

BAGMAL NEWSLETTER

BOSTON ASIAN GAY MEN AND LESBIANS

November 1987

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Photos by Jin Gui and friends

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March on Washington

A report with some personal observations by S.H.



Organizing for the March on Washington had been going on for a long time before the actual event. Jack Lo, co-chair of BAGMAL's Steering Committee was active networking with other gay Asian groups on both coasts while locally encouraging participation from Boston gay and lesbian Asians. As a result it was not surprising that Boston produced the largest Asian contingent from outside the Washington area.

Asian Lesbian Slide Show

Asian lesbians from both coasts were already busy on Saturday afternoon presenting slide shows at the George Washington University. Two slide programs dealing with the herstory and culture of Asian lesbians were exhibited. One of the shows by Trinity Ordone had made the rounds at the First Asian/Pacific Lesbian and Gay Conference in LA in July as well as the Asian/Pacific Lesbian Retreat in Sonoma in May.

(continued next page)

Calendar

Sunday, 15 November. 12 p.m.

Wonton party. Come learn how to make wonton—it's a group activity! We make it and then we eat it. Everything provided except alcohol (BYOB if you want). \$6, including \$1 social "tax." Please call Jack Lo (547-8647) seven days in advance if you will be attending so that he will know how much to get. At Timmy Pham's, 54 Gorham Street, apt 1, Somerville, 628-9205. (Take the red line to Davis Square, go out the Holland Street exit, turn left, walk five blocks, turn left on Gorham Street.) All welcome.

Sunday, 6 December. 1 p.m.

Potluck and discussion meeting. Topic to be announced. At Tony Shum's, 62 Boylston Street, apt M6, Boston (diagonally opposite the Common), 542-8514. For Asians.

Corrections

BAGMAL Newsletter October 1987 printed a Book Review in Chinese on pages 9 and 10. Because this was not listed in the Table of Contents non-Chinese literate readers might not have realized what the 2 pages contained. We apologise for this. The two books reviewed were *Ba Wang Bie Ji* and *Qing She* (The Green Snake), both novels by Hong Kong author Li Bihua.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON REPORT

(continued from page 1)

Washington Bridge Party

A Saturday night (Oct 10) dinner organized by the Washington Bridge for Asian participants at the March was the first occasion for many gay and lesbian Asians to meet one another. Washington Bridge is the local organization for gay Asians and their friends. The Bridgettes brought the food and collected money from their members. The out-of-towners got in free. The location was a rented party room at a hotel up from Dupont Circle, the gay ghetto in D.C. Anyone in the city that day would have already sensed the palpable excitement in the air - an excitement created by the large numbers of gay men and lesbians thronging the subway, the streets, the monuments. At Dupont Circle and down Connecticut Avenue the crowds of gay and lesbian people had taken over the sidewalk - some were window-shopping, others looked for dinner or passed out and received pamphlets, petitions, march information; many merely cruised, enjoying the carnival atmosphere. At the Washington Bridge party the large numbers of Asian faces was an added welcome. In addition to the large turnout by Washington and Boston participants, many came from Philadelphia, New York City, Chicago, LA and San Francisco. Among the groups represented and who introduced themselves were Asians and Friends of Chicago, Asian and Friends of New York, Asian Lesbians of the East Coast, Asian Women from CA who publish Phoenix Rising and a new group just forming in Philadelphia.

Reminiscences of the First March on Washington, 1979

I spotted Don Kao and Fernando Chang-Muy. We had met at the first march in 1979. Fernando had brought along our banner from that first march. We are Asian, Gay and Proud

- dark blue letters on a white background. The words were direct and the design plain but they expressed our emotions accurately. For us in October 1979 it was an even greater revelation to meet up with gay Asians from outside our local area. BAGMAL then was only a few months old. The only Asian gay man that was prominent nationally was Dan Tsang, then living in Philadelphia and publishing the radical journal, *Gay Insurgent*. I met him for the first time in Washington and also Richard Fung who had gone on to found the Gay Asians of Toronto shortly thereafter. These were spontaneous, personal rapport formed in a short time but which developed into informal networks which we used to keep each other informed of developments within our local areas. It was gratifying to see that eight years later viable, organized communities have formed in the major cities. Undoubtedly these were very different organizations gathered there that night - some were exclusively male or female, some had more Asian members, others more friends. Some emphasized consciousness raising while others stressed dating. Still the bottom line is that an Asian gay man or lesbian coming out in these cities now has a place where the support of numbers and community can be found, where negation of one's racial identity need not be part of accepting that one is gay or lesbian.

