

Tongues Untied Stirs Controversy

To Be Shown in Asheville by SALGA

The Cultural Events Committee of the Southern Appalachian Lesbian and Gay Alliance (SALGA) will present the internationally acclaimed documentary, *Tongues Untied*, at a showing to be announced with short notice. Copies of the film are being distributed through Men of All Colors Together to groups interested in showing it. To expedite distribution, groups send the film on to another group wishing to show it, which this makes it difficult to predict just when it will be shown in Asheville. Time and place of the showing will be communicated to local media and by word of mouth.

Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied*, which has been described as an "in your face" award-winning documentary about black gay men, was aired on many PBS stations on July 16. The documentary is a very powerful and provocatively presented film describing the homophobia and racism that confronts black gay men.

North Carolina Public Television did not carry the program. Programming Director Dianne Lucas said the station's decision not to air *Tongues Untied* was made "because of the language and the content, which we felt was too graphic." She said that the decision "was consistent with what we had not aired in the past," and had nothing to do with the fact that it dealt with gay and lesbian issues. Lucas added that WUNC aired the pilot show for "Out in America" on June 26, during Gay Pride Week, and that the station doesn't "have any problem with airing programming about gays and lesbians." WNET in New York, which produces "Out in America," said that "Out in America" will be a series, but that they do not yet have a timetable for it. Lucas indicated that North Carolina Public Television will likely air any future segments.

Of the 284 stations which normally air "Point of View," the series in which *Tongues Untied* was run, 110 stations aired the documentary and 174

did not, according to North Carolina Public Television.

Tongues Untied was shown in one North Carolina city on July 16. An Ad Hoc Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays and the NC Lesbian/Gay Pride Committee sponsored a showing in Durham at the Eno River Unitarian Fellowship. Organizer Mandy Carter said that over 500 people attended, and many had to be turned away.

Tongues Untied has won at least 18 major awards, including Best Documentary at the Berlin International Film Festival, Best Independent/Experimental Work by the Los Angeles Film Critics, and Best Video at the New York Documentary Film Festival. According to the *Washington Blade*, the film has previously aired on public television stations in New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles, with little unfavorable reaction from viewers. *Tongues Untied* includes some racial and homophobic slurs, and scenes showing men nude or embracing, but it is not sexually explicit.

At a showing earlier this year in St. Louis, Director Marlon Riggs told the audience why he thinks it is important for America, and not just gay men and lesbians, to see *Tongues Untied*. As quoted in the *Lesbian and Gay News-Telegraph* (St. Louis, 6/91), Riggs stated, "America is living a lie under a cloak of hysteria and deceit about homosexuality and sexuality in general. We as a nation are refusing to deal with sexuality and it is killing people through AIDS, through dysfunctional families which refuse to accept their children's sexuality. *Tongues Untied* explodes that myth and does show the truth and that we must accept each other for who we are."

If North Carolina Public Television's decision not to show *Tongues Untied* offends you, you can register a complaint by writing to Dianne Lucas, Director of Programming, P.O. Box 14900, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-4900; or call (919)549-7065. ▼

wants to protect their gay and lesbian citizens from violence at the hands of bigots, why not encourage legislation increasing penalties for crimes motivated by hate? Why not at least cooperate with the FBI in collecting statistics on hate crimes against gay men and lesbians? If the state is really concerned about the welfare of its lesbian and gay citizens, why not start by giving them the right to privacy by repealing the Crimes Against Nature Law which says our style of lovemaking is illegal?"

Asked whether this case sets any precedent, Elliot said that since the case was settled out of court, there's no legal precedent. However, a precedent has been set in the state. "I think it learned through this case that it's going to have to treat its citizens equally, or there will be a price to pay."

Special congratulations are owed R.L. Russell, who conceived the idea of SALGA participating in the Adopt-A-Highway program and made application to the Department of Transportation, and Teri Gibbs, former Chair of SALGA, who worked with the ACLU over the past year to ensure SALGA's victory. ▼

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