

DYKE PSYCHE

African-American Lesbians and the Church:

An Interview with Filmmakers
Dee Mosbacher and Sylvia Rhue

by Esther
Rothblum



When Dr. Dee Mosbacher completed the film *Straight From the Heart* (for which she received an Oscar nomination) she was told that a film about lesbians and their parents needed to be more community-specific. The Washington Sisters, African American lesbian musicians who appear in the film with their mother, told Dee that lesbians faced different issues around homophobia in the African American church-going community. Dr. Mosbacher decided to collaborate with Dr. Sylvia Rhue and Ms. Frances Reid to co-produce a film about Black churches and the gay/lesbian experience.

Dr. Rhue came up with the new film's title, *All God's Children*, a phrase that was used so often by the people they interviewed. As Jesse Jackson says in the film, "In the larger civil rights movement, we must see all people as God's children." The Reverend Dr. Cecil Murray of the First AMC Church, the oldest Black church in Los Angeles declares: "The church exists for all God's children."

All God's Children is a 26 minute documentary that explores the issues of homosexuality and homophobia within the context of the Black church and its congregants. As Dr. Rhue told me: "It was important to get church leaders that our parents respect, the senior pastors. Marjorie Hill, Ph.D. from the National Board Unity Fellowship Church says in the film: "Gay and lesbian African Americans are intertwined with our community, and we need the church."

All God's Children also includes interviews with prominent people from the Black community such as Congresswoman Maxine Waters, Linda Villarosa, Executive Editor of *Essence* Magazine, and Cornel West, Professor in Afro-American Studies and the Philosophy of Religion at the Harvard School of Divinity. In the film, US

Senator Carol Mosely-Brown states: "...our diversity is, after all, a strength and not a weakness."

The film includes interviews with Black families who discuss having a gay or lesbian family member.

is very important. The project itself, I think, was divinely led," she concludes.

Dr. Mosbacher explained "We really try to use the film as an organizing tool. Our efforts have been try-



All God's Children Producers (l. to r.) Dr. Sylvia Rhue, Frances Reid, Dr. Dee Mosbacher

Music plays an important role in *All God's Children*. Lavender Light: The Black and People of All Colors Lesbian and Gay Gospel Choir performs the gospel music so familiar to Black churchgoers. "You have to understand that music is part of the message too; it's not filler," explained Dr. Rhue, "because even when we play the film to people who are resistant to the message they can't resist the music."

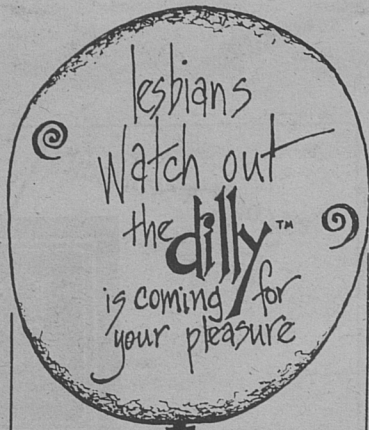
The three co-producers all have prior film-making experience, but that's where the similarities end. Dr. Mosbacher is a psychiatrist. Dr. Rhue has a Ph.D. in human sexuality and is a Bible scholar/student. She says: "Western society has kept sex and spirituality very separate and that shouldn't be." Frances Reid is a professional film-maker whose work received two Oscar nominations in one year.

The co-producers are now involved in getting the film shown across the country. "The bottom line is that lesbian, gay and bisexual people should see the film and feel better about themselves. It is important for them to see people, including leaders in the Black community, support them as heterosexual allies, and to see the pioneers of the current Black gay movement on film," said Dr. Rhue. "This is also the first time that Black gay and heterosexual people have gone on record to this degree for an absolutely pro-gay stance. The film includes interviews with six Black ministers. Since the Black church is the strongest institution in the Black community, to have the ministers talk

ing to get the film to as many people as possible who would take it to their community—whether the church community, the educational community, PFLAG [Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays], etc. We've tried to act creatively, and have gotten a number of people to subsidize copies of the videos and accompanying materials so that the film can get out." After completing the film, Woman Vision wrote a joint promotional letter with Phill Wilson, the founder of the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum. Dr. Rhue continues to travel all over the country presenting the film and lecturing about the issues it raises. Since its release, *All God's Children* has been screened in over thirty film festivals and has won six awards, including the Lambda Liberty Award and Best Documentary at the National Black Arts Festival.

The film, *All God's Children*, can be obtained from Woman Vision, c/o Transit Media Film Library, 22-D Hollywood Avenue, Hohokus, NJ 07423, tel. 800-343-5540, fax 201-652-1973. The price is \$99.95 for institutions.

Esther Rothblum is a Professor of Psychology at the University of Vermont and Editor of the Journal of Lesbian Studies. DYKE PSYCHE is a monthly column. copyright Esther Rothblum



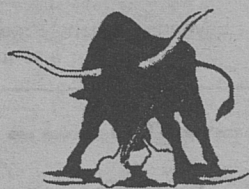
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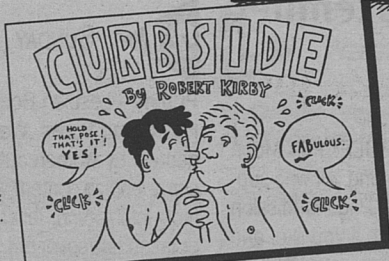
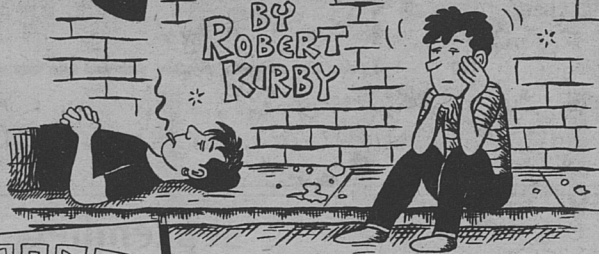
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