

# Dare

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TENNESSEE'S GAY AND LESBIAN NEWSWEEKLY

JANUARY 20-26, 1989

## Crowd of 2500 celebrates life of Martin Luther King

by DEBORAH BURKS  
Staff Writer

In celebration of the national and state holiday commemorating the birthday of civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., a crowd estimated at approximately 2,500 people attended a rally held Monday at Nashville's Legislative Plaza.

King, who was assassinated in Memphis in 1968, would have turned 60 on Sunday, January 15.

Many of those attending the rally marched to downtown Nashville from nine sites including Tennessee State University (TSU), Jefferson Street Baptist Church, East Nashville and Vanderbilt University's School of Divinity. Although Metro Nashville schools were not closed for the King holiday, hundreds of school children participated in the day's activities.

Also in attendance at the rally were several skinheads carrying signs which stated "Skinheads Against Racial Prejudice" and "Keep the Dream".

Michael Martin, one of the skinheads receiving a good deal of attention, said that because of the participation of skinheads in the Klan march held in Pulaski this past weekend, he felt hostility and suspicion from the crowd at Legislative Plaza. Martin noted that he and the others were present to "get the real skinhead story out" and referred to the participation of the skinheads in Klan activities as "a new media package for an old hatred".

"I'm a straight-edged skinhead and we are opposed to racism and support nonviolence," said Martin. "There is a real lack of concern among the white working class regarding racism."

continued on page 4



Schoolchildren gather on Legislative Plaza to celebrate the memory of slain civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. on the federal holiday recognizing the 60th anniversary of his birth. —DARE PHOTO DEBORAH BURKS

## Anti-gay judge brought before Commission on Judicial Conduct

by JEFF ELLIS  
Managing Editor

Almost one month after his published remarks sparked an "outpouring of outrage" among lesbian and gay activists worldwide, Dallas Judge Jack Hampton finds himself the target of an investigation conducted by the Texas Commission on Judicial Conduct.

Complaints filed against Hampton were heard last Friday by Commission members during a hearing in the Texas statehouse at Austin. The Jan. 13 hearing followed the Dec. 16 publication of a *Dallas Times-Herald* interview with Hampton in which the judge said he

had given a convicted killer a lighter sentence than was sought by prosecutors because the victims were gay men.

After Hampton's Nov. 28 decision to give convicted murderer Richard Bednarski a lighter sentence, a complaint was filed with the Commission by the Texas Human Rights Foundation (THRF).

No public announcement of any action on the part of the Commission has yet been made. Following the hearing, held behind closed doors, a spokesperson refused to comment on Hampton's case.

Outside the statehouse, some 25 to 30 activ-

ists braved a freezing downpour to stage a protest against Hampton.

Hampton's published remarks prompted an "outpouring of outrage," according to Dallas Gay Alliance (DGA) spokesperson John Thomas.

"Instead of people getting tired of all the controversy, they still seemed concerned with the business of removing Hampton from the bench," Thomas said Tuesday.

Hampton gave Bednarski, 18, a 30-year sentence instead of the life sentence sought by prosecutors in the case. Bednarski was convicted in the shooting deaths of Tommy Lee

Trimble, 34, and Lloyd Griffin, 27.

"I'd put prostitutes and gays at about the same level, and I'd be hard put to give somebody life for killing a prostitute," the judge said. "I didn't much care for queers cruising the streets picking up teenage boys. I've got a teenage boy."

Hampton further indicated he would have given Bednarski a harsher sentence if his victims had been "a couple of housewives out shopping, not hurting anybody."

Amid the controversy which ensued following the publication of the interview, Hampton continued on page 3

## Volunteers needed in drug study

by STUART BIVIN  
Editor

Vanderbilt University researchers looking for a cure for AIDS will try a modification of the smallpox vaccine, according to a report in Tuesday's *Nashville Tennessean*.

The researchers are looking first, however, for nine volunteers between the ages of 18 and 60 who have never been given the smallpox vaccine. The trials will study the effects of a new vaccine, called HIVAC-1e. The vaccine was designed to cause an immune system response to HIV (human immunodeficiency virus, thought to cause AIDS).

