

ing display a recurrent tendency to confuse bisexual orientation with anatomical or psychic androgyny. Further, the assembling of useful ethnographies of contemporary groups requires a careful delimitation of the specific type or variety of bisexual behavior to be studied. With respect to individual psychodynamics, it is essential to pay careful attention to the depth and quality of the experience, rather than relying on a mere quantitative assessment of "sexual outlets." It is to be hoped that with further well-planned research, the present chaotic amalgam of "bisexuality" will yield to a more rational spectrum of "bisexualities," perhaps in parallel to a comparable phalanx of "homosexualities."

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Sandor Rado, "A Critical Examination of the Concept of Bisexuality," *Psychoanalytic Medicine*, 2 (1940), 459-67; Fred Klein, *The Bisexual Option*, New York: Arbor House, 1978; Fritz Klein and Timothy J. Wolf, eds., *Bisexuality: Theory and Research*, New York: Harrington Park Press, 1985 (with bibliog. by C. Stear, pp. 235-48).

Wayne R. Dynes

BLACK GAY AMERICANS

Thus far the social profile and achievements of black gay Americans have not received their due. This neglect stems from several sources. White Americans tend to view blacks almost monolithically, through a lens of stereotypes, one of which is that the black male is typically a macho heterosexual. The slighting of black lesbians is part and parcel of the relative invisibility of lesbians as a whole. Until recently, most socially conscious black gays chose to put their energies in the civil rights movement, rather than in the gay movement. Finally, there is the view that homosexuality is somehow alien to the black experience. Some black nationalists claim that same-sex behavior was unknown in Sub-Saharan Africa until European colonialists imposed it. Although abundant evidence now exists for a variety of homosexual social patterns in black

Africa, the notion that the behavior is somehow distinctively white lingers.

Earlier History. For countries such as Brazil and Haiti there is evidence of direct transfer of forms of homosexual life as part of the African cultural diaspora. For North America such evidence is lacking, perhaps because the slave masters, observing Protestant norms of opposition to "sodomy," ruthlessly sought to stamp the phenomenon out. Oral tradition suggests, however, that just as white masters engaged in sexual relations with black women, so some white men would seek the sexual company of attractive young black slaves. After Emancipation, at the turn of the century, there is evidence of large-scale black dance events in such centers as St. Louis and Washington, D.C. These gatherings probably lie at the origin of the drag balls in Harlem in the 1920s, which attracted both blacks and whites. Not altogether dissimilar is the still surviving tradition of *Mardi Gras* in New Orleans—though a more visible black-white gay presence is evident in the carnivals in Brazil.

New York City's Harlem, originally developed as housing for the white middle class, emerged at the end of World War I as a vital center of black culture (the *Harlem renaissance*). A number of black gay writers contributed to this flowering, including the poet Countee Cullen (1903-1946), and the prose writers (Richard Bruce Nugent (1906-) and Wallace Thurman (1902-1934). Other writers such as Langston Hughes (1902-1967) were very discreet and ambiguous in their sexuality but occasionally displayed homoerotic sensitivities. More tolerant than Greenwich Village, Harlem's vibrant nightclub scene attracted many white gays from other parts of the city. Here they were regaled by such bisexual and lesbian entertainers as Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, "Moms" Mabley, and Gladys Bentley (1907-1960). Of these, Bentley was most easily identifiable, with her male attire and tough, butch behavior; eventually she

married her white lesbian lover in a highly publicized ceremony. Her recording career spanned the two decades after 1928. During the heyday of **McCarthyism** she was forced to conform and denounce her lesbianism, but even that could not save her singing career.

While the Depression of the 1930s put an end to the special brilliance of Harlem, black gay and lesbian life continued as before. There is increasing evidence of bars and nightspots in many American cities that were largely and completely black. More frequently than their heterosexual counterparts, blacks and whites entered into homosexual coupled relationships—though such “salt and pepper” couples could attract the particular ire of white bigots and also the disapproval of black relatives.

