

The Front Page

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In Review:

The second annual North Carolina Gay & Lesbian Conference, held from March 30 to April 1, attracted nearly 100 people to N.C. State University in Raleigh, from throughout North Carolina, as well as Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. Organized around the theme "Networking for Community Support," the conference offered attendees a wide range of workshops, a keynote speech by a gay Republican, with responses from a gay Democrat and a gay Libertarian, a comedy concert by a lesbian feminist, and several opportunities for social, political, and religious gatherings.

Friday, the first night of the conference, was given over to registration, a workshop on gay transcendental sex, and a coffehouse concert by Michael Mewborn, singing gay men's music, and by Jeanine Normand & Orchestra, an all-women's orchestra.

Republican, Democrat, Libertarian, Leather

Saturday's activities ran from 9:30 AM to midnight. The center of the day's events was a lunchtime keynote address by Frank Ricchiazzi, who chairs the Republican party in California's 55th Assembly district, and is also vice-president of the Log Cabin Club, a southern California organization for gay Republicans. Ricchiazzi described his own experience as an openly gay candidate, his efforts in lobbying for a California non-discrimination law, and his belief that "The Republican party belongs to me, and the Republican party belongs to you, and it does not belong to a Jesse Helms or an H.L. Richardson."

The first response to Ricchiazzi's speech came from Jere Real, a Lynchburg (Va.) College professor and free-lance writer. Real has had several political affiliations, having been a Mississippi Democrat, a member of the Virginia Republican Central Committee, and a Libertarian. He described his skepticism about the possibility of change in the Republican party, citing several examples of blatantly anti-gay behavior.

The Democratic response to both Ricchiazzi and Real was given by Tom Chorlton, who is executive director of the National Association of Gay and Lesbian Democratic Clubs. Chorlton cited reasons for optimism about the gay impact on mainstream politics, and claimed that the South in particular had seen great strides forward in this area.

After the address and responses, a question-and-answer period focussed on the place of leather and drag in the gay political movement. Larry Bush, a Washington-based reporter specializing in gay issues, contributed to this exchange.

The text of the keynote speech, responses, and question-and-answer period appears elsewhere in this issue.

The morning and afternoon sessions offered twenty-two workshops, covering topics like AIDS, the lesbian/gay information gap, gays and alcoholism, leather, gays in a rural environment, gay and lesbian couples, and gay literature, publishing, bookshops, legal issues, and activism.

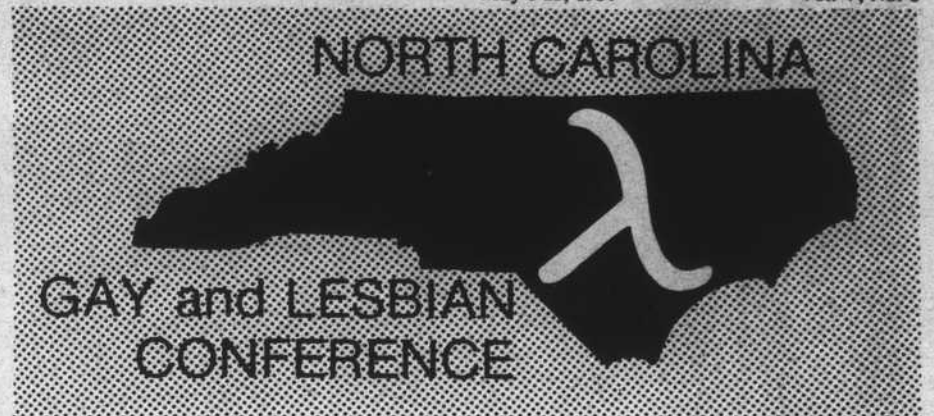
Internalized Oppression And Passionate Indignation

John D'Emilio, gay historian and history professor at UNC-Greensboro, gave a workshop on "The Bonds That Divide Us: Overcoming Internalized Oppression." D'Emilio defined internalized oppression as "taking misinformation about what it means to be gay and internalizing it," and asserted that every gay and lesbian, to some degree, has internalized such self-hatred. He said that we have "the power, ability, and resources to end gay and lesbian oppression," but that the internalized self-oppression has created divisiveness, which prevents us from achieving that goal. Because we hate ourselves, we hate other gays, and therefore cannot achieve the unity that is necessary to victory. The solution, D'Emilio said, is to arrive at "a passionate indignation at the injustice that we see around us."

