

# An Interview with Delroy Constantine-Simms

BY SYREETA GILL & CAROLINE YEARWOOD

## Why is homosexuality the greatest taboo in Black culture?

It must be made clear from the outset that black culture is as diverse as every other culture. The general perception within Black culture is that homosexuality, like Christianity, is another cultural imposition on Africans by Europeans. It must also be made clear that religion, specifically Christianity, plays a very important role in reinforcing this taboo. However, one has to remember that mythical perceptions of Black sexuality and prowess are centered on heterosexuality, not homosexuality. Therefore any deviation from this norm is seen as unacceptable in many sections of the Black community, except the arts to a certain degree.

In reality, the Black community knows that homosexuality exists; the unspoken rule is that we may know it but don't flaunt it.

More importantly, universal stereotypes regarding Black sexuality are so strong that Black folks worldwide have come to believe the hype about their own sexuality. To the extent that anything outside heterosexuality is dismissed and not allowed to be openly portrayed or displayed in Black culture (with a few exceptions of course,) one only has to look at contemporary Black music, film and literature to understand that expressions of diverse sexuality are not tolerated. If it is expressed, it is more likely to be in terms of lesbianism.

**In regard to gay literature, what's missing to you? What would you like to see more of? How would you encourage it?**

I don't think anything is missing other than the fact that it needs to be culturally diverse and more accommodating to other ethnic groups. I would like to see more culturally diverse gay literature, in order that the audience irrespective of their background has the opportunity to at least identify with one book that reflects them. However, I am

encouraged by the fact that more and more publishers are being very pro-active in this direction. At the same time, these respective communities need to take the initiative and not expect others to continuously support them. I am also of the view that more of literature should be directed to the non-lesbian and gay community rather than writing for the converted.

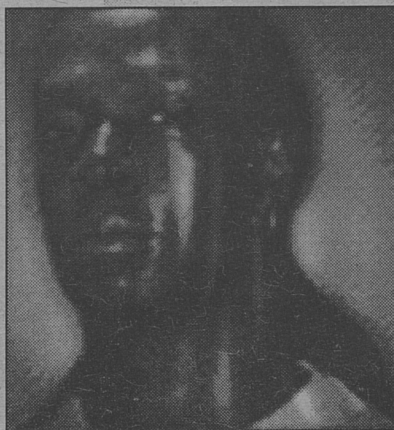
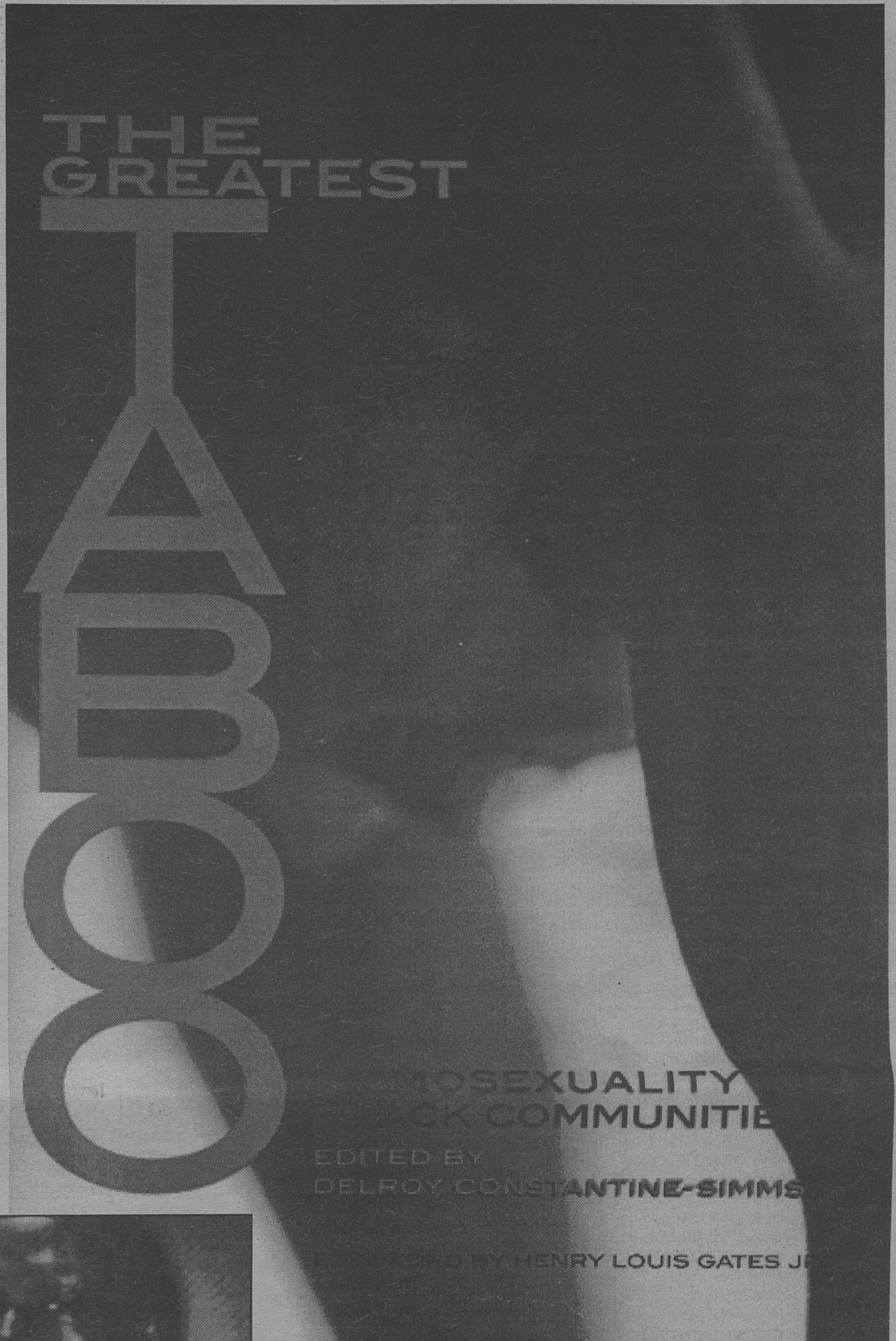
## Why do you think there is so little written about gay Black culture and gay Black writers?