The study will use smallpox vaccine carrying a piece of HIV genetic material into participants' cells. The material the vaccine carries will not enter the nuclei of the volunteers cells, according to the study team.

The article quoted Vanderbilt professor of

medicine Barney Graham, part of the investigative team at the school.

Graham said that the team anticipated some difficulty in finding volunteers for the study.

"It's going to take a lot of interested people to find our volunteers," Graham told the *Tennessean*, although he added, "I believe we will eventually get nine volunteers."

The problem is that very few qualify to be volunteers in the study. Only those who have not been vaccinated for smallpox can participate. The group estimates that between 3% and 5% of the over-18 population were never vaccinated against smallpox.

Volunteers must also be involved in monogamous relationships, be unexposed to HIV and have a "low chance of exposure in the future," Graham said.

Women volunteers will be required to avoid pregnancy. •

## I N S I D E

Dare this week



On your toes!  
The Nashville Ballet has arrived, page 4.



Okay, we give up.  
What's a snow fairy?  
Snaps, page 8.

Whose silence equals death?  
Soapbox, page 5.



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**MEMPHIS**

**Mondays**

**Gay Alternative Hour** Radio show, WEVL-FM 90, 6-7pm.  
**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**Tuesdays**

**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**Wednesdays**

**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**Thursdays**

**P-FLAG** (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) Support group, St. John's Episcopal Church, 322 S Greer. 1st Thursday only. Info 901 761-1444.  
**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30pm. Info 901 272-9459.  
**Into the Light** (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous) Meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 276-7379.

**Fridays**

**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 5:30 and 10pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**Saturdays**

**Twisted Sisters** (ACOA) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.  
**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**Sundays**

**Agape New Life Church** Sunday School, 9:30am. Worship service, 11am. Info 901 276-1872.  
**Holy Trinity Community Church** Worship service, 11am. 1216 Forrest Ave. Info 901 726-9443.  
**Into the Light** (Women's Alcoholics Anonymous) Meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. Noon. Info 901 276-7379.  
**Phoenix** (Gay Alcoholics Anonymous) Open meeting, Memphis Lambda Center. 8pm. Info 901 272-9459.

**NASHVILLE**

**Mondays**

**Gay Overeaters Anonymous** Open meeting for lesbian and gay overeaters. MCC, 5:30pm. Info 615-327-4614.  
**Nashville CARES** HIV Education Support Group. 6:30pm. ARC/AIDS Support Group, bimonthly. 6:30pm. Family Support Group, bimonthly. 6:30pm. Info 615-385-1510.  
**Lambda Group** Closed Alcoholics Anonymous meeting for gay men and lesbians, Unitarian Church. 8pm.  
**MAGNET** (Married and Gay Network) Support group for married gay men. 1st & 3rd Mondays only. MCC. 8pm. Info 615-320-0288.

**Tuesdays**

**Vanderbilt Lambda Association** Meeting for gay and lesbian Vanderbilt students, faculty, staff and alumni. President's House, Peabody Campus. 7pm. Info 615-385-4283.  
**Al-Anon** Closed meeting, MCC. 6:30pm.  
**Nashville CARES** ARC/AIDS Support Group. 4pm. Info 615-385-1510.  
**Sober Sisters** (Lesbian Alcoholics Anonymous) Closed meeting, MCC. 8pm.  
**Gay Cable Network** Viacom Channel 35 (Community Access Television). 9pm.

**Wednesdays**

**Sex Addicts Anonymous** Closed meeting for gay men and lesbians. MCC. 5:30pm.  
**Nashville CARES** ARC/AIDS Gay Couples Support Group. 5:30pm. ARC/AIDS Support Group. 6:30pm. Info 615-385-1510.  
**MTSU Lambda Association** Meeting for lesbian and gay Middle Tennessee State University students, faculty, staff, and alumni. Murfreesboro. 7pm. Info 615-890-3787.

**Thursdays**

**Gay Overeaters Anonymous** Open meeting for lesbian and gay overeaters. MCC, 5:30pm. Info 615-327-4614.  
**Nashville CARES** Visualization Group. 6:30pm. Info 615-385-1510.  
**Alternatives** (Alcoholics Anonymous) Closed meeting for lesbians and gay men, MCC. 8pm.  
**Lesbian Adult Children of Alcoholics** (ACOA) Meeting. 8pm. Info 615-385-4776 or 615-352-5823.

