1989 National Coalition for Black Lesbians and Gays Five Year Plan article By Angela Bowen

Angela Bowen
Black Lesbian/Gay Agenda
A Five Year Plan

Four hundred and fifty registered participants met in L.A. Feb. 18-20 at the second annual Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Conference. Preceded by an AIDS institute Feb. 17, the conference ended with a roundtable, in which a Black Lesbian and Gay agenda for the next five years was set.

Several speakers at the gathering reiterated the theme that coming out is empowering. Phil Wilson, founder of the Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum (BGLLF), who sponsored the conference, stated, "There are those who say we don’t exist...because we have not been willing to stand up and say, ‘Yes, we are part of this community.’" Gay minister Carl Bean, founder of Unity Fellowship and of The National Minority AIDS Council of Los Angeles, said in his keynote address, "Come out of the closet...the closet is death."

California Assemblywoman Maxine Waters, an outspoken advocate for lesbian and gay rights among lawmakers, said during a luncheon address on Sunday, "If you don’t love yourself, who can love you? If you don’t stand up for yourself, how can you expect someone to stand up for you?" Her words sounded remarkably similar to those of the late gay civil rights activist Bayard Rustin, who said in an interview with the late Black Gay activist/writer Joseph Stearn in the Philadelphia Gay News, "People will never fight for your freedom if you have not given evidence that you are prepared to fight for it yourself."

Along with the visionary speakmackers, the celebrations, tributes, awards, banquet, luncheons, etc., there was much nitty-gritty work to be done. The AIDS Institute on Friday brought together professional health workers, AIDS activists and community volunteers, and included many PWAs. Those who attended shared information in workshops, panels and informal discussions, and exchanged handouts on a wide variety of related topics, including:

- developing effective education and prevention programs specifically for Black women and gay/bisexual men;
- how to start an AIDS project;
- creating supportive relationships with clergy toward involving churches in AIDS work;
- creating relationships with AIDS funders.

A fitting finish to the Friday AIDS Institute was a tribute to the late Sylvester starring Chaka Khan at Jewelle Williams’ The Catch One—said to be the oldest Black Gay club in existence. Some lesbians expressed concern when a workshop on body image named "Big, Black and Beautiful" by its presenter was renamed "Black and Beautiful" by conference organizers. The same presenter, Ayofemi Stowe Folyan, had scheduled a workshop on lesbian health, which was cancelled without notice. These changes and a general feeling among lesbians that the conference needed a more political and personal focus on lesbians, led to the formation of a lesbian caucus, which addressed a variety of topics, including the possibility of holding a Black Lesbian Conference in 1991.

Notes of interest on the weekend:
- Craig Harris produced a daily newspaper for conference attendees on a desktop computer.
- L.A. Human Rights Commission President Morris Kite delivered a stirring address extorting Black Lesbians and Gays to consider appointments to special city and state commissions and advisory boards as another way to gain visibility and influence, even as we attempt to run for political office.
- A group claiming to represent the "real" Black Lesbian and Gay community of Los Angeles distributed a two-page handout accusing the conference organizers of, among other things, "tinseltown frivolity" and of ignoring the contributions of [New Alliance Party president] Dr. Lonnie Fulani to the Gay and Lesbian movement.

The roundtable group resoundingly approved support of Merle Woo in her case against the University of California. (The case has since been decided in Woo's favor.)

Monday morning the roundtable session began, with approximately 60 representatives of Black Gay and Lesbian organizations from across the country gathered to set an agenda for the next five years. The participants were expected to carry back to their respective communities and constituencies some common goals and implement them however ways were feasible. The session was coordinated by Phil Wilson (BGLLF) and Angela Bowen, co-chair of The National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (NCBLG). Bowen conducted the roundtable. A sense of urgency drove the group, which worked diligently to set the following agenda around six issues:

- **Health:** "To develop materials and strategies that will enable us as a Black Lesbian and Gay community to identify, define and actualize comprehensive modes of mental and physical well-being."
- **Media:** "To establish and promote positive imagery of Black Lesbian and Gay men. Also, to monitor and hold accountable all media and Black entertainers for responsible portrayals of Black Lesbians and gay men."
- **History/Culture:** "To establish a Black Lesbian and Gay task force to identify and impact upon Black historical societies, to acknowledge and uphold the Black Gay and Lesbian personhood of Black historical figures, past and contemporary. To support all our existing efforts at establishing or developing positve Black Gay and Lesbian cultural historical identifications, archives, and historical societies."
- **Politics:** "To contribute to the quest for greater political clout of the Black community in order to advance our issues, as well as to counter growing right-wing reaction by working to elect or have appointed at least 20 openly-gay or lesbian Black officials. To increase our ability to counter attacks against our rights by seeking continued on page 35"
The Death of Privacy
June 30, 1989 marks the third anniversary of the Hardwick decision in which the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of Bowers v. Hardwick that Gays and Lesbians have no constitutional right to engage in private, adult, consensual sexual behavior. In a vote of 5-4, the Supreme Court gave state governments the right to make Lesbian and Gay sexuality against the law.

