

Gay activists lead King Day event

For the first time ever, two black sexual minority activists helped lead the official commemoration of Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Keith Boykin, executive director of the National Black Gay and

Lesbian Leadership Forum, and award-winning film producer Dr. Sylvia Rhue were grand marshals for the King Day parade held Jan. 20 in Atlanta, Ga.

Boykin and Rhue participated in a march through the downtown and historic areas of the city. They were joined by numerous civil rights activists including Johnetta Cole, president of Spellman College, and Coretta Scott King, founder of the Martin Luther King Center for Nonviolent Social Change. Following the march, Boykin and Rhue spoke to the thousands of people gathered outside the King Center.

Prior to the march, Boykin spoke at the Bayard Rustin Rally, an annual event honoring the legacy of the gay civil rights leader and adviser to King. Rhue and Boykin also hosted a discussion on the black church and homosexuality at the all-male Morehouse College, which included a screening of Rhue's film *All God's Children*.

Gore meets with gay and lesbian leaders

Vice President Al Gore met with seven leaders of the lesbian and gay community in the White House on Jan. 17. Meeting participants included Roberta Achtenberg of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Elizabeth Birch of the Human Rights Campaign, Kerry Lobel of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Martin Ornelas-Quintero of the Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization, and Keith Boykin of the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum.

Among the issues discussed were needle-exchange programs, Medicaid and the narrowly defeated Employment Non-Discrimination Act.

Presbyterians divided by controversy

In July the governing body of the Presbyterian Church USA approved a proposed amendment—known as the fidelity and chastity amendment—to its constitution. The measure allows the ordination of homosexuals as ministers or elders of the church only if they remain celibate and renounce their sexual past, and prohibits sex for unmarried ordained heterosexuals, reports the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

The church's General Assembly voted 313-236 in favor of the proposed amendment, but it must also be approved by a majority of the denomination's 171 regional presbyteries, representing 11,416 churches and 2.7 million members nationwide. So far eight presbyteries have voted for the measure and seven against, including those in Chicago and the San Francisco Bay area. Church officials in Chicago voted 320-167 against the amendment, while in San Francisco it was defeated by a closer margin of 214-179.

The proposed amendment states in part that "persons refusing to repent of any self-acknowledged practice which the confessions call sin shall not be ordained and/or installed as deacons, elders or ministers." The Rev. Eugene TeSelle, a professor of church history and theology in Nashville, Tenn., told the *Chronicle* he fears the language of the amendment will be selectively used to target homosexuality, rather than other sins such as usury and gluttony.

D.C. clinic switches to using oral HIV test

Whitman-Walker Clinic, the primary community-based provider of HIV/AIDS services in the Washington, D.C.-area, began exclusive use of oral testing in place of traditional blood testing for HIV on Feb. 1. The decision came after a month of using both methods together to determine the usefulness, safety and accuracy of the oral test.

The clinic's executive director, Jim Graham, said he feels the new testing method will help "reach people who are averse to blood-based testing with needles."

According to an agency press release, the OraSure System, approved by the Food and Drug Administration in June 1996, tests a sample of oral mucosal transudate rather than saliva, which is easily contaminated. Results of large-scale clinical trials published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* indicate the test has a high accuracy rate. The product was developed and is manufactured by Epiteope Inc.

Murders spark alarm

Although local police are hesitant to claim any connection among three incidents that claimed the lives of five black gay men in the Washington, D.C.-area in the last four months, community members are becoming concerned that a killer may be targeting them.

According to an Associated Press report, the first victim, Anthony Barnes, 42, was last seen alive at Bachelor's Mill, a Capitol Hill club with a black gay clientele, and was found stabbed to death in his home on Oct. 6. Jimmy McGuire, 33, and James Williams, 27, were found shot to death in their suburban home on Dec. 21. John R. Whittington, 41, and Derrick Hilliard, 22, were also shot to death and later found Jan. 5 in a motel room. There was no sign of forced entry at any of the crime scenes.

Patrons of the Bachelor's Mill, 360 and Full House—nightclubs that cater to gay men—recognized photos of the victims posted at the bars by police. The AP report states that while it is clear the five victims frequented the same clubs, police have not established that the men knew each other.

Queer youths organize

Nearly 500 queer youths gathered at a Jan. 15 rally in Sacramento, Calif., organized by the rights group LIFE Lobby to protest discrimination against sexual minorities, support AIDS prevention programs, and reverse the

"historic invisibility of queer youth in civil rights advocacy," reports The Associated Press. Speakers, mostly in their teens and early 20s, told of the harassment they have suffered because of their orientation and urged their compatriots to stand up against bigotry and demand fair treatment and representation.

Two members of the California State Assembly addressed the crowd: Carole Midgen of San Francisco and Sheila Kuehl of Santa Monica. The first openly homosexual members of the state Legislature, the two were given a warm welcome by the rallying young people.

Kuehl is the author of a bill to prohibit discrimination against sexual minority students in public schools, including colleges. She submitted a similar bill that was defeated by the Assembly in 1995.



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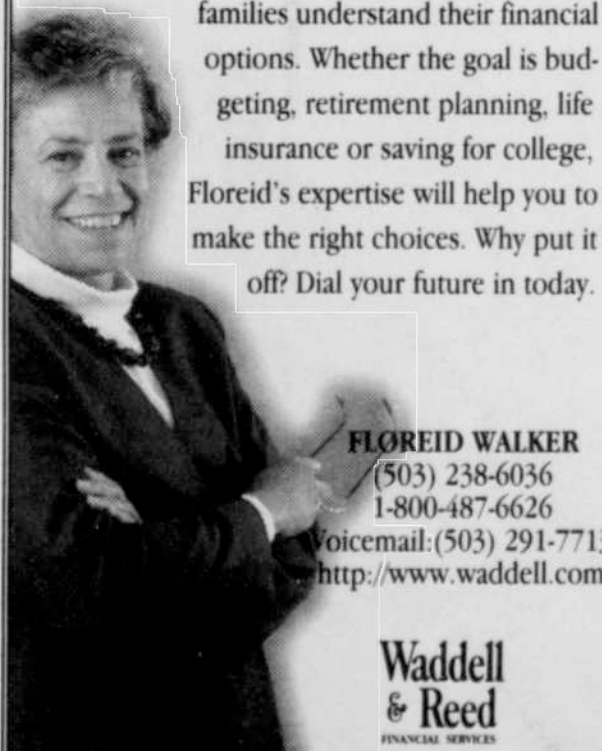
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