**Fridays**

**Sexaholics Anonymous** Closed meeting, MCC. 5pm.  
**Gay Parents Support Group** Meeting, MCC. 1st Friday only. 7pm. Info 615-831-2941 or 615-320-0288.  
**Alcoholics Anonymous Program Study Group** Meeting, Belmont United Methodist. 7:30 pm.

**Saturdays**

**Nashville CARES** HIV/ARC Support Group, bimonthly. 4pm. Info 615-385-1510.  
**Metropolitan Community Church** Mortgage Meal, all you can eat. 7:30pm. \$5.  
**Gay Cable Network** Viacom Channel 35 (Community Access Television). 8pm.

**Sundays**

**Metropolitan Community Church** Worship services, 11am and 7pm. Info 615-320-0288.

**Special Events**

**Saturday, January 21**

**Party** *Recoup from the Holidays*, movie and popcorn, Gay Women's Social Group, Memphis. 7:30pm. \$2 donation. Info 901 324-6949.

**Saturday, January 28**

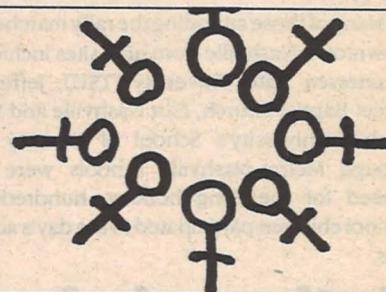
**Spaghetti Dinner and Fish Fry** Black and White Men Together, Memphis. 7-10pm. Info 901 452-5894.

**Friday, February 3**

**Mardi Gras Ball** Party and dance, Towne House Tea Room, 167-1/2 8th Av North, Nashville. Food, drinks, and costume contest. Sponsored by Metropolitan Community Church. 8pm-1am. \$5 donation. Info 615 228-8571 or 615 320-0288.

**Saturday, February 4**

**Party** Hors d'oeuvres, Memphis Gay Coalition. BYOB, potluck. Party room, Bryton Tower, 1271 Poplar, Memphis. 8pm-11pm. Free. Info 901 324-GAYS.



**Sunday, February 12**

**Feminist Book Circle** Discussion of Rita Mae Brown's *Rubyfruit Jungle*. Unitarian Universalist Church, 1808 Woodmont Blvd, Nashville. 5-7pm. Free. Info 615 385-4283.

**Tuesday, February 14**

**Out and About Ball** *Valentine's Day Dance* Warehouse 28, 2529 Franklin Rd, Nashville. Sponsored by Tennessee Gay & Lesbian Alliance. 7:30pm. \$6 per person. Info 615 333-2215.

**Saturday, February 18**

**Seminar** *Loving Yourself Unconditionally*, Susan Taranto. Sponsored by Gay Women's Social Group, Memphis. 7:30pm. \$2 donation. Info 901 324-6949.

Your nonprofit event can be listed free in *Dates*. Write to *Dare*, Box 40422, Nashville, TN 37204-0422, or phone 615 292-9623 and leave a message. Please include information about time, location, cost, sponsor, and a contact person's name with address and/or phone number for verification. Deadline noon Tuesday for publication next Friday.

# Judge chides sex/porn D.A.

by JEFF ELLIS  
Managing Editor

Crusading Davidson County assistant district attorney Richard Fisher incurred the wrath of Davidson Circuit Judge Walter Kurtz Tuesday after committing himself to prosecuting three cases in three different courts at the same time.

The scheduling conflict in Kurtz' court also led to Davidson Criminal Court Judge Tom Shriver's decision to continue until April two cases resulting from last winter's sex-for-pay sting involving then-15-year-old male prostitute Tony St. Clair.

In addition to his scheduled appearance in Shriver's court, Fisher was also slated to appear in the courtroom of Judge Ann Lacy Johns to prosecute another child sex-abuse case.