Toward the Present. In the 1960s James Baldwin achieved national—and international—renown with his depiction of blacks and gays in such books as *Another Country* (1962) and *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968). In a more subdued way the playwright Lorraine Hansberry lent her support to the nascent lesbian movement. Black gays such as Bayard Rustin made important contributions to the civil rights movement.

In the years of gay liberation after the **Stonewall Rebellion** relatively few black gays and lesbians participated. This reflected in part their sense of the greater urgency of the black civil rights movement, as has been noted, as well as the feeling of many who did attend that they were not comfortable. Heterosexual black leaders, even radicals, tended to keep their distance from the cause of gay liberation well into the 1980s. In 1983, after a stormy battle over gay participation in the 20th anniversary March on Washington, a group of prominent black leaders endorsed the national gay rights bill and put a speaker, Audre Lorde from the National Coalition of Black Gays, on the agenda; the following year the Reverend Jesse Jackson included gays in his “Rainbow Coalition.”

The largely white and middle class gay subculture sometimes openly discriminated against blacks, as in the practice of “carding” whereby black patrons of nightclubs were singled out by being required to present personal documents to be admitted.

These and other problems led to the formation of such organizations as Black and White Men Together (renamed Men of All Colors Together in some cities) and the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays (1978). Several little magazines appeared featuring black writers, and such black lesbian and gay authors as Michelle Cliff, Anita Cornwell, Larry Duplechan, Audre Lorde, and Anne Allen Shockley took their place in America's gay bookstores. Samuel R. Delaney came to be recognized as one of the four or five most distinguished science fiction writers of America. New York's Blackheart Collective brought together and published gay black poets. Other black gays became known in the worlds of music, sports, and the church. Black gay self-affirmation in turn stimulated similar movements among Asian-American and American Indian gays. Meanwhile, organized black homosexuals continue to wage a two-front battle against both racism in the gay community and homophobia in the black community.

Black Perspectives on Homosexuality. While a substantial portion of black Americans share the dominant modern industrial-world model of homosexuality, the majority of the black population, perhaps reflecting class differences as well as a different ethnic tradition, seems to accept a different, more “Mediterranean” conception. For these blacks, homosexuality tends to be equated with effeminacy, and the penetrator is less likely to view himself as homosexual. Thus, there are fewer inhibitions preventing a “macho” black male from engaging in sexual activity with another male, as long as he himself retains the “male role” and his partner restricts himself to the “female role,” than for his white counterpart. The high pro-

portion of young black males who pass through American confinement institutions and absorb models of homosexuality which are normative in prisons, jails, and reformatories may contribute to this perspective.

Complicating the American black perspective on homosexuality is the perception that slavery represented an attack on black *manhood* and that continued white (economic, political, legal) control over black men is an extension of that attack. Thus behavior which is seen as undermining black manhood, such as taking what is perceived as a feminine sexual role, is seen by many as a betrayal of the race, imposing a burden on black gays which whites do not ordinarily share.

Nonetheless, the black community, having long commiserated in the face of common oppression and misfortune, seems to have developed an ethos which is somewhat more tolerant of individual eccentricities, including sexual ones, and cognizant of the pernicious effects of discrimination of all kinds. Black culture seems to have been spared much of the anti-sexual heritage of the white Puritans and their successors, and the sort of organized witchhunt which white heterosexual society has from time to time inflicted on white homosexuality has apparently been absent from black American history. It is on this community ethos of relative tolerance that black gays must build in the future.

Kinsey Statistics. The Kinsey Institute study of homosexuality in the San Francisco Bay Area, published by Alan Bell and Martin Weinberg in 1978, sought to measure differences between white and black homosexuality; the original Kinsey surveys had restricted themselves to whites. Among the findings of this survey (which has undergone some methodological criticism) is that homosexual blacks were more likely to be "out" with their families than whites, were more sexually active but had fewer partners, were more likely to cruise at private parties and on

the street, were less likely to worry about public exposure of their orientation, were less likely to have sex with strangers, more likely to accept older partners, more likely to engage in anal sex, less likely to belong to a homophile organization, and were less likely to have been arrested (in contrast with the heterosexual blacks in the study, who were more likely to have been arrested than the heterosexual whites).

