. The gay rights movement in America, up to then, was less than a decade old. Gay organizations were springing up all across the country to address the concerns of this newly identified minority. At the same time however, these new institutions failed to recognize racial and cultural differences and, thus, became basically white organizations addressing the needs of white lesbians and gays.

Tragically, these groups also reflected the racist attitudes and behaviors typical of American society at that time. Persons of color were not allowed to hold positions of power to any significant degree and were embraced only if they were willing to be "gay first." Lesbians and gays of color who were not willing to separate racial oppression from sexual oppression found themselves needing an organizational structure which would allow for the addressing of both. Something that would incorporate both celebration and support into their lives, especially when struggling against their dual oppres-

sions. NCBLG was that vehicle.

Today, NCBLG has broadened its scope from addressing the issues of the Black lesbian and gay community to challenging the awareness of the broader community. With a commitment to fighting for an end to racism, sexism, class oppression and homophobia, NCBLG has found common bonds to network with other people of color and multiracial organizations throughout the country.

It was just such an effort which produced a successful first-time-ever National Black Lesbian and Gay Conference. Over 400 people came together for 3 days in February and the participants read like a Who's Who in Black lesbian and gay America. With the theme "Leadership, What Have We Learned, What Can We Share?" conference attendees heard speaker after speaker talk about lesbian and gay empowerment.

Along with dynamic speeches, the conference also offered 38 different workshops. It was truly the inspiration for local Black lesbians and gays who attended to come back and form the Bay Area NCBLG chapter. With strong moral support from the BWMT-SFBA chapter and seed money to help with the kickoff celebration, held in May, the local group is well on its way.



MICHAEL MOORE

The political arena is another area of major concern to the organization, particularly in this presidential election year. Jesse Jackson's candidacy has brought to the presidential race issues which no one else has ever raised in such a powerful way. Particularly, he attempts to address issues around basic civil rights, Gay rights and AIDS support and funding. This is an opportune time to take advantage of the heightened awareness of these issues in the broader community and build bridges between the Black lesbian and gay community and the Black community at large.

AIDS is another major concern to Black lesbians and gays. This epidemic has disproportionately affected the Black community. It has also had a major effect on the way Black lesbians and gays interact with the Black community as a whole. NCBLG seeks to address this concern, acting as a bridge between the two communities. As stated by Phill Wilson, "You can't deal with AIDS in a Black context without dealing with the issue of homosexuality or the issue of homophobia."

Dewitt Hoard, Ad Hoc Committee member and organizer, says "As Black lesbians and gay men, we have a unique set of concerns that no one can articulate better than we ourselves. By forming a local chapter of NCBLG, we are attempting to develop a vehicle through which our concerns can be addressed in a manner that will hopefully affect the type of responses we require to meet our needs and celebrate our lives."

The presence of NCBLG in the Bay Area will be an important resource, giving Black lesbians and gays a structure through which to achieve their own agendas. The time is NOW! Join us!

For more information about NCBLG, call 255-2155.