RACIAL DEPICTIONS IN THE LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL MEDIA

A Report by the
Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Advisory Committee
Human Rights Commission
March 16, 1993

1983 COMMISSION HEARINGS

In response to requests from individuals and organizations in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community, the San Francisco Human Rights Commission held hearings in November, 1983, on allegations of racism within the community. The hearing found that Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color were under-represented in employment and other sectors of the community. Public testimony at the hearings supported allegations of discrimination in employment, denial of service in public accommodations, and marginalization and stereotypical portrayals in the media. The final report from the hearings noted specifically that "few Lesbian/Gay newspapers employ people of color or deal with issues of racism or concerns of people of color."

1983 HEARING RECOMMENDATIONS

In its findings the Commission recommended in 1983 that the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media "hire people of color, include articles by and for people of color, not accept racist advertisements, reduce ad rates for businesses practicing affirmative action, and publish a yearly list of these businesses." As of the fall of 1992, it appears that little progress has been made in the implementation of these recommendations.

UNDERREPRESENTATION OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES IN THE MEDIA

As a result of concerns expressed by individuals and organizations within the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community, the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual Advisory Committee of the Human Rights Commission began a process of reviewing the issue of racism in the community in the spring of 1991. The Committee decided to initially focus on the portrayal of people of color in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual print media. Subsequent actions will include a reexamination of employment practices, public accommodations, and access to appropriate and culturally sensitive social services.
The underrepresentation of people of color is not unique to the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media. A report released in December, 1991, What Color is the News: An Ethnic Content Analysis of the Bay Area News Media, found that:

People of color comprised 19 percent of the news sources on television, and 20 percent in newspapers. However, they account for 40 percent of the population in San Francisco and Oakland, according to the 1990 census. Newspaper photographs were more representative of the general population. Thirty-four percent of individuals shown in photographs were people of color.

Lastly, most of the stories about people of color were reported by journalists of color. The relationship between African American reporters and the use of news sources from communities of color was particularly strong. Seventy-four percent of the black television reporters used one or more persons of color as news sources for their stories, as did 90 percent of the African American newspaper reporters.

In its examination the Committee found a severe underrepresentation of people of color among the reporters employed, news sources utilized, and stories covered by the San Francisco Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual print media. This underrepresentation was particularly acute in the photographic portrayal of people of color in the print media. As noted below, one local paper featured an article on elected Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community leaders from across the country. The article included photographs of over sixteen elected officials from various states. Noticeably absent were the photographs of any elected officials who are people of color, despite the fact that African American Lesbians and Gays serve on City Council, and other elected positions, from Albany, New York, to Seattle, Washington.

The underrepresentation of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color operates as a barrier to reducing and eliminating discrimination within, and against, the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community. The elimination of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender, race and disability requires a commitment to eliminating the barriers and stereotypes that perpetuate discrimination. Sadly, almost ten years after its initial examination of the portrayal of people of color in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media, the Commission finds that there is still much work to be done.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

In order to assess the portrayal of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people and communities of color, the members of the Commission’s Lesbian/Gay Advisory Committee reviewed 15 randomly selected issues of the Bay Area Reporter and the San Francisco Sentinel during the period January 23, 1992, and July 16, 1992. The San Francisco Bay Times was initially included in the study, but was subsequently dropped as a result of changes in
their format; the Bay Times will be included in any further actions by the Commission. The Commission may possibly expand the review to include other media, such as the Bay Guardian and the San Francisco Weekly.

The population of San Francisco is one of the most complex and diverse populations found among American cities. The 1990 census found that the population of San Francisco is 53.6 White, 10.9 percent African American, 13.9 percent Hispanic, 29 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, .5 percent American Indian and 5.9 percent other. The Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community of San Francisco reflects this diversity.

REVIEW FINDINGS

The Commission's examination of the portrayal of people of color in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community found that these groups are significantly underrepresented in most aspects of the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media. This includes employment, coverage of story items, and photographic portrayals. In addition, stereotypical and negative images of people of color were frequently found in the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media.

Specifically, the study found that few persons of color are employed by the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media. This underrepresentation includes reporters, editors, photographers and other staff. The significance of this finding is reflected in the fact that similar studies of the media conducted in the Bay Area, and other parts of the country, have found that reporters of color are more likely to cover specific issues of communities of color and to rely on news sources within communities of color.

The period of review, January 23, 1992, through July 16, 1992, included a number of events of relevance to Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual communities of color. These included the National Lesbian/Gay African American Leadership Conference; the social unrest following the verdict in the trial of the officers accused of assaulting Rodney King, including demonstrations in San Francisco; the appointment and removal of Chief Hongisto; the Presidential primaries; the Lesbian/Gay Freedom Day Parade; and, press coverage regarding the HIV status of Magic Johnson.

