

Yes Virginia, there is homophobia in Fairfax County

The radical right is alive and well in Fairfax County, Va. Metropolitan Washington's largest jurisdiction, and one of the nation's wealthiest counties, is the scene of an ongoing struggle by extremists to inject discriminatory rhetoric into the public arena.

Most prominent has been an effort lasting more than a year to ban the *Washington Blade*, a lesbian and gay newspaper, from public libraries.

The latest twist in that effort comes from County Supervisor Elaine McConnell, an elected official. She introduced a resolution in May that would ban the display, distribution or storage of any material that solicits or promotes "anyone to violate any criminal law of the Commonwealth of Virginia." It would also prohibit groups which "promote" such activity from using county facilities.

Backers of the proposal maintain that the *Blade*, and in fact all lesbian and gay organizations, promotes violation of the Virginia sodomy statute.

Civil libertarians maintain such a law is unconstitutional because it infringes upon free speech. A ruling to that effect by the legal counsel may deter the board from passing the bill.

Scrimmages have recently been fought on two other fronts as well:

Allene Sizemore, a new resident to the county, was scandalized when her 15-year-old daughter came home from school with questions about sexuality. She had seen the HBO movie *The Coming Out of Heide Leiter* in Family Life Education, a county school system program that includes sex education.

The film tells of two teen-age Virginia lesbians who fell in love and went to the prom, and how the community handled it.

"There's a message in that film that could hurt the children," complained Allene Sizemore. "The [film] destroyed my right to teach these things to my children the way I wanted to. Seeds have been planted in her."

School officials have reprimanded teacher Kelly Mastradonato for showing the film, because it was not part of the program's approved curriculum. They declined to say what action would be taken.

The second incident involved a small inverted triangle used as a design element on campaign literature for Thomas B. Davis III. Davis, chairman of the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, is the county's highest elected official. Davis, a Republican, is running for Congress against first-term Democrat Leslie Byrne.

Gwendalyn Cody, vice chairwoman of the county Republican Party, said there is concern "that Tom was being consciously or unconsciously involved in [the homosexual] web of in-your-face promotion."

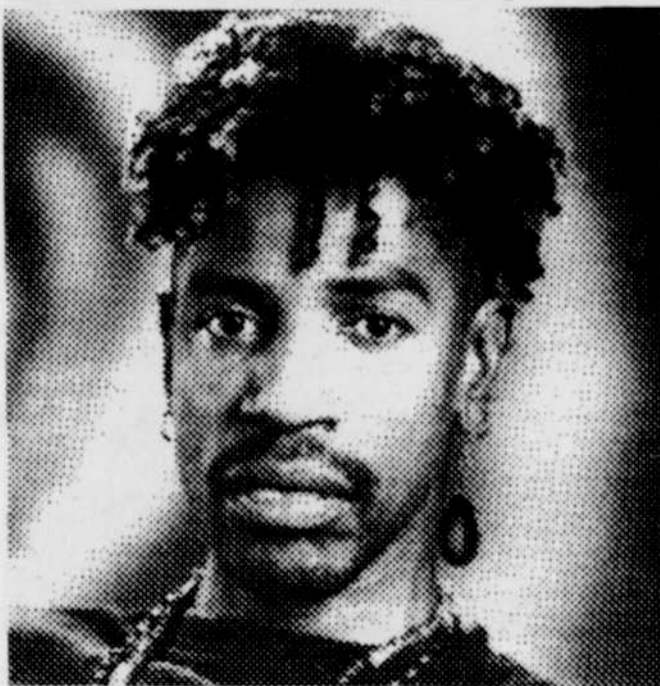
"I don't think the triangle has anything to do with anything," said Davis. He cited a similar design element in campaign literature for Oliver North, who is seeking the Republican nomination for the U.S. Senate.

Nonetheless, Davis removed the triangle from his campaign literature. "Who needs the aggravation?" he said.

A Different Light Bookstore sponsors a lesbian and gay literary conference

June Jordan, Michael Nava, Jewelle Gomez, Melanie Kaye Kantrowitz, Justin Chin and Cherrie Moraga are among the authors who appeared at the first Readers and Writers Literary Conference sponsored by A Different Light Bookstore in San Francisco, Calif.

More than 50 mostly local gay, lesbian and bisexual writers read from their works and shared their thoughts at the event, held May 20 and 21 at the San Francisco Women's Building.



Wayne Corbitt

The conference opened Friday, May 20, with "A Celebration of Ethnicities," featuring local performers Wayne Corbitt, Justin Bond, Mimi Freed, Suzy Berger, Shaffiq Essajee, the Drama DIVAS and the Love Like This Theater, Eric Capulong, Nao Bustamante, and Ruven Hannah. This event was free.

