

BY RUPERT KINNARD

A new anthology not for black men only

Black, gay and writing

On the surface the recent publication of *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology* doesn't present itself as the milestone that it truly is. Only when one realizes that it is the first published anthology of literature by black gay men that its importance becomes more evident. And what a welcome addition it is. The writing within this assorted collection of essays, short stories, interviews, poetry, etc., is so involving, unrestrained and insightful, it would be a tragedy if more readers didn't treat themselves to its pleasures merely because it is written primarily for black gay men. There are so many common threads running between the experiences of women, racial minorities, lesbians, and gays as oppressed people that we can all relate to the emotions and the difficulties expressed throughout *In the Life*. As a black gay man, however, the joy of reading such a collection is a different story. Editor Joseph Beam writes in his introduction that he had "grown weary of reading literature by white gay men, who fell quite easily into three camps: The incestuous literati of Manhattan and Fire Island, the San Francisco cropped-mustache clones and the Boston-to-Cambridge politically correct radical faggots. None of them spoke to me as a black man."

It is interesting that Beam found himself exclusively reading works by lesbians and black women, because he "caught a glimpse of my reality in their words." In 1983 there was the anticipated publication of *Black Men/White Men: A Gay Anthology*, edited by Michael J. Smith, a white man. Though there was the obvious potential of having the black gay man's perspective diluted by the presence of the white writers and their experiences, many black men were not prepared for the tone of the book, set by the unfortunate inclusion of photos, once again depicting black men as pieces of meat. The book featured writing from a perspective that had been rarely available before, and it also included a piece about black homosexuals during the 1920s and the Harlem Renaissance, and rare writings by some of the more influential writers of that time, including Langston Hughes.