The Committee's review indicates that African Americans, and other Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color, were more likely to appear in the entertainment section than in news or feature articles. Of those photographs depicting people of color, 38.5 percent appeared in the Arts & Entertainment section of the Sentinel, 24 percent appeared in the Feature/News section; 43.7 percent appeared in the Arts & Entertainment section of the B.A.R., 32.3 percent appeared in the Feature/News section.
As part of its Parade coverage, one local paper featured an article on elected Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community leaders from across the country. The article included photographs of over sixteen elected officials from various states. Noticeably absent were the photographs of any elected officials of color, despite the fact that African American Lesbians and Gays serve on City Council, and other elected positions, from Albany, New York, to Seattle, Washington. This illustrates the lack of visibility for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color in the media. In addition, this serves to reinforce the misconception that the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community is primarily white.
QUANTITATIVE REVIEW FINDINGS

I. AVERAGE NUMBER OF PHOTOS PER ISSUE:
   (A) SENTINEL: 41.5 (39.4 WITHOUT PARADE ISSUE)
   (B) B.A.R.: 57.0 (48.5 WITHOUT PARADE ISSUE)

II. NUMBER OF PHOTOS THAT INCLUDED MINORITIES:

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<td>LATINO/A</td>
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<td>22</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2.4%</td>
<td>10</td>
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III. SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY POPULATION (1990 CENSUS)

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<td>LATINO/A</td>
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IV. SECTION PHOTOS APPEARED:

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<td>Bay Area Reporter</td>
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<td>---------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>REGULAR COLUMN</td>
<td>13</td>
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<td>1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.0%</td>
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MEDICAL REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee has made the following recommendations to assist the media in addressing the issue of accurate and adequate representation of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color. The Committee plans to schedule meetings with the publishers and editors of the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media to discuss these recommendations.

1) Increase the number of reporters of color working for the Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual media. This would include full-time reporters, photographers, editors and other staff; free lance reporters and writers working on assignment; and editorial and guest opinion writers.

2) Consider Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual communities of color as a separate and distinct category for reporting, such as sports, leather, women and other aspects of the community. This could include a regular column or feature on Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color.

3) Become familiar with issues of concern to Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual communities of color, such as carding, immigration, culturally and linguistically appropriate services, and community organizing. Also become sensitive to issues that affect the wider communities of color, as these communities are often presented as monolithic blocks.

4) Develop a diverse set of sources for reporting news and soliciting community reaction to news. The Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community is not a monolithic block, neither are communities of color.

5) Avoid the marginalization of Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual communit of color. This is particularly apparent in stories that pit the "Black/Asian/Latino/Native American community" versus the "Gay Community."

6) Recognize and avoid racial and ethnic slurs and stereotypical portrayals. The media should develop policies that identify stereotypical and derogatory terminology. Such guidelines are available from minority journalist associations and other sources.

7) Portray Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual people of color from their own perspectives and within their own historical context. For example, when presenting a story on the developing Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual community in Southeast Asia, or other countries, the stories tend to focus on how American tourists can make sexual contacts, as opposed to the development of a contemporary lesbian/Gay/Bisexual rights movement within a particular historical and cultural context.

8) While it may be appropriate to exaggerate individual physical features for the purpose of caricature in editorial cartoons, the use of stereotypical images to portray
entire communities is insulting and should be avoided. The effect of these portrayals is to deny the diversity of communities and to perpetuate negative and stereotypical images. This practice should be condemned whether the stereotypes be on the basis of sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, religion, disability, age, or gender.

9) An internal mechanism should be specified for responding to and periodically reviewing allegations of stereotypical or derogatory portrayals of people of color.

10) Training opportunities should be provided to reporters, editors, and other staff, on issues of concern to Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual communities of color. This could include meetings with appropriate community based organizations.

11) Calendar sections should be reviewed to ensure that they fully reflect the diversity of the community. Organizations of color frequently report that their listings and meeting notices are not reported in the media.
APPENDIX A

POSITIVE EXAMPLES OF THE REPRESENTATION OF

PEOPLE OF COLOR

IN THE LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL PRINT MEDIA
This regular column generally includes the perspectives (and photographs) of people of color.

Q: Which presidential candidate are you supporting?

The only candidate who has demonstrated a concern for and commitment to the gay community is Jerry Brown.
—Mitch, 33

Between the three (Bush, Clinton and Brown), I’ll take Bush. If given another four years, he might do a better job. At least he talks about AIDS.
—Lawrence, 27

I’m definitely supporting Jerry Brown. He’s willing to get in there and stir things up and debunk the status quo. He’s got the guts to get in there and say what’s on his mind.
—Noelle, 30

Bush is out! I’m undecided now, because Tsongas is out of the race. I’ll have to think about it.
—Tony, 27

I’m for whoever is ready to give jobs to people.
—Germain, 21.
Talented Trio
Three Latina Lesbians Talk About Their Lives and Work

by Mónica Hernández

The Latino/a lesbian and gay community is blessed with a tremendously diverse fountain of talent. Circumstances ranging from lack of personal and community resources to the imposition of stereotypical definitions of what constitutes Latino/a and lesbian/gay identity or art have obscured the work of many artists.

