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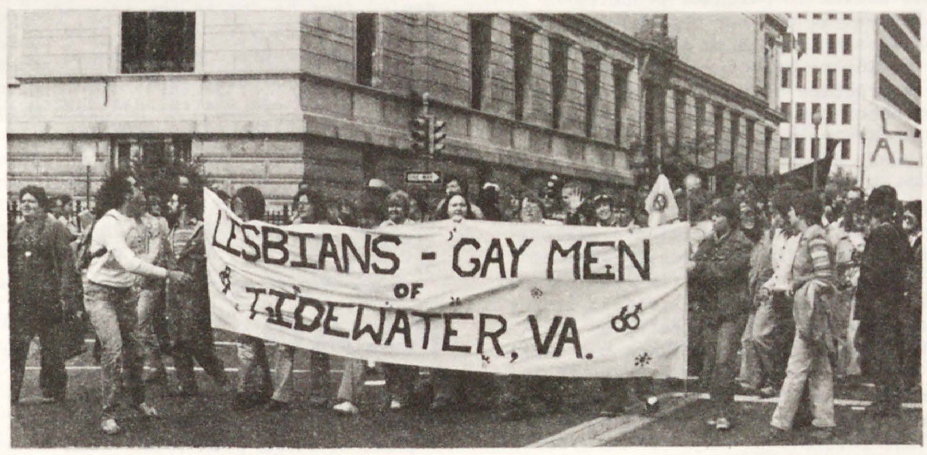
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THE NATIONAL MARCH ON WASHINGTON FOR LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS OCTOBER 14, 1979



On October 14, 1979, at 12 noon began the largest national gay rights demonstration in history. It was the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights and more than 100,000 people marched the two mile route from the mall opposite the Smithsonian down Pennsylvania Avenue past the White House and to the grounds of the Washington Monument for a rally.

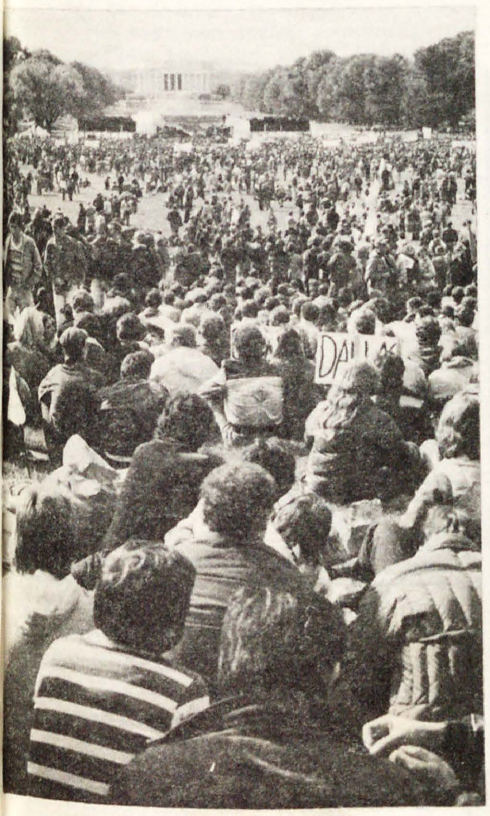
More than a year's planning went into the March, and the stated goal was "an end to all social, economic, judicial, and legal oppression of lesbian and gay people." The March was peaceful and organized and progressed on its route very smoothly. The spectators generally appeared friendly, although opposite the White House there were two men carrying "Repent or Perish" and "Jesus Saves From Hell" signs.

The major controversy of the day seems to be the question of how many participated in the March and rally. Figures quoted in various non-gay newspapers vary from 25,000 to 75,000, as estimated respectively by the U.S. Parks Service and the D.C. Police Department, supposedly using the same procedures for crowd estimation at the same times of the day. The March on Washington Media Committee had two people stationed at 17th and Constitution counting marchers and one stop at the Washington Monmument. Their final estimate was 120,000 people at the march and rally. Several local Tidewater people who have attended other demonstrations (ERA, Vietnam) also concur that the "more than 100,000" estimate is more reasonable.