Kurtz summoned District Attorney-General Torry Johnson to his courtroom and ordered Fisher to pay some \$158 in costs for resetting the child sex abuse case which was on Kurtz' Tuesday docket.

"I've just about had it with your attitude toward your responsibility to this court," Kurtz said. "You have a long history in this court of coming in here not prepared and with conflicts.

"You may think there are special rules in this

court for you, Mr. Fisher, but there are none. If you think there are, I am going to teach you different."

Fisher said the scheduling conflict arose from "doing the state's business as best I can."

Johnson, alluding to past charges of disorganization and lack of preparation on Fisher's part, said, "It's no secret that organization is not Richard's strong suit, but you certainly couldn't argue with the results he achieved" in prosecuting child sex abuse cases.

In 1983, Fisher was removed from the prosecution team in a series of cases resulting from a massive crackdown on adult bookstores, video arcades and massage parlors. Then-district attorney Shriver was forced to reassign the caseload to another staffer after Chancellor Robert S. Brandt became angered by Fisher's untimely responses to defense lawyers' motions.

Before coming to Nashville in 1982, Fisher had served a ten-year term as district attorney general for Bradley, McMinn, Monroe and Polk counties in east Tennessee.

Since his arrival here, Fisher has been in the forefront of the news while prosecuting a number of high-profile cases, including cases resulting from the teen sex-for-pay sting conducted last winter. •

## ...anti-gay judge charged

continued from page 1

apologized "for (his) choice of words," but did not apologize for the light sentence given Bednarski.

Hampton's actions attracted media attention worldwide and focused attention on Dallas, which has long been called "the city of hate."

Dallas earned that dubious distinction in the aftermath of the 1963 slaying of President John F. Kennedy.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy (D-Mass.) is among the national political leaders who have lent their support to efforts by the DGA to oust Hampton from the bench.

Last Thursday, in a press conference which followed the Dallas premiere of *Torch Song Trilogy*, writer and star Harvey Fierstein added

his name to the list of public figures lambasting Hampton.

"But it doesn't matter how many editorials are written in papers across the country calling for the judge's resignation," Thomas said. "The judge will not suffer from this. He could make much more money in private practice than he does on the bench."

Thomas said the continued feelings of outrage expressed by members of the Dallas lesbian and gay community indicate that efforts to remove Hampton from the bench will continue.

"But unfortunately we can become bogged down in the whole process. There's not a whole lot you can do to speed up the process," Thomas said. •

## BRIEFS

### Chicago gets les/gay rights ordinance

from STAFF REPORTS

BY A 28-17 VOTE, members of the Chicago City Council last month approved a lesbian and gay rights ordinance for the city.

The bill's approval followed some 14 years of defeat by the city council.

The bill adds sexual orientation to the Chicago human rights ordinance which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, religion and ethnicity. It provides for penalties of \$100-500 a day for violating the bill's anti-discrimination provisions.

"We have never been so popular," Laurie Dittman, co-chair of the gay and lesbian Town Meeting, a network of lesbian and gay groups working for the ordinance, told Gay Community News. "Every serious candidate for mayor lobbied for the bill and has been courting our vote. They know we can swing the election."

Dittman credited incumbent Mayor Eugene Sawyer for convincing several aldermen to vote in favor of the bill's passage. Alderman and independent mayoral candidate Timothy Evans also worked for the bill's passage.

According to opinion polls, Sawyer and Evans, both of whom are black, currently trail white mayoral candidate Richard Daley Jr., son of the late Chicago kingpin Richard Daley. •

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CURTAINS

Nashville Ballet

Reviewed by JEFF ELLIS  
Managing Editor

THERE ARE THOSE people who believe that there was dance before there was life. Those people will argue that one atom bouncing off another is as intriguing as a mazurka or a tarantella; thus, their contention that dance preceded life.

If that's true, then Nashville Ballet's first season a few years ago was an even longer time in coming than most balletomanes may think. But it was worth the wait.

Nashville Ballet once again affirmed its place in the local arts community with its winter series presented in the Polk Theatre of the Tennessee Performing Arts Center last week.

Presenting a program of two world premières and two company premières, the members of the young company performed a varied program that had something to please even the most hardened non-ballet fan. And even the most discerning ballet aficionado.