The following are profiles of three Latina lesbians who have faced these boundaries, as artists, as lesbians and as women, and who seek to break the shackles of imposed limitations and to define their experience for themselves.

Rosa Flores

“The art of folklore, of literature, all that is human expression is destined for transformation, finding a balance between respecting the authentic without having to be imprisoned in the imposed roles,” says dancer and writer Rosa Flores. As a lesbian, Flores has had to reconcile her passion for folkloric dance with the heterosexual nature and the imposition of stereotypical roles for men and women by seeking new interpretations of her art form. “It is true that the traditional roles are very strong when you are not conscientious of those roles. But since I began living an openly lesbian life, I have discovered a whole series of possibilities to challenge those roles. In terms of traditional roles, as a woman it was imposed on me to dance a certain way because as a woman I had to wear a skirt, makeup, etc. But since I began living a different experience, I feel that there is opportunity to demonstrate another side.”

Flores feels that one way to challenge traditional roles is to perform for gay and les...
Marta Gomez

"Exile has been a central theme in my artistic work. I am always looking for and finding myself in the same place. Since I cannot be there, I must re-create it."

—Maritza Perez

Depiction of cartoon characters includes people of color.
APPENDIX B

NEGATIVE EXAMPLES OF THE REPRESENTATION OF

PEOPLE OF COLOR

IN THE LESBIAN/GAY/BISEXUAL PRINT MEDIA
Japan's First Gay Lawsuit
by ROBERT T. BERNARDO

Members of OCCUR/Association for the Gay and Lesbian Movement in Japan have brought suit against the Tokyo government and its Board of Education for not allowing the group to meet in a downtown youth center.

While OCCUR used the Fuchu Youth Activity Center, a facility designed to promote social education for youth in Japan, some members discussed politics and the future of gay rights in Japan, while others played basketball and volleyball.

At one point leaders from each group using the Fuchu facilities were asked to meet at a social so that groups at the youth center could learn more about each other. Two OCCUR representatives met with the other leaders, and during the meeting the two experienced various forms of harassment, including being called "fags" and "queers." They were also followed into their rooms and heckled in the public baths.

OCCUR reported the harassment to the assistant superintendent of the facility, asking him to take appropriate action. His immediate response was to side with a group leader from the Jesus Christ Church. Then OCCUR sent a letter to the superintendent of the Fuchu Center, requesting assurance that homosexuals would not be harassed or prevented from using the public facility.

Segawa arranged negotiations with OCCUR and

continued on page 21
The San Francisco Sentinel, June 6, 1992. No people of color included in 16 photographs of elected officials.
Accomplishments: Visibility of condom availability, boycott of boycott, and avoiding teacher layoffs; and rather than sell the school, send them to the薇薇安,讓學生去上課。

Goals: Service gay and lesbian needs of parents and special education.

Quote: "We must be careful not to become too assimilationist as to not lose the richness of our differences." Harvey Milk didn't have to be a winner to stay in office.

ROBERTA ACHTENBERG
San Francisco Board of Supervisors, elected 1984

Accomplishments: Anti-discrimination ordinances for AIDS and sexual orientation, domestic partners, bereavement leave, fireworks ban, and spaying/neutering law.

Goals: Continuing to work toward completing gay and lesbian agenda. Fighting for parity between diverse members of our community.

TOM NOLAN
San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, elected 1984

Accomplishments: Anti-discrimination ordinances for AIDS and sexual orientation, domestic partners, bereavement leave, fireworks ban, and spaying/neutering law.

Goals: Get Bill Clinton elected ("The biggest hope for the future we've had in some time."), protecting life-sustaining services from the budget ax, and delivering "Children's Fund" dollars.

Quote: Gay power means freedom to rise and fall on your own merits. To be as flawed a person as you might be and still know that being gay is just and necessary means that it isshan't be the end of you, but doesn't prevent you from being all that you can be. It's about being special like being gay. The point of getting rid of discrimination is about living up to your potential.
No photographs of people of color are included in the news (front) section of the paper.
No photographs of people of color are included in the news (front) section of the paper.
The first Gay Pride Festival in Guerneville was the place to be seen last weekend.

The Bay Area Reporter, June 18, 1992. No photographs of people of color in a series of six photographs on Pride events.
High Tech Gays march in the San Jose Pride Parade.

The Marin Pride celebration (above and left) drew many for picnicking and fun.

(Photo: Rick Gerber)