After this introduction, D'Emilio called on volunteers to tell their own life stories in order to explore the forms that internalized oppression can take.

All The News That Fits Their Image

Larry Bush, in a workshop on "Gays in the Media," offered evidence that gays have no control over what gay-related events are considered to be news. He cited several cases of the media's tendencies toward silence, ignorance, or sensationalism regarding gay news. For an example of ignorance: when George Moscone and Harvey Milk were killed in San Francisco, the Washington Post reporter said that it was a "mystery" why Milk was a victim; it took the Post 11 months to solve the mystery. For silence: in 1980, when



the Kennedy and Carter platform representatives called a joint press conference to announce agreement on a single issue — their endorsement of the gay rights plank — the news was not carried by ABC, NBC, CBS, the Washington Post, the New York Times, or the Los Angeles Times. For sensationalism and trivializing: when six San Francisco pizza parlor workers formed a union to get certain benefits — among them a Gay Pride holiday — all the above-mentioned media carried the story.

Bush outlined three main obstacles to decent coverage of gay stories. The first is the value judgment by editors, who prefer to print stories that underline mainstream American values. This means that stories about individual gays who show rugged individualism can be printed, but that stories about gay groups don't fit the desired pattern. Gay groups display "social change as confrontation," which is not among the mainstream American values, and therefore do not get covered. "The public refuses to deal with us as a community," Bush asserted. It can grant the justice of individual gay rights, but "refuses to acknowledge that we must unite and organize for those rights."

The second obstacle is the bias of reporters, who never explore gay stories, but simply repeat, without any reportorial skepticism, what the police reports say. As a result, in many cities the only gay stories reported are tea-room busts. Often, male reporters refuse to acquire expertise on gay issues, for fear that others will think they are gay. As Bush said, "It's the playground game of 'If you know so much, you must be one'." Washington Post editor Ben Bradlee told Bush that he would never assign the same reporter to do a series of gay stories, because he wouldn't want the reporter to think that he thought he was gay.

The third obstacle is the institutional bias against hiring gay reporters. Bush said that

there were only two openly gay reporters for the major media organizations. He referred to the Associated Press's recent refusal to protect gay employees: "They said that, if they protected gays, they would need to protect child molestors, and that they might have a drag queen representing the AP at the White House."

Taking Over The Republican Party

After his keynote address, Frank Ricchiazzi turned to more pragmatic issues in his workshop on "Republican Party Politics and Gay People." His main point was that, in places where Republicans were in a minority (like California and North Carolina), gay Republicans stood a better chance of making their presence felt within the party.

In California, he said, "The Log Cabin Club puts up its candidates where they know Republicans can't win. The Moral Majority puts up its candidates where they know Republicans can't lose. Who has the balls?"

The point in running a losing race is that all candidates, winners or losers, gain positions of power within the party. In this way, gays can become entrenched and build up grass-root support for later races. Then, when they can put forth a viable, openly gay Republican candidate, gay Democrats will vote for the candidate as well.

Ricchiazzi noted that, in California, the Republicans can carry the national elections, but can't win office at a level lower than senator: "The Republican party has gone computer, it's gone after national elections, and has let the precincts falter." His solution is to start rebuilding at the grass-root level, for Republicans in general, and specifically for gay Republicans.

Ricchiazzi also insisted that the Republican party does hold something for gays: "The Republicans will never have an anti-gay

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