"Opus II," which featured Stephen J. Mato performing his original piano composition, highlighted the talents of eight members of the troupe who, despite one small misstep, performed admirably. The company's artistic director, Dane LaFontsee, choreographed the piece with an obvious eye toward accenting his dancer's strengths.

The second piece, set to the music of Ravel, was the world première of LaFontsee's "Remembrances." Performed "for everyone who has ever lost someone," the piece was touching and sweet in its evocation of an ill-fated love affair.

Danced with a mesmerizing blend of grace and power by the lovely Karen Portner and the dashing handsome Barry Thane Gager, "Remembrances" was perhaps the evening's most beautiful performance. Portner and Gager proved that, in a company that technically has no stars, they are the dancers whose talents approach the stratospheric.

The Edward Myers-choreographed "Dark

Reflection" had its world première in the series, danced by another eight-person combination of the troupe's members.

The modern dance influence was felt strongly in the piece and the dancers proved themselves worthy of Myers' choreography, despite a somewhat tentative beginning. "Dark Reflection" demonstrated the company's relative youth — youth not only in age, but in years of stage experience.

The evening's closing performance, perhaps the most anticipated, was Bryan Pitts' "Tangos," set to the sultry Latin rhythms usually associated with the sex-tinged tango.

But Pitts' choreography succeeded in doing something to a tango heretofore thought impossible — de-sexing it. Instead of a real tango, sizzling with Argentine sensuousness, Pitts presented the hot-blooded tango as comedy relief, reducing it to a series of cheap laughs and over-acting.

While "Tangos" was immensely entertaining — for its comedy relief — it was, nonetheless, the evening's only disappointment, marred by the macho



Nashville Ballet's Luis Cataldi—PHOTO DAVID PHILLIPS

posturings of Gager and Sylvain LaPointe and by the sheer waste of myriad possibilities.

Deborah Johnson's costumes for "Tangos," which were probably better appreciated up-close, proved to be tired and tacky from the orchestra.

The Mimi Shimmin-designed costumes for the earlier program, however, were lovely with special consideration given Portner's flowing white gown for "Remembrances." Lighting design — by J.R. Hutchins for "Opus II" and Scott Leathers for the remainder of the program — was appropriately moody or uplifting, engaging or dismissive.

For its spring series, Nashville Ballet will reprise its immensely popular production of "Cinderella." First performed last year to sell-out audiences, the ballet will be presented again in May. •

...civil rights leader remembered

continued from page 1

The rally program was held in the War Memorial Auditorium, which was filled to capacity. The theme of the 4th annual celebration was "The Struggle Continues".

Governor Ned Ray McWherter was scheduled to address the crowd, but was unable to do so because of illness. Nashville Mayor Bill Boner was on hand to remember King's contributions to the civil rights movement.

"The finest tribute to Dr. King is for each of us to dream about and work for what we ought to be," said Boner. "We can make this city and this nation a better place for all of us."

Speaking on the importance of teaching African American studies in schools, Tennes-

see State University professor Andrew Jackson noted, "A people without a history is like a tree without branches."

The keynote address, "The Courage to Hope", was given by Wallace Charles Smith, pastor of the First Baptist Church, Capitol Hill. The church has been a rallying place for Nashville's civil rights movement. Smith's speech contained many references to the "injustices" of the Reagan administration.

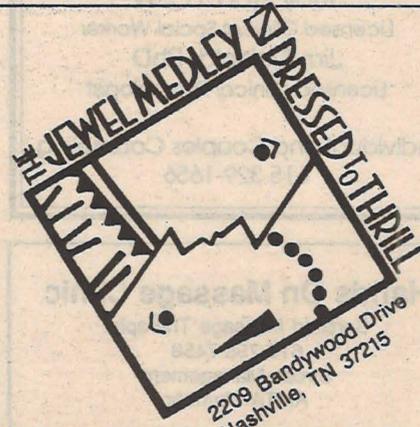
"We must hope that what Martin saw is still alive," said Smith. "With hope these last eight years will not hold us back."

