

As an African American gay man, I recall an occasion in the late '80s when I was confronted with the attitude of a white gay guy who looked upon the Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame with disdain. The group was planning to hold award ceremonies in Oakland, Calif., where I was living at the time.

The frustrating confrontation with my little naysayer dissolved into the classic "why do black people have to segregate themselves all the time" argument, which I had encountered ever since my college days, when many white students just couldn't understand why so many black students liked eating together in the school's dining room. Considering absolutely no black filmmaker ever had been recognized by the Academy Awards, I didn't think it took a brain surgeon to understand why African Americans in the industry might want to encourage and honor their own. It didn't seem to bother this man that gay people gathered in groups that were strictly "family."

In the early '80s, a group of Portland African American queers created a group called Black Lesbians and Gays United, affectionately nicknamed "Bloo Goo." Although many white queers might have had visions of black people plotting ways to overthrow the white power structure, we delighted in attempting to outcook one another with potluck dishes and spirited games of cards.

Not exactly the kind of revolutionary acts that could cause the downfall of society as we know it. The group produced a couple of

In praise of AMANI

Portland black queer group reactivates and honors its own

columns in the earliest issues of *Just Out* that could be considered "think pieces"; however, it was primarily a social group. It also was involved in a number of queer events for a period of time before people became too busy and, for whatever other reasons, drifted apart.

Easily one of the more colorful characters to bless those gatherings was our late friend Amani Jabari. He was one of those people who could hold you in awe as he spoke passionately to a crowd of people about political injustices, then crack you up in a social setting with his sharp wit and larger-than-life persona.

Unlike Michael Jackson, who had to proclaim himself the "King of Pop," the multitudes bestowed the title of "Queen Reverend Mother" upon Amani. If you met him, you understood why.

When Brother to Brother formed in 1992, many Portland black gay men were able to rekindle much of what Black

Lesbians and Gays United offered.

Great kinship was reawakened during Funk Fest, a fund-raising dance for the No on 13 Campaign that brought together other groups of color including Asian & Pacific Islander Lesbians and Gays, Somos Orgullo Latino/a and the Lesbians of Color Potluck Group.

With a great need to bring back that lovin' feelin', a new group has been meeting regularly during the past three months. It is like a reactivation of Black Lesbians and Gays United but has been renamed The AMANI Group in honor of Jabari, who died of AIDS in 1990.

In an effort to describe the group with the letters AMANI, Afro-queers Mingling And Nurturing Intimately clumsily came to mind. However, in the search for the meaning of the Swahili name, I found out it meant "peace," so the name seems quite appropriate. These recent meetings have revealed how



Amani Jabari

much we, as a minority within a minority, were craving such a gathering. There's the transplant from New York City who has given up his Sunday passion for skiing the slopes of Mount Hood on occasion; the two fascinating native Kenyans; the young lesbian who attended without knowing a soul in attendance—The AMANI Group celebrates diversity on levels that go far beyond race and sexual identity.

In an arena where black queers might be expected to bemoan the racism within the gay community and the homophobia within the black community, these Sunday afternoon gatherings have been full of great food, laughter and soulful connections that seem reminiscent of the black queer communities in larger cities such as Oakland, Atlanta and Washington, D.C.

When we do share our racial experiences, the therapeutic effects are uplifting. Instead of relating the stories bitterly, we seem to take on a "let me tell you how crazy these people were to me last week!" kind of a tone and are able to laugh with each other about it. Not only would we like to invite other black queer folks to contact us for the next potluck date, but we encourage nonblack allies to pass this info on to any lesbian, gay or bisexual African American you think might enjoy such a zany collection of our community's best. ☐

African American bisexuals, lesbians and gays interested in THE AMANI GROUP can call the Brother to Brother hot line at 503-417-7991.

RUPERT KINNARD is the Art Director of *Just Out* and the gleeful host of The AMANI Group.

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