The conference kicked off Saturday with a hands-on panel of book and magazine editors and publishers discussing "Doing It Yourself," covering the nuts and bolts of publishing.

The centerpiece panel at noon, "Voices in Print," featured panelists Dorothy Allison, Allan Berube, Jewelle Gomez and Helen Zia tackling the question "who gets published and who doesn't?" Amy Scholder of City Lights and High Risk Books moderated.

Afternoon panels included a discussion of "identity politics," and what it means for the lesbian and gay community, with Carla Trujillo, Justin Chin, Enrique Asis and others.

Allan Berube, Chea Villanueva, Sauda Birch and Sabena Stark participated in a discussion on "Writing Working Class." The issue of being of mixed heritage and queer ("Writing Between the Lines") was explored by Lisa Hall, Cherrie Moraga, Jewelle Gomez and Caroline Streeter.

A panel entitled "Inspired by the Mediterranean," treated the influence that region has on Jewish, Arab, Sicilian and Greek writers; a panel on the power of humor featured cartoonist Tim Barela, Jim Coughenour and writer-illustrator Kris Kovick. Michael Nava, best known for his mystery writing, appeared with co-author Robert Dawidoff (*Created Equal: Why Gay Rights Matter to America*) and Sara Miles.

The conference closed with a reading by poet and essayist June Jordan, whose work draws together many of the themes touched on at the conference.

Lesbian Avengers organize against the right

During the past two years the Christian right successfully took their agenda to the polls, winning anti-lesbian/gay/transsexual/bisexual legislative contests in one state and more than 20 cities, towns and counties around the country. With eight statewide initiatives being planned for November 1994, quite a struggle is brewing for basic civil rights. At least five national lesbian and gay groups are organizing against these referenda, which mark a decisive turn in civil rights legislation.

Among the groups, the Lesbian Avengers Civil Rights Organizing Project grew out of work done last year in Lewiston, Maine, against the repeal of the city's anti-discrimination ordinance. The experience in Lewiston has convinced LACROP activists of the need to support out, locally based strategies which directly confront the tactics of the Christian right and which cover those campaign areas not being targeted by traditional campaign organizers.

"Our strongest belief is that activism needs to be indigenous to the communities affected by it, so we're not going into a community with a fixed agenda," says Sara Pursley. "We do intend to provide support, resources and on-site assistance to local lesbian activists working on the kinds of out, innovative projects that often have few resources and little or no staff," she said. Pursley is

one of LACROP's current organizers, and one of the Lesbian Avengers who worked in Maine.

In Lewiston, LACROP provided support to local lesbians and gay men on projects such as door-to-door outreach, publicized town forums in which local activists spoke to their own communities, set up voter registration and volunteer sign-up drives in local lesbian and gay bars, and led



direct-action protests. LACROP is currently supporting groups of local lesbian activists in Arizona, Oregon and Ohio in a variety of ways, such as assisting in the organization of activist roundtables and workshops, gathering information, helping with mailings, and providing literature.

One issue LACROP stresses in confronting the 1994 initiatives is the importance of working with local lesbian activists in an out campaign.

"The Christian right has used the closet against us, suggesting that we must be ashamed of who we are if we are not willing to be out. It is demoralizing to our communities to play into the white-washed 'no discrimination' campaign strategy in the hope of gathering more votes," says longtime activist Maxine Wolfe.

LACROP is producing an "Out Against the Right" manifesto to be distributed at Stonewall 25 and a handbook which will be available free of cost to local activists. Both will be written by lesbians living in states and cities which faced referenda in 1992 and 1993, and those with initiatives in 1994.

The only projects LACROP says it will not offer support to are those that sanitize or marginalize lesbian and gay communities. The LACROP brochure states that: "Butch, femme and androgynous dykes, lesbians and gay men of color, drag queens, lesbian and gay youth, transsexuals, people with AIDS, and rural lesbians and gay men will not be sacrificed in the name of 'campaign strategy.' We have no desire to win a battle if it means losing the war."

The Christian right is organizing nationally, providing money, literature, training and campaign strategies to local groups and supporters. LACROP, operating on a modest budget, is compiling the manifesto and handbook; offering an exchange of experiences, skills and resources; and helping to create an urban-rural, cross-state network of local activists committed to long-term social change. Pursley explains, "We need to ensure that these referenda struggles push our movement forward, not back—so that whether or not we win in November we know that we have strengthened our skills and courage as individuals, and increased our pride, energy and determination as a community."

Compiled by Michele Kelley, Bob Roehr and Jann Gilbert

cathartic comics I featuring The Brown Bomber and Diva Touché Flambé by Prof. I.B. Gittendowne