A National Conference in the Making

Aside from the excitement of meeting so many from around the country the major impetus was on setting up a national network, which had been one of the concrete achievements of the first march. Beginning with the initial planning for that evening's gathering energy had been brewing for a larger and more focused meeting of gay and lesbian Asians. With the far-flung bodies gathered in one place that night the networking for such an

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March On Washington-Another View Point

by Andrew Li

There is much that was Wonderful about the march on Washington. It was exhilarating to be among the huge numbers of gay people and to meet gay Asians from around the country and to march together. But there were some things that I found very upsetting, things to do with being Asian in the gay community.

What happened is that we got mixed up with a bunch of white people. I have nothing against white people (some of my best friends...); I do, however, have a great deal against white people who are racist. Well, what happened exactly? *Washington Bridge*, a group of gay Asian and non-Asian men in Washington, hosted a party for out-of-town Asians coming to the march. This was a gracious gesture, which I appreciate all the more because it allowed us to meet up with other Asians from out of town.

But the atmosphere was that of a meat market—a market of Asian meat for inspection by whites. Why else would there be pinups of Asian men on the walls? A white man bumped into me and said “gomennasai” (Japanese for “excuse me”). I am not Japanese, and my native language is English. It is racist to equate all Asians with Japanese (“they all look the same, I can’t tell them apart”) or to assume that I cannot speak English.

The next day, at the rally and march, we had a couple of dozen Asians behind our banner (“we are Asians, gay and proud”) as well as several white men from the Washington group. I had been hoping for an Asian contingent. After all, the point of having an Asian contingent is that Asians be together and draw strength from our commonality. So I was annoyed that our Asian contingent should have so many non-Asians in it. They wanted to hold the banner



Andrew Li and Don Kao at the March. Don's sign says "Gay Asian"

and march in front. They wore “Asian, gay, and proud” sweatshirt. They chanted “We’re Asian, gay, and proud.”

So what’s wrong with solidarity from non-Asians? Keep reading; it gets worse. As we were marching and receiving applause from onlookers, one of the white men said: “Clap loud, because we have a lot of good-looking Asians here.” We were nothing but walking, talking pinups to him. This kind of solidarity I don’t want.

I am not the only one in *BAGMAL* who was upset by all this. Fernando Chang-Muy of Philadelphia and Don Kao of New York felt exactly as I did. The three of us had some very good discussions about this. As a matter of fact, we have been motivated to set up some kind of regional group or network of gay Asians. This is the sil-

Documents from the First Lesbian and Gay March on Washington, Oct 14, 1979 and the National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference Washington DC - Oct 12-15 1979

The first National Third World Conference and the first March on Washington by lesbians and gay men were organized to coincide with one another the weekend of October 13-14 1979. Both events drew large and enthusiastic participation. While we celebrate our success at the March on Washington this year the historical moment represented by these two earlier events should be remembered. We reprint two speeches by Asian participants from October 1979 which captured much of the excitement of the period. These speeches are reprinted with kind permission of Dan Tsang from *Gay Insurgent* No. 6 Summer 1980.

An Asian Lesbian's Address before the Washington Monument

Sisters and Brothers,

I am here to represent the Lesbian and Gay Asian Collective, which was formed at the first National Third World Lesbian and Gay Conference (Oct 12-15, 1979) this weekend. I don't know if any non-Asian American lesbians and gay men know how important this moment is. This is the first time in the history of the American hemisphere that Asian American lesbians and gay men have joined to

form a network of support, of, by and for Asian American lesbians and gay men. I must interject a little comment here. I am being careful to use the phrase Asian American because we are not hyphenated Americans nor are we always foreign born women and men from Asia. We have been in this country for over 150 years! We live in *Asian America*. It is a statement of our experiences and a statement of racism in America.

I am in awe of this moment and what it can mean for Asian American lesbians and gay men. America has called us the "model minority" and has claimed we are 200% Americans. The truth is that because we are less than 1/2 of 1% of the population of this country and because of the lies that the American media perpetrates about us, we have difficulty in impacting even Third World lesbians and gay men. We are called the model minority, the quiet, passive,

exoticotics with the slanted cunt to match our "slanted" eyes or the small dick to match our small size. But we are not.

