

One Step Beyond

"Transsexuality 101"

by Lynnell S. Long

If you've ever had any questions about transsexuals or still don't understand us, then this article is for you. If you feel you understand us



perfectly, then after reading this, please pass it on to someone who doesn't.

I personally don't like the word transsexual because I feel it's a label that's supposed to describe a group of people, but as we all know every-

one is not the same. It's just like saying all Black people look alike. The dictionary defines a transsexual as someone of one sex becoming another. First of all, most transsexuals have never considered themselves to be the gender of their birth certificates; most of us fought against what we were told because, although the doctor said it's a girl or boy, we knew someone made a mistake. I can remember at the age of eight arguing with anyone who told me I wasn't a girl. It wasn't something I did to be rebellious, I was angry because although I knew I was a girl, I happened to be born with the wrong genitalia.

Imagine all your childhood years resenting your parents and brothers and sisters because they wouldn't or couldn't understand that you sincerely believed Goddess made a mistake, that you should have been born with a vagina instead of a penis.

Then there's the question of sexual orientation. A lot of people assume that transsexuals are gay ... why? We all must learn to respect each other's gender. If a male-to-female transsexual is dating a man, she usually considers herself straight, because she is a woman attracted to men. Whereas I am a lesbian because I am attracted to women, and happen to be engaged to one. That puts me in another category of transsexuals: transsexual lesbians, although I prefer to be called a Sunsetting Lesbian. Yes, we do exist, although until recently I thought I was the only one in Chicago.

Transsexuals have been in existence since the birth of man and womankind. There are transsexuals in every culture, except in the past they weren't called transsexuals. In many cultures they were often considered people of higher status. Even today in some parts of Africa, male-to-female transsexuals are called "OKULE," and female-to-male transsexuals are called "AGULE." There they are spiritual leaders (according to the book *Transgender Warriors*).

Which leads us to 1996, where unless you are closeted, people stare at you, call you rude names, attempt to bash your head in the ground, or kill you. When will all this bullshit end? When will transsexuals be able to live in peace and without fear? When will the African-American community, both gay and straight, begin to accept transsexuals and respect our struggle?

Well, we are not going to wait for the answer

to these questions. Today, transsexuals are joining together and fighting against anything or anyone that stands in the way of our progress. Transsexual Menace Chicago on Oct. 19, along with Transsexual Menace NY, Connecticut, Boston, Queer Nation and other organizations, including members of WAC (Women's Action Coalition) demonstrated against the American Psychological Association for the abuse of the Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis, which has been misused to hospitalize and treat "non-complaining, gender-variant" youth.

During Stonewall, members of the transgendered community were there helping the fight. Transgendered people along with gays and lesbians stood back to back, screaming that they were not going to take it anymore and they didn't back off until they were heard and taken seriously. Why, after 27 years, is the gay and lesbian community turning their backs on the transgendered community? The majority of the transsexuals I know, including myself, have experienced more rejection and humiliation from gay and lesbian friends after coming out, than from heterosexual friends. I've heard things like, "I don't understand them," or "they are just men that think life would be easier as women." Try having your mother tell you, "I can never accept you as my daughter; I'm too old to change the way I think." And then for her to die without you ever receiving that acknowledgement of acceptance or motherly love we all need.

I have a dream, that one day the members of the Black community will wake up and accept homosexuality and transsexuality. We will no longer be apathetic to the prejudice and hatred we inflict upon one another. I have a dream, that transsexuals will no longer be rejected from society because of the differences in our life and struggle, but will be accepted because of the similarities of our struggle.

Notes of a Political Junkie: An African American Perspective on the Convention & The Election

Part I: The DNC

by Renae Ogletree

I began keeping a diary or journal of sorts on my experience during the Democratic National Convention. This could be called not just another perspective, but the other, other, other perspective, as an African-American Lesbian Woman.

The convention began for me on Friday night with the beginning of the OutVote convention. I hadn't planned on going because I have fundamental differences with the Human Rights Campaign, which sponsored OutVote. I do not believe they represent the concerns or issues of poor people or Black people. I had met a representative of HRC at the Bud Billiken Parade who encouraged me to give them a chance. He arranged for a scholarship for me to attend. It was a hard choice for me. I knew of a group of women who were going to protest the conference, and I really believed in what they were say-

ing. Imagine having to pay to be able to determine the lesbian and gay agenda or to participate in the lesbian and gay convention.

At any rate, I decided to go. Upon my arrival at the gaily decorated hotel, three cheers for the red, white and blue (our pride colors were no where to be found outside), I was greeted by the Rev. Phelps crew: they spoke, jeers not cheers, but they spoke and their feelings were clear—I was Queer. I got past them and went into the lobby of the hotel and found my way to the registration area. I noticed there weren't many Black folk around, but figured they were probably in a Black caucus meeting, since there couldn't possibly be a lesbian and gay convention without people of color. I looked and looked but the only other person of color I found was the person who had invited me to attend. I began to regret my decision.

I then went into the reception area where there were many people, many white people. I saw and met altogether three or four people of color. I found myself feeling incredibly uncomfortable. I realized that I was a woman with no place. Clearly I did not belong out on the picket lines with the Phelps people, but I also didn't belong here either. The Sojourner Truth saying of 'Ain't I a woman' came to mind, except it was more like 'Ain't I a queer too?' This was not a good beginning for the DNC.

On Sunday afternoon Chicago Black Lesbians and Gays co-hosted a conversation with members of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum with Keith Boykin, Deborah [redacted] Sabrina [redacted] and Steve [redacted]. More than 20 African-American lesbian and gay leaders from Chicago gathered to discuss how our work and issues intersected with the national Black lesbian and gay agenda. As we talked about our work, I was first amazed and then very proud not only of what we had done but the manner in which we got it done. The feeling of strength, connection, and commitment was so strong from my brothers and sisters. It was the right way to begin what I had hoped would be a powerful week for Chicago's Black les, bi, gay and transgendered community.

Monday was spent finalizing Rainbow Jam plans. What a pleasant and happy surprise to find that a member [white] of our business community had responded at the very last minute to a request to provide T-shirts for the event. We would be able to sell them for additional funds for the Youth Development Fund, and she with her partner would also be coming to help sell them.

The Rainbow Jam was Tuesday evening. Where were our Chicago delegates? The Unity that we speak of as a community seems to have been lost. The Rainbow Jam reminded me of the People's Party. You didn't have to dress fine or have a lot of money—and our community responded. More than 600 people jammed to the tunes of Lora Branch and the event raised approximately \$6,000. I got chills when Ili of Gay Asians and Pacific Islanders officially welcomed everyone to the Jam. You could feel the power, the togetherness in the room. I couldn't believe it

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BLACK

LINES

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Free/\$2 outside Chicago

EXPRESSIONS FROM BLACK GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDERED

Hall of Fame

The 1996 induction ceremony for the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame is Tuesday, Nov. 12. See pages 10-11 for interviews with two of this year's honorees, DJ Frankie Knuckles (right) and activist Mary Morten (below). Jackie [redacted], another activist, will also be honored.



LESBIGAY FILM FEST

Films by
Marlon Riggs'
(left) will be
shown.
See page 18

**PATTI
LaBELLE**
Interview,
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**SPECIAL
ELECTION
GUIDE**
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