Interracial Homosexuality.

Given a perspective which frequently interprets homosexual relations as signifying dominance and submission, interracial sexuality must often deal with racial politics. For many heterosexual black men, it is more acceptable to take a dominant, controlling sexual role with a white male who takes a "female" role because this is seen as reversing and compensating for the historic political dominance of white men, a white dominance which has frequently been expressed (hetero)sexually, not only in slave society when white men freely appropriated black women, but in the contemporary world where black prostitutes are seen as having been appropriated by financially more powerful white male clients. This dynamic is expressed in the most extreme form in prison rape, which often follows racial lines.

Some gay blacks, on the other hand, being more comfortable in the submissive role, generalize from their experience of whites as holding the major power positions of American society to perceive white males as particularly sexually powerful, and so are attracted to them.

Whites, too, can get caught up in this situation, seeking out black transvestites and effeminate gays because they feel more comfortable dominating them or placing them in roles which elicit contempt from such white males. In the other direction, there are whites who are drawn to more "macho" black men because they are responding to a popular belief which depicts blacks as more virile, sexually uninhibited and forceful, with larger organs and without the supposedly weaken-

ing qualities of cultivated white civilization. Certainly the images of black men presented in written, photographic, and cinematic gay pornography do nothing to dispel such notions.

Having outlined such situations, it must also be noted that there is widespread interracial homosexuality which does not follow such lines, but which may be affected more by the attractiveness of the "different," curiosity, class differences, rebellion against social custom, or a belief that race should not be a factor in discriminating between potential sexual partners.

The San Francisco Kinsey survey found that 22 percent of white but only 2 percent of black homosexual males had never experienced interracial sex; none of the whites reported more than half their partners to be black, while two-thirds of the blacks reported more than half their partners to be white. For lesbians, only 28 percent of the whites had interracial experience, while 78 percent of the blacks did, and 30 percent of those had a majority of white partners.

Interracial couples seem to be rarer than the frequency of interracial sex would lead one to expect, probably because the dynamics of an ongoing relationship are more likely to trigger hostility from a society which is both homophobic and racist than would isolated encounters.

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Alan P. Bell and Martin S. Weinberg, *Homosexualities*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1978; J. R. Roberts, *Black Lesbians*, Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1981; Michael J. Smith, *Colorful People and Places*, San Francisco: Quarterly Press of BWMT, 1983; idem, ed., *Black Men, White Men*, San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1983.

Ward Houser

BLACKMAIL

Blackmail is the popular term for what criminal law designates as extortion, which is defined as the making of a demand for some action (the handing over of

money or secret information, or the commission of some official act) with a threat (to reveal some compromising action committed by the victim) for one's own gain or to the detriment of the victim. Until quite recent times the fear of blackmail in homosexual circles was intense. Most overt homosexuals were obliged by the moral attitude of society to lead a double life, posing as heterosexuals in public view and engaging in forbidden sexual acts clandestinely. By contrast, the professional criminal often cannot be blackmailed simply because he has no façade of respectability, or else lives in a subculture in which such a demand would be promptly met with violence against the would-be informer.

History. The origins of blackmail lie in the practice of delation that was widespread in antiquity. Before a modern police and detective force existed, the state power had to rely on informers who were characteristically rewarded for the information which they conveyed to the authorities. But if they could obtain a far greater sum from the delinquent party than the state would pay for the information, cost-benefit analysis pointed in the direction of extortion. It has been established that by the end of the thirteenth century, the moral teaching of the Western Church had succeeded in outlawing homosexual behavior, for which the Bible and the Code of Justinian prescribed the penalty of death. This meant that the individual who defied the ban on sodomitical acts exposed himself to capital punishment, and had besides to conceal even his interest in the forbidden conduct. In practice the fact that sexual behavior tends to be relegated to the most intimate sphere of private life, one to be hidden from all except the participants, made it nearly impossible for the state power to uncover and punish the culprits. But the potential blackmailer, if he discovered the homosexual propensities of his victim, could extort major sums of money from him for his silence.