For years Asian Americans have organized against our oppression. We protested and were lynched, deported and put into concentration camps during World War II. We must not forget that the United States of America has bombed, napalmed and colonized Asian countries for decades. Thus it was possible for America to bomb Hiroshima and Nagasaki and to continue to economically colonize and rape Asian countries. It could rape and murder Vietnamese women, children and men then claim that "Asians don't value human life."

I am an Asian American woman, a mother and a lesbian. Because these things are difficult to put into a neat package, because I am genuinely different - I know that I live in the face of this country's determination to destroy me, to negate me, to render me invisible. And the reality is that non-Asian Americans are ignorant of our existence. We share the same problems that other Third World lesbians and gay men share. Because of fear of deportation, because of Asian American dependence on our families and Asian American communities for support, it is very difficult for us to be out of the closet. But we need to come out of the closet for not to do so would be living a lie, and the great lie, which is America, can use that weakness not only to destroy Asian American lesbians and gay men, but also our Third World lesbian and gay sisters and brothers.

We have a right to our sexuality, to our love and to our racial identities. This is something that sets us apart from and challenges white lesbians and gay men. We demand that you white lesbians and gay men begin to think of how you repress and oppress your Asian American lesbian and gay sisters and brothers. You share oppression from homophobia with us but unless you begin to address your white-skin privilege and actively support Asian American lesbians and gay men, you will not have our support and you would lose out on a chance to build the kind of world we all need, to live decently and lead full productive lives.

We must realize the capitalist system uses not just sexual preference but race and class as well to divide us. To our Third World sisters and brothers, gay and straight, I would like to say we all share the same oppression as Third World people, and for that reason we must stand together or be hanged separately by what Audre Lorde calls the "noose of conformity".

To our closeted Asian American lesbians and gay men, I would like you to consider how we become accomplices to our own sexual and racial oppression when we fail to claim our true identities.

I have a three year old daughter and any risk that I must take to build a free future for myself and my daughter is worth it. It is as concrete and as abstract as that.

MORE DOCUMENTS FROM OCTOBER 1979

Who's the Barbarian? An Asian American Lesbian speaks before the Third World Conference for Lesbians and Gay Men (Oct 12-15, 1979) by Tana Loy

Sisters and brothers, you know the lesbian and gay Asians who are here have had a bit of a struggle and you know you have to fight, you have to fight inside yourself for what you think is going on; try to figure out what really is going on. We had some difficult feelings amongst ourselves in the sense of where we felt left out. But we want to say right now that the strength that comes from being here and being out with you is the thing that is keeping us in here and keeping us thinking about unity.

Sisters and brothers, and sisters and brothers in ways that only we who are Third World lesbians and gay men can know, because we live it every day of our lives. Because there're attacks, there're attacks all around, and it may mean we don't have childcare, it may mean that we get lousy medical care, or no medical care; or that we don't have jobs or that we go to bed hungry.

My name is Tana... and I feel especially fortunate to share with you what happened to us at the Asian American caucus, what happened to us personally and politically.

Somehow we felt - immediately and immensely in tune with each other. Because whatever the reason - and there are many, many reasons - we run from each other: because of the pain; because of the anguish; because of the deep self-hatred of racism in this country. It's a survival response, because for decades of imperialist wars we have been atomic bombed;

we have been napalmed; we have been raped; we have been driven to suicide - and we built this country from east to west. And we have been called the barbarian! Who's the barbarian?

It is something extremely important, and that is, that in the context of this history making conference, we Asians, gay Asians - and that means Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Indonesian, Vietnamese, whether we're from Guam, Korea, Malaysia, whether we're Indian, whether we're Pakistani - we have for the first time, for many of us, with open hearts and minds, run toward each other.

And we all know that for a Third World lesbian and gay man, to do something that personal is highly political. It is very much as though we had been in a wasteland and we were thirsty, and someone had - another Asian - had a drop of water, and we saw that and we wanted it, and we couldn't take it. But today we are going toward each other and we are sharing our strength with each other, and with all our brothers and sisters here today.

You know something? You know we're not that quiet and reserved

Asian. We don't clean those clothes every day 24 hours a day. We're not that "model minority" - oh, no, oh, we're silent, but why are we silent? We're silent, even from each other, by the

racism and the sexism that exists in this country, that manifests itself in the fears and frustrations that keep our own people in the closet as Asians and as lesbians and gay men.