Groups from all over the country were represented, with especially large state contingents from California, Texas, New York, and Massachusetts. Most major cities were represented with large banners and there was a large variety of groups marching. A small sampling includes Parents of Gays, Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf, Gay Teachers, Gay Youth, Gertrude Stein Democratic Club, Gay Farm Workers, and the Worker's World Party. Religious groups included Affirmation United Methodists, Dignity, Integrity, MCC, Gay Mormons United, Jewish Gays, and Gay People in Christian Service. Campus groups represented Harvard-Radcliffe, University of Iowa, Arizona State University, and Virginia Tech, to name only a few. Local banners confirmed that Lambda Alliance of Williamsburg, and the UUGC and OUR OWN were part of the contingent behind the "Lesbians & Gay Men of Tidewater, Va." banner.

The rally was emceed by comic Robin Tyler and March Transportation office coordinator Ray Hill. Speakers included Lucia Valeska of NGTF, Eleanor Smeal and Arlie Scott of NOW, Rep. Ted Weiss and Rep. Phillip Burton (co-sponsors of national gay rights bill), San Francisco City Supervisor Harry Britt, Troy Perry of MCC, and many other speakers from such diverse groups as parents of gays, gay youth, Native American gays, black gays, and deaf gays. Meg Christian, Holly Near, Tom Robinson and Gotham were among the entertainers.

The speeches during the rally generally expressed feelings of pride, of exuberance, of unity, and of determination. The remarks of Betty Santora of Lesbian Feminist Liberation perhaps encapsulated many of the sentiments when she said, "This historic event has laid the foundation for a national mass movement for lesbian and gay rights...As we move into the next decade, we move with the force and energy of a united people."



ANTI-KLAN COALITION COUNTERS KLAN RALLY

Accompanied by chants of "we say no to racism" and "Ku Klux Klan, scum of the land", the People United for Human Justice (PUHJ) Coalition gathered outside the Virginia Beach Dome Civic center in the early evening hours of October 5. Between 75 and 100 strong, the protestors, from black, labor, socialist, gay rights and civil libertarian organizations, carried signs and picketed in opposition to a Ku Klux Klan "recruiting rally" which took place a few blocks south of the Dome. The Klan's Imperial Wizard, Bill Wilkinson, who had arrived in Virginia Beach on October 2, conducted the recruitment effort.

Lesbians and gay men from all parts of Tidewater joined in the demonstrations, and at one point, it was estimated that as many as 30 demonstrators were members of the gay community. A majority of these were members of the Unitarian Universalist Gay Community (UUGC) of Norfolk. (On September 25 the UUGC formally voted to join the anti-Klan coalition.)

More than 100 state and local policepersons, wearing riot gear and using attack dogs, were stationed in the vicinity of the demonstration and rally areas.

After picketing and chanting for about two hours outside the Dome, various spokespersons for the members of PUHJ made brief talks to the assembled protestors. Speakers included George Banks, President of the Norfolk branch of the NAACP; Daniel Gary, for the Norfolk Coalition for Human Rights; and Phillip Wilayto, for the socialist Workers World Party.

Coalition members then decided to carry their protest to the 7th Street site of the Klan's rally. The group grew in numbers as it marched south along the east side of Atlantic Avenue, accompanied by riot-trained policepersons. A picket line was established on the sidewalk immediately in front of the Ramada Inn and only several hundred feet away from the Ku Klux Klan's rally, which was taking place on the boardwalk.

Across the street from PUHJ demonstrators were the pickets of a group known as the Committee Against Racism (CAR) whose leader had maintained that the Klan should not be allowed to exist and had predicted violence at the rally. (The Norfolk Virginian-Pilot reported that members of CAR did assault two members of the Ku Klux Klan and had taken several of the Klan members' hoods.)