Events planned in memory of King and in celebration of Black History Month will continue through January and February. •



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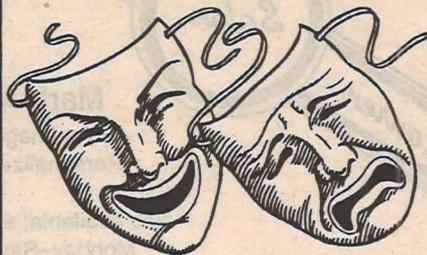
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PAGES

**The Construction of Homosexuality**

*The Construction of Homosexuality.* David F. Greenberg. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 544 pp. \$29.95.

Reviewed by **SHERRE DRYDEN**

Book Editor

AS ONE WOULD EXPECT from his title, David F. Greenberg posits a constructionist interpretation of homosexuality. Sexuality, homo- or hetero-, he believes, is not determined by an individual's essential nature. It is, instead, a product of socialization.

The *Construction of Homosexuality* is a meticulously documented, scholarly account of the existence of homosexuality — mostly male — throughout time and civilization. Since Greenberg's position is that careful examination of the forms homosexuality has taken will demonstrate that it is a construct, driven by social, political and economic systems, the book is necessarily comprehensive. In Part I, "Before Homosexuality", Greenberg covers kinship-structured societies, archaic civilizations, early civilizations and feudalism. Part II, on modern homosexuality, includes chapters on the emergence of subcultures, the rise of market economies, medicalization of homosexuality and gay liberation.

Whether or not one agrees with Greenberg's theories, *The Construction of Homosexuality* is a fascinating overview. Although it is definitely not to be read casually — some pages have more notes than text and the bibliography is over a hundred pages long — the book's cross-disciplinary nature makes it accessible to readers with little knowledge of history or social theory. It is an important book as well, one likely to be the subject of heated discussions for some times to come.

Greenberg himself acknowledges that his views may not be popular:

"To some, the social-constructionist position has seemed troublesome because of its political implications. When heterosexual chauvinists have told homosexuals to change, essentialist theories have provided a ready response: I can't. When parents have sought to bar homosexual teachers from the classroom lest their children...become homosexual, essentialist theories have provided a seemingly authoritative basis for denying the possibility."

IN SIMPLISTIC TERMS, what Greenberg finds is that when homosexual acts are not stigmatized, people do not define themselves as homosexuals. Sexuality exists on a continuum, with all possibilities available to all people. As stigmatization — through ridicule, legislation, or violence — increases, so does the likelihood of the creation of a category of persons characterized by their participation in those acts. The "homosexual person," then, is a product of relatively recent forms of social organization.

Greenberg's strongest evidence points toward the growing stigmatization of male homosexuality (or homosexual acts) as undesirable because of a link with femininity as its is traditionally described.

He begins with kinship-structured societies and a curious correlation between the amount of power accorded women and male homosexual practices. He seems ready to lay the

credit (or blame) for male homosexuality at the feet of female dominance. Where gender constructs allowed females superiority through matrilineality or matrilocality, males needed something (archaic male bonding, perhaps?) to reassure them of their masculinity:

"**HOMOSEXUAL RELATIONS** are found, then, when they are most needed to solidify male power against challenges from women. They function to reproduce male-dominated gender relations where they are shaky."

This interpretation supposes male superiority as a norm with variations from that norm necessitating reactions. Greenberg admits that the anthropological information upon which he bases his theories is unreliable. Collection methods were not consistent, homosexual practices were often of only tangential interest to the original researchers, women were seldom involved at any level and interviewees were aware of Western taboos against homosexuality. Yet given these flaws, plus others, Greenberg never questions the assumption that the way these societies constructed gender defined their sexual practices and not the opposite. He cautions against equating modern homosexuality with the homosexual acts of other civilizations, but fails to follow the same logic when considering gender.

Stigmatization was, on the whole, progressive, and directly tied to the bureaucratization of society. As more and more men moved into bureaucratic environments — the military, business, government — homosexuality was forced farther and farther outside. Bureaucracy, Greenberg states, is defined by its maleness; the intolerable aspect of homosexuality was its femaleness.

