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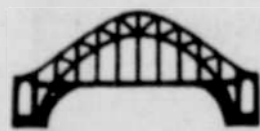
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Dahmer terror still reigns

The gay and African-American communities in Milwaukee and Chicago are still traumatized by serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer

by Tom Flint

Jeffrey Dahmer has confessed to and been charged with the gruesome murders and mutilations of at least 17 young men and boys over the past ten years in the Milwaukee/Chicago area. The grizzly nature of the murders has horrified the whole country, but the Midwest is reeling in a state of virtual shock, particularly the African-American and gay communities of Milwaukee and Chicago.

Dahmer's victims were primarily African-American gay men he picked up in gay bars and in local shopping malls, where Dahmer is believed to have cruised the bathrooms. Dahmer picked up one of his victims at a gay pride rally.

During a recent visit to Chicago, the message received in the street and from local gay activists was markedly different from what graces the pages of the mainstream press. Dahmer was a familiar face to patrons of Chicago's gay bars. He seemed so odd that most of the people in the Halsted gay district (similar to Seattle's Capitol Hill) would not have anything to do with him. Dahmer allegedly picked up most of his victims in outlying impoverished areas.

In 1987, Dahmer was evicted from Milwaukee's Club Baths apparently because he was caught drugging people. No one in the Chicago community was able to elaborate on the accusations.

African-Americans and gays are outraged at the local police department, saying the department is dragging its feet because of prejudice and homophobia. Dahmer was on probation because of a conviction of child molestation in 1988, but his probation officer didn't stay in contact with him.

The incident that has the African-American gay community most outraged was the death of Konerak Sinthasomphone, a 14-year-old Laotian boy. The boy briefly escaped from Dahmer's apartment and ran down the street, naked and bleeding. Two of Dahmer's neighbors, Sandra Smith and Nicole Childress, called the police and actually physically confronted Dahmer until the police arrived.

But the police returned the boy to Dahmer's apartment when Dahmer told them the boy was his homosexual lover—and that they'd been having a domestic quarrel. Neighbors vigorously objected and the police threatened to arrest the neighbors for obstructing an officer in the line of duty.

Sinthasomphone spoke perfect English. His family speculates that he was drugged, in that he did not speak to police about what was happening to him. The police are reported to have physically carried the child into the apartment and laid him on the bed. Newspaper accounts say the apartment "was rancid" with the stench of death and a corpse was decomposing in an adjacent room. The police were apparently not even aware of that. On the living room floor through which the police walked were also photographs of dead bodies and mutilated body parts.

Review of the 911 tapes reveal that Dahmer's neighbors made follow-up calls to the police

department to check on the safety of the boy. The police repeatedly assured the neighbors that all was well and the child was safe.

Sinthasomphone's family filed a missing persons report in May. Print and broadcast media publicized the boy's disappearance, even publishing a photograph of him. The connection was never made.

The three officers involved in this incident have been suspended pending an investigation. But the local police guild has protested the suspension, calling for the resignation of the police chief.

When the story first broke in Milwaukee, police and local media were quick to label Dahmer as a homosexual murderer and to call his crime "homosexual overkill"—a term being banded about in the Milwaukee courts recently. The gay community brands the term as another incidence of "gay bashing," pointing out there is no such crime as "heterosexual overkill."

It is not at all certain that Dahmer was a homosexual. He is known to have frequently made comments about his hatred for homosexuals and African-Americans. The media has reported that Dahmer confessed that he did, on one occasion, have sex with one of his victims after killing him. Most gays and lesbians in Chicago perceive Dahmer not as a gay person, but as a psychotic monster acting out his hatred toward gay people. Many activists are angry that Dahmer has not been charged with hate crimes in conjunction with the murder charges.

Anti-gay bigotry has increased in the Midwest since the story of the murders broke. Bar owners have reported bomb threats and bar patrons have been harassed from passing cars. Gay leaders have received death threats via telephone and mail.

The murders have catalyzed both the gay and lesbian community and the African-American community to organize against homophobia and racism. Local politicians are responding to the demands. State Representative Gwen Moore has criticized the police for negligence and called for an investigation into charges of prejudice in the department. She said she has received reports of jokes about "niggers" and "fags" circulating in the department.

The gay and lesbian community has called for a full-scale comprehensive investigation by outside authorities. They say the police department has failed to "protect citizens who are people of color, gay or lesbian, or poor." They have also demanded an official liaison from the police department to work with the gay and lesbian community.

Some have remarked that the entire city of Milwaukee is experiencing a "collective nervous breakdown." The city is bracing for a wave of suicide attempts. Special teams of crisis counselors are being trained and brought to Milwaukee to speak with community members who have been traumatized by the murders.

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