At one point in the demonstration CAR members crossed to the east side of Atlantic Avenue and mingled with the People's Coalition, and together the two groups traded taunts and insults with Klan supporters. After demonstrating for about one hour at 7th Street, the Coalition members marched back to the Dome. KKK supporters followed the coalition pickets throughout their 11-block march during which the two sides exchanged shouted insults. It was during this return march that police appeared to make several arrests of those who were impeding vehicular traffic on Atlantic Avenue, but there were no incidents involving Coalition marchers.

Action by certain PUHJ coalition demonstrators did reveal a lack of sensitivity for gay members of the Coalition. Toward the end of the return march along Atlantic Avenue, some Coalition people people tried to insult Klan supporters by shouting the word, "Faggot", at them. Lesbians and gay men among the anti-Klan demonstrators were visibly disturbed by this insensitive behavior on the part of some of their comrades.

Navy Orders Rallies Off-Limits

The U.S. Navy commands in Tidewater had declared both the Klan rally and the anti-Klan demonstrations off-limits to all Navy personnel. At least four Navy persons were subsequently disciplined as a result of violation of these off-limits orders.

As a result of the Navy's actions the Klan's Imperial Wizard, Bill Wilkinson, has requested the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Virginia to intervene on behalf of the Klan and the right of military personnel to attend the rallies. The ACLU has acknowledged that it

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3rd World λ Conference

We're Gay, We're Proud, We're Third World

by Daniel Gary

Two Englishmen were amongst those who participated in the very first National Conference for Third World Lesbians and Gay Men, which was held at Harambee House, Washington, DC, October 12-15. One of them is writing this article and finds the task not a little arduous. He also realizes the irony of having a white, non-Third World foreigner visiting what was envisaged as a national event and then being asked to write about the experience. How much happier he would be to have had a Third World person from Tidewater write this account. He knows this cannot be, for no Third World persons from the Norfolk area, be they Black, Asian, Latin or Indian, attended the Conference. That fact in itself is a [illegible] of great sadness to him. Considering the size of the black, gay population in this area he had good hopes that someone would be found who was willing and able to go, but it was not to be. (Perhaps we didn't try hard enough to locate people--I know we didn't --I know I didn't.) So, he went on his own, on the Greyhound. And these are his experiences, these are my experiences.

The main purposes of the Conference were: to establish a national political service organization which would reflect the concerns and needs of lesbians and gays who are also racial/ethnic minorities; to establish a communications network by and for the many Third World lesbian/gay organizations which currently exist and which will come about.

Organized primarily by a handful of dedicated people from the National Coalition of Black Gays, the Conference attracted nearly 500 people during its run, people from a wide range of backgrounds and groups. Gay American Indians were in attendance from the West Coast, gay Asians arrived from all over the country. (How many gay Asians are there in Vermont?) A large Latin American contingent was in evidence and it was pleasing to see that the Conference had attracted a group of gay people from Mexico who spoke during the Conference sessions about the terrible oppression that gay people suffer in their country. Naturally, the largest racial group was that of the Blacks, who had travelled to DC in their hundreds to be present at this historic occasion. Mention must also be made of the substantial minority of Whites who were there. The Conference had been arranged so that only Monday's session would be closed to non-Third World people. We were invited to attend all the other sessions and workshops. From talking to other Whites, I gathered we all shared enthusiasm for the Conference, were all pleased to be there, to have been allowed to attend and take part in Conference business.

The Conference activities began on Thursday night with a cultural evening, which took place in the Rahama Ballroom of Harambee House. ('Rahama' is Swahili for 'peace','Harambee', Swahili for 'unity'.) The audience was well entertained and their minds stimulated by such obvious talents as The Club House Dancers, who boogied away much energy with a certain amount of style, singers Castleberry & Dupree, poets Audre Lorde, Ernie Acosta, Octavio Roca, bluesman Blackberri whose song-title 'When Will The Ignorance End?' formed part of the logo of the Conference, and Dolores Berry, whose powerful gospel singing evoked much response, particularly on the Saturday evening during the General Session when she had me in tears, so emotive was her music.

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