Greenberg contends that a social constructionist interpretation of homosexuality does not preclude the legitimacy of homosexual rights. He suggests that by looking at race and the results of the civil rights movement in the United States we can see that, although racial classification systems have varied it does not follow that American blacks should stop thinking of themselves as black. Yet it was not the existence of difference — race — that was the construct; it was how we classified that difference.

The civil rights movement changed the construction of that classification. It did not repudiate the difference.

IT IS EASY TO JUMP on what will likely become the anti-Greenberg bandwagon, accusing him of giving ammunition to the enemy. It is, after all, fine for him to speak to an informed, academic audience that homosexuality's being a construct, somehow tied to the amount of power accorded women, does not mean that people are in practice able to choose their sexual orientation. But they have academics at Bob Jones University, too, and I fear that Greenberg has provided some powerful and dangerous words for them to use against us. •

*Whether or not one agrees with Greenberg's theories, The Construction of Homosexuality is a fascinating overview.*

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# Dare

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Managing Editor  
Jeff Ellis  
Book Editor  
Sherre Dryden  
Staff Writers  
Deborah Burks  
Carole Cunningham  
Joe Marohl  
Jaan Sturgis  
Contributing Writer  
Patrick Hills

Advertising Sales Manager  
Ann Taylor  
(615) 352-5823

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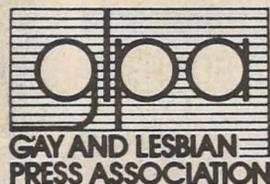
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## S O A P B O X

### Decorum or Dignity: On working within the system

by CAROLE CUNNINGHAM  
Staff Writer

**"Men are so necessarily mad, that not to be  
mad would amount to another form of madness."  
—Pascal**

WE ARE TAUGHT from the time we are children that discretion is the better part of valor. Cool heads were a hallmark of the Reagan administration—so much so that badgering members of the press were more likely to become pariahs than the politicians and Reagan appointees whose ethical misconduct set new standards for slime.

Reagan, of course, had the coolest head of all. The buck never stopped at Reagan's feet because his feet were never on the ground.

Groups whose interests were marginalized during the Reagan years—everyone from gays and lesbians to welfare mothers and the homeless—found themselves in a curious position with respect to their causes: where righteous indignation had once done much to publicize the plight of blacks and other oppressed minorities, it had now become the dubious badge of terrorists and other "fanatics." Working within the system, the logic went, would diminish your marginality and better promote your interests. Sit-ins might get you in the newspapers, but to cool-headed bureaucrats, activism in the street would only get you one place: further down the street.

For the most part, gay and lesbian rights organizations and AIDS activists have kept in step with what is "expected": we have established local and national organizations with dues-paying members, presidents, co-directors, and board seats, all designed to promote our rights and convince our oppressors that we're as good at the politics game as they.

THE REAGAN YEARS tell us that the road to freedom is paved with good manners, not upraised voices. So when ACT UP (Aids Coalition to Unleash Power) first began mobilizing in cities like Boston, New York, and Los Angeles, their indignation, often scurrilous rhetoric and "unreasonable" demands, sent a shiver of fear through the "established" gay and lesbian activist community. How were more "cool-headed" groups going to respond to slogans

like "AIDSGATE" and "Silence=Death?" Whose silence were the upstarts referring to? "Theirs" or "ours?"

When an ACT UP chapter formed in Nashville over a year ago, its members and activities were met with cautious civility from most gays and lesbians and often outright hostility from members of AIDS education and service groups. Using direct-action models tested by other ACT UP chapters, a small band of gays and lesbians began organizing protests, pickets, and sit-ins in response to the inaction of local health authorities and Metro Nashville Mayor Bill Boner, to the threat of mandatory testing and reporting posed in the State Legislature, and to the testimony of U.S. Rep. William Dannemeyer (R-California) at a Nashville meeting of the President's Commission on AIDS.

*I see  
that cooler heads—  
mine included—have  
often prevailed by  
preserving decorum at  
the expense of dignity,  
civility at the expense  
of civil rights.*

What makes queers and non-queers alike flinch at the mention of ACT UP is the fact that ACT UP members don't hide their sexual orientation, don't take cues from their oppressors about how to end their oppression, don't nod understandingly when bureaucrats blame their lack of leadership in the AIDS crisis on either the bureaucracy or on the electorate's squeamishness about sexuality and disease. And, to boot, ACT UP in Nashville and in most other cities had no charter, no constitution, no

officers, no board, no budget, no tax-exempt status.