Many of us cannot even come out for fear of deportation; and yet I know there are many Asians who are going to be out on that street tomorrow, knowing that's a reality in our lives.

In our short time together, a support system has evolved from which we have drawn our strength, from each other and from all of you here. And out of this strength we have collectively decided to march together as Asians.

We come to you to share our strength, as we have come out strong with each other. We express our strength and power with all of you; with all of us. Because when we are out tomorrow it will be the Third World lesbian and gay people, side by side, as one voice, to say no to racism, no to sexism, and no to anti-gay bigotry. And you can be sure, you can be damned sure, that those who oppress us; will hear us, and they will hear us loud and clear.



Jing at the Asian Contingent table at the Morning Rally, October 11 1987

News Notes

Asian American gay people interviewed in Chinese-language newspaper

The Phoenix, a publication of GLSU, University of California, Irvine reports that *Centre Daily News*, a mass circulation Chinese-language newspaper has published the first interview with openly gay Asian Americans. Those interviewed were Merle Woo, an Asian American Studies instructor at UC Berkeley and Daniel Tsang, a librarian at UC Irvine. Woo and Tsang discussed the need for AIDS education among gay and lesbian Asians and Asian Americans, the prevalence of Chinese homosexuality throughout history and the difficulty of coming out as an openly gay or lesbian person. The interview was conducted at the International Lesbian and Gay People of Color Conference in LA last November and appeared in the paper's Feb. 26 1987 issue. *Centre Daily News* is published in Monterey Park with other editions in Houston, Texas and New York City.

Writings by Asian/Pacific Lesbians

Between the lines, an anthology by *Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, CA* is a lively collection of essays, poems, photographs and personal testimonials edited by C. Chung, A. Kim and A. K. Lemeszewski. Also included in this 56-page anthology are essays on South Asian and Japanese lesbianism as well as a bibliography of materials of related interest. A welcome addition to the body of creative output by and for gay and lesbian Asians, *Between the Lines* costs \$4.95 and is available at Glad Day Bookshop, 43 Winter St. Boston MA 02108.

Passing through

BAGMAL played host to David Moy, president of *Asian and Friends Chicago* who was on a visit following the March on Washington.

Also in town during the first week of November were Christy Chung and Aly Kim who were distributing and publicising their book *Between the Lines* on the East Coast.

Announcement

Gay and Lesbian Advocates and Defenders (GLAD), New England's Boston-based public interest law foundation is seeking applications for its Board of Directors. Board members have decision-making authority for the organization and take a primary role in fund-raising and setting policy and direction. GLAD has an active case load which currently includes the Massachusetts foster care policy suit against the Department of Social Services and an AIDS Law Project which deals with discrimination against gay people who have AIDS or are thought to carry the HI-virus. *BAGMAL's* Siong-huat Chua is a GLAD Board member. He encourages other Asian gay men and lesbians to apply to be part of the Board. A background in law is not a requirement, only a commitment to work to further the organization's goals. Please call GLAD 426-1350 for information or application forms. Also S.H. Chua 536-9309.

MARCH ON WASHINGTON REPORT (continued from page 2)

event got underway. There is every likelihood for a national conference in the near future.

People of Color Rally

Unfortunately I missed the People of Color rally the next morning - Sunday October 12. It was slated to begin at 9 o'clock Sunday morning but on arriving on time and without breakfast I found large contingents already setting up and preparing for the march at noon, but no People of Color rally on the stage set up at the Ellipse, a park a few blocks from the White House. For an excellent account of the rally I refer you to the *Gay Community News* Volume 15, No. 14 October 18-24 1987. Speaking at the rally according to GCN was Tana Loy described as an Asian-American nurse who works with people with AIDS in New York City. One believes this is the same Tana who spoke at the first Third World Conference of Lesbian and Gay Men in conjunction with the First March on Washington in October 1979 (see reprint of her 1979 speech in this issue). Any readers who can confirm this please get in touch with the newsletter staff. The reason for the separate morning rally was apparently the reluctance of March organizers to schedule more speakers who are both gay and of color at the main rally in the afternoon. I recall the last-minute jockeying for an Asian speaker at the first rally in 1979. Many white people in the audience thought her speech too negative, that it did not show solidarity. (It is reprinted in this issue.)

The March at Noon

The march itself began punctually at noon. The Asian contingent with its "We are Asians - Gay and Proud" banner stepped out from the Ellipse as part of the National People of Color

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MARCH ON WASHINGTON REPORT (continued from page 6)

Caucus. Marching behind us were the Asian Lesbians of the East Coast with their own banner. Among us marched many other groups of people of color.