Pittsburgh’s Lesbian and Gay action group, CRY OUT! has called for all Lesbians and Gay men to join in a “National Day of Mourning For the Right to Privacy.”

Simon Nikoli Tours North America
Gay South African anti-Apartheid activist Tsoko Simon Nikoli has been acquitted of all charges. Following a riot that broke out after a banned funeral service in South Africa, he and 21 others were arrested and incarcerated for a year before they were charged with a crime.

Plans are underway for Nikoli to tour Canada and the United States, pending his being able to obtain a visitor’s visa. More information will be made available through NCBLG as plans are finalized. NCBLG intends to present Nikoli at one event in Boston in September, and in Detroit in October, if all goes well. This tour will be an excellent opportunity for us to better understand the struggles of our sisters and brothers in South Africa.

For more information contact: OLOW: The Gay and Lesbian Organisation of the Witwatersrand, c/o Glen Shelton, South African Institute of Race Relations, P.O. Box 30144, Braamfontein, 2017, Republic of South Africa.

Hate Crimes Bill Introduced
In February, the Hate Crimes Statistics Act of 1988 (H.R. 947) was introduced in the House of Representatives. This act requires the Justice Dept. to collect data nationwide on crimes committed because of race, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. This includes verbal harassment as well as physical assault. Since 1980 hate crimes against Lesbians and Gays has risen dramatically, yet it has been reported that 80 per cent of the crimes against Gays and Lesbians go unreported. Black Lesbians and Gays are especially victimized due to the added dimension of negative racial attitudes. If you are the victim of violent attacks, verbal as well as physical, report it as soon as possible. You have the right to live safely and free of harassment regardless of your color or sexuality.

Immigration
The Immigration Exclusion and Deportation Amendments Act of 1989, H.R. 1280, introduced in March by Congressman Barney Frank, will end discrimination against Lesbians and Gays seeking to immigrate into or visit the United States. Persons with AIDS and HIV infection are currently excluded from entering the country. Urge your congresspeople to support the bill, H.R. 1280.

International Lesbian and Gay Conference
The 11th Annual Conference of the International Lesbian and Gay Association will take place July 16-22, 1989 in Vienna, Austria. For more information contact: Homosexual Initiative (HOSI) West, ILGA Conference Organizing Committee, Novaragasse 40 A-1020 Vienna, Austria Tel. (0222) 26-66-04.

Giovanni’s Room holds exhibit for Joseph Beam
Joe Beam will be the subject of a month-long tribute at the Philadelphia bookstore where he worked for a number of years. The exhibit will photograph, drawing and painting exhibit as the bookstore where he worked, learned

NGLTF Hires Black Lesbian for Families Project
The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) recently hired Ivy Young as director of its new project to secure recognition of lesbian and gay families. Ms. Young has a strong background in media, political and grassroots organizing. The project she will direct will educate, advocate and organize for full societal recognition of Lesbian and gay relationships and for the protection of lesbian and gay families.

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greater mutual support with other Black organizations, developing a national emergency response network, and supporting other organizations or issues targeted by right-wing reaction.’’

• Networking: ‘‘To support the creation of coalitions by Black Lesbians and Gay men with Black professional and political organizations, such as the National Medical Association, the National Conference of Black Lawyers, the National Black Nurses Association, the National Dental Association, the Urban League, the NAACP, and other similar organizations.

• Spirituality: ‘‘To enhance the spiritual quality of our lives by focusing on the various spiritual traditions in our communities, by establishing Black Lesbian and Gay churches, spiritual communities and networks, and by educating existing spiritual and religious bodies about Black Lesbian and Gay concerns and spiritual issues.’’

The final agenda document will include statements of intention in several areas, including: a focus on serving as role models for Black youth and mentors for Gay and Lesbian youth: working for a national health plan; assuring that Lesbian health—particularly Lesbians with cancer—is attended to. The language in the document is still being finalized. Upon submission to and approval by the roundtable participants, Black Lesbian and Gay communities across the country will begin working toward these goals. □

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