But here in Nashville, what began with a bang ended with a whimper. Why? Most of us who attended ACT UP/Nashville meetings and ACT UP actions were the same people attending T-GALA meetings, serving on the board of Nashville CARES, working with the Vanderbilt AIDS Project. Pressure from the last two groups to silence ACT UP/Nashville certainly foretold the nature of ACT UP/Nashville's demise. Told they were doing more damage than good by not being well-mannered and respectable, members of ACT UP took a hard look at their purposes and their methodology. In fact, eventually, some of the same people who one day were marching in the streets with "AIDSGATE" signs were the next day donning their suits, tying their ties, and having coffee with the mayor.

NOW ONE YEAR later, despite the assurances of Those Who Know Best that working inside the system would promote gay rights, secure funding for AIDS education and support services, and buy us the legitimacy we all surely needed, the city of Nashville and the state of Tennessee have yet to allocate any funding directly and specifically for AIDS education and support services.

The almost frenzied attempts of AIDS service groups to de-gayify AIDS have not gotten lesbians and gays or persons with AIDS any closer to equal protection under the law from discrimination based on sexual orientation or HIV status. I wonder now what madness we live with in exchange for silencing the madness of anger, of grief, of righteous indignation.

When I and my political companions meet now with the mayor's office, health officials, and the press regarding AIDS funding and the insidious discrimination and outright violence against lesbians and gays, the weariness I feel is less with "them" than with myself. I have donned my suit and tied my tie once too often. I long for the madness of righteous angels while I lie in the den of the dissimulators and echo the reassurances of the straight world and much of the gay world that progress takes time, that I need my society's cloak of legitimacy while I beg for civil rights, that discretion is the better part of valor.

I see that cooler heads—mine included—have often prevailed by preserving decorum at the expense of dignity, civility at the expense of civil rights.

When ACT-UP/Nashville faded into the sunset, I was confident my pumps and polish could take its place. What I didn't see then was the vacuum its demise created in me. For the last year, I have hoped my forays into the halls of the "establishment" would be part of the solution.

I'm beginning to fear that I'm part of the problem. •

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## B O X 4 0 4 2 2

### "Read my lips, George!"

Dear *Dare*,  
"Read my lips!"

Every time George Bush slapped us with this bullying quip during this past campaign I wanted to pull one of my man friends up close to me, smack a luscious kiss together and retort, "Read *my* lips, George!"

Despite the bad press and the dismal return on the money we pay our government, we all know that our lesbian/gay love, our sexuality, our relationships, our ways of seeing and being in the world are potent and powerful. We are also learning that our love empowers us when we let the world see it, alive, healthy, creative, even demanding!

Soon we'll be celebrating Valentine's Day, a

day of love and lovers. This year I'd like to inundate the White House, Congress, the Supreme Court, ABC, CBS, etc., with lesbian/gay Valentine wishes. So I invite you all to play along and head to your favorite lesbian/gay card shop, find your favorite postcards of men or women kissing, color them with a few red hearts, inscribe them with a "Read *my* lips!" and other quips you fancy.

Then send them off to George Bush, Justices Rehnquist or O'Connor or to whomever you'd like to read your lips. Let our collective lips daringly speak our love.

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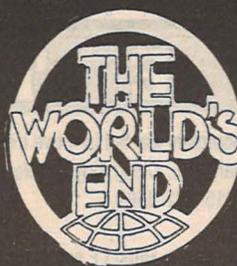
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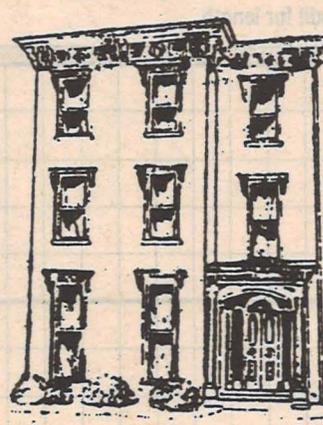
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