"Say it Clear, Say it Loud, We are Asian, Gay and Proud" was the chant of the day as we wound our way past solid walls of supporters and onlookers cheering us on all along the route past the White House and government buildings to the Mall in front of Capitol Hill.

A Digression on Numbers

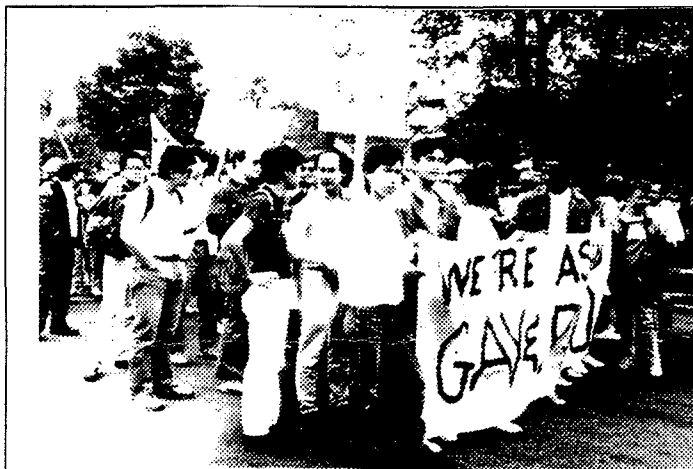
March organizers estimated the participants at between 500,000 to 800,000 which makes this one of the largest demonstrations to hit Washington. In comparison the number of Asian marchers seem small. Yet too often we fall into the trap of the numbers game - measuring our strength and our worth solely in terms of body count. We accept without thinking the notion that gay people constitute a minority and that people of color are a "minority within a minority". The categories - gay/straight, white/not white seem static, almost natural as if they will always be with us. If you are not white you will always be a minority. If you are not straight you will always be in the minority. We forget that the categories that divide people into majority and minority are in themselves manufactured ones and can be eradicated. Early gay liberation sought to liberate the homosexual potential in everybody. Gay liberationists did not merely want equal rights between two mutually exclusive and separate categories - gay and straight. Instead they looked forward to a time when whether one has sex with the same or opposite gender would not be such a big deal, when the whole division between homo and hetero would cease to make a lot of sense. Simi-

larly people of color must perform an equally difficult balancing act. On the one hand we must always insist that the gay movement acknowledge and include the participation of people of color. Yet while emphasizing

everyone has forgotten that it's an issue. Then we will begin to be complete".

The Rally

The rally began even while the marchers were still filing into the Mall. They would in fact continue to do so for the next few hours given the size of the demonstration. As rallies go this was not to be more or less inspiring than most others. In fact once at the rally site I had begun to feel that the weekend's excitement was over. The rally speeches, the



The March about to set off

ing race we must at the same time work towards a redefinition of the gay community away from race - so that race will not be the primary means of dividing and classifying people. Only if we insist that white/non-white is not an acceptable way to divide the community into majority/ minority can we truly be on our way to eradicating racism.

The Quilt

As the March approached the rally site on the Mall I wandered off to view the Quilt. Made up of rectangular panels each commemorating a person who had died of AIDS and made by friends and relatives of the deceased, the quilt stretched the length and breadth of several fields, a solemn and painful reminder of the emotional toll the disease had exacted. Under the low and cloud-laden sky and with the the Washington monument as backdrop the panels resembled cemetery plots round which many strolled barely suppressing tears of remembrance and grief. I passed the panel dedicated to Carl Wittman, an early gay liberationist whose "Gay Manifesto" had defiantly declared: "We'll be gay until

self-congratulatory messages - they seemed mere posturings for the media which we hope will convey some of what we represent to the larger public out there. The concrete achievements of the March - the grassroots organizing the networking, meeting one another at Washington - these had happened already. We did these activities for ourselves - we learnt how to organize, we showed that we could organize and at the March itself we showed our strength, our unity, our numbers. We are better prepared now for future marches, future organizing. As the only gay speaker of color, Barbara Smith said in her speech, "The reason I have survived I owe to all of you gay and lesbian people out there, and especially the lesbians and gay men of color." It is this strength that we give one another through organization, community and support such as at the March that will hold us together as a movement in the many struggles and marches that inevitably lie ahead.