I think there is a lot of work out there written by many Black gay and lesbian writers. But at the end of the day, publishers ask the obvious questions: Is the work any good? How can we market this project? I must also make it clear that it's tough enough for European American gays to get a publishing deal, so it may be even more difficult for African-Americans. While the issue of race may be a consideration, there are too many other factors to consider.

It must also be noted that the misguided general perception is that Black folks do not read. So it goes without saying that as Black gays are themselves black, then it is also safe to assume that they don't read either. So why should publishers print books that will not be bought by Black gays and lesbians, let alone anyone else.

## How did you find the contributors to this book?

Bruce Morrow did the ground work for me in New York, while Steven Fullwood of "One Step Further" sat down with me at the Schomburgh Library in Harlem and helped me put out a call for papers on every gay and lesbian website that we could find. I received so many responses to the point that I have enough material for a second edition. It took me so long to read the material, and it was even more painful telling people that I would not be able to use their work.



Delroy Constantine-Simms

## What writers do you consider some of the most significant contributors to gay Black culture today? Why?

When you read a book you're never sure about the sexuality of the person, so to commit yourself to any specific person is not something you would do because you never know who is who. That is why I don't have any favorite gay or lesbian writers. But I would argue that any openly Black gay and lesbian writer who puts pen to paper is making a significant contribution to Black gay culture and Black culture as a whole.

## Where do you see the future of gay Black literature?

With the advent of new technology and digital publishing, the opportunities are limitless. However, I do acknowledge that mainstream Black gay literature has a long way to go. Fair enough, there are always going to be a few mainstream successes, E. Lynn Harris, James Early Hardy. If Black gays and lesbians don't buy the book, why should any one else?

## What do you think are some of the common myths, stereotypes and misunderstandings the white queer community has about attitudes toward homosexuality in the black community?

Homophobic, intolerant, sexual beings, nothing else. These are the common points. But I would also argue that the stereotypes held by white gays and lesbians are not much different than their heterosexual counterparts. It must also be noted that African-Americans are not

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