

interview with JAMES BALDWIN

by Karen Wald (LNS)

[Editor's Note: The following interview with James Baldwin was done soon after his recent visit to Huey Newton, minister of defense of the Black Panther Party, in prison. Huey is serving a 2-15 year sentence for manslaughter — the state was unsuccessful in framing him up with a first degree murder charge for the killing of a policeman.]

Q: YOU WERE JUST DOWN AT THE CALIFORNIA MEN'S COLONY IN SAN LUIS OBISPO VISITING HUEY NEWTON. CAN YOU TELL US WHAT HIS TRIP WAS ABOUT?

J.B.: Huey is one of the most important people to have been produced by the American chaos. His fate is very important. And not one person in white America, if they read the mass media, knows anything about Huey, what produced him or what produced the Black Panther Party.

Black people have always played, in this country, a tormented role in the white man's imagination. They prefer to believe him to be King Kong, or whatever it is white Americans take black people to be. It's inconceivable to them, because it says too much about the republic. I think that the Black Panther Party was originally called the Black Panther Party for Self Defense. And that it was produced as a reaction to, and I'm a witness to this because I was born in the ghetto, to the tremendous irresponsibility of the police force. It didn't come out of nothing, it didn't come about because Huey and his cohorts are some kind of weird antisocial monsters. It came out of the very real necessity to invest the black community with a certain kind of morale, which cannot be found in any American institution.

Q: HAVE YOU SEEN CHANGES IN HUEY SINCE YOU FIRST MET HIM?

J.B.: In much the same way that events of the last two years have caused everybody to re-think the situation, Huey has gone through some changes himself. I think that oppressors always make the same mistake. They think that they're going to break you by the degree and the nature of your punishment. But they always miscalculate, because you may be able to break ten people, but there's always one person or two people or three people on whom it doesn't work, who use it to find out something and to become, in a sense, more dangerous than they were before. More dangerous than if you'd left them alone — more dangerous, that is, to the status quo. I think Huey is changing that way.

Q: WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO COMMENT ABOUT SOME OF THE CHANGES YOU, YOURSELF, HAVE BEEN GOING THROUGH IN THE LAST TWO YEARS?

J.B.: I think that no one any longer can be fooled about the intentions of the American government because they've made it perfectly clear. And that may be the most healthy thing that has happened in this time. Nobody, after all, can say anything for the present administration. It represents the American illusion that it's a white country, that it's a white world and that they can make it a white universe — the moon is our first colony.

Q: ELDRIDGE CLUCK SAID THAT THERE WERE BASIC DIFFERENCES CONCERNING THE ATTITUDE YOU HAD TOWARD DEALING WITH THE VIOLENCE OF THE WHITE OPPRESSOR — DO YOU SEE ANY CHANGES IN THE WAY YOU FEEL ABOUT THIS?

J.B.: My enormous concern has been, and still is, that I don't want to see a generation go out into the streets and die. On the other hand, I was also forced to realize that it wasn't up to me. Nobody can answer for a generation except that generation itself. We don't have the helicopters, we don't have the tanks, the weight against us is tremendous — which demands of the people in the situation that they find a way to respond.

Some very respectable people in this country, respectable in the ordinary sense, are aware of what is happening. This has made very peculiar bedfellows — the position of Justice Douglas is not that different after all from the position of Huey Newton. Some of the people

are beginning to see what has happened to the civilization, what has happened here, as a result of the fantastic greed of the corporatized system.

One of the reasons for the Nixon-Agnew business, about the silent majority and the whole claim that people who are against the war are really murdering American boys, is in the hope that somehow they can unite the whole country around a series of really bloody contradictions. Which is not possible.

They can't put thirty million black people in jail in secret, and in any case there are many more than thirty million — black people aren't the only dissenters here. What this country does not really understand is something very simple. That Huey is right when he says that as long as there are black people, there will be Black Panthers. Malcolm was right when he asked about the numerical strength of the Black Muslims — anyone who knows won't tell you and anyone who claims to know a fool. The truth is, any black person in this country at the time when the Muslim movement was at its height, was a Black Muslim. Any black person in this country at this hour is in some way a Black Panther.

And even if he weren't, the fact is that the cop isn't going to ask me my name and address before he shoots me, and the only difference between me and any other black cat in this country is that if they shoot me my name would be in the papers. We all know many people have died, none of us knows how many, but I know that for every one of me there would be twenty people dead,



here in my own generation. But they don't understand about the Viet Cong. My brother puts it this way — we are the first Viet Cong.

Shooting people in their apartments in the middle of the night creates exactly what they would not like to happen, this does something to people who ostensibly don't care, wouldn't care — something begins happening to the American consciousness — it's not just happening to black people, it's also happening to me. When society becomes that anarchic, it's not only black people that are managed, it's everybody else. So they create a resistance that wasn't there before.

Q: WHAT ABOUT THE PANTHER 2) CASES IN NEW YORK OR THE SUPPOSED MURDER IN NEW HAVEN, WHAT ARE YOUR FEELINGS ABOUT THOSE CASES?

J.B.: I see all those cases as harassment, as intimidation. Even if I were a very different person than the person that I am, there is no way for me to believe what the police or the government says. Unless I am really in a position to check it out myself. I've seen too much, I don't care what the white press says about the exaggerations of police brutality, I've lived with it all my life. I know, whether the New York Times wants to believe it or not, I was there and the New York Times was not.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY DOUBTS THAT THE NEW YORK AND NEW HAVEN CASES ARE FRAME-UPS?

J.B.: Until it is proven beyond a shadow of a doubt, preferably in the halls of the U.N., that it is not a frame-up, I will believe that it is a frame-up, because I am part of a people who have been historically framed-up.

Q: WHAT WOULD YOU SAY ABOUT THE CONSPIRACY TRIAL?

J.B.: I think that is simply too obscene to be discussed.

Q: WHY DO YOU THINK THEY INCLUDED BOBBY SEALE, WHO HAD ABSOLUTELY NOTHING TO DO WITH THE DEMONSTRATIONS, IN THE CONSPIRACY?

J.B.: Quite apart from all the illegality involved, Bobby Seale is a bad nigger. Same reason Mohammed Ali, formerly Cassius Clay, was stripped of his title. Same reason Malcolm's dead. One of the historical facts about this nation is that you always take a bad nigger and hang him publicly, as an example to all others who would be bad niggers.

Q: HAVE YOU OUTSIDE OF THE YOUNG BLACK AND WHITE MILITANTS YOU'VE TALKED TO, A STRONG REACTION TO THE MURDER OF FRID HAMPTON AND MARK CLARK IN CHICAGO?

J.B.: I don't know how to answer that, you put it the wrong way — Hampton and Clark are only the latest examples. The show has become monotonous.

Q: WASN'T THAT SO MUCH MORE OBVIOUS?

J.B.: It's amazing to me how difficult it is for people to see when they don't want to see. Black people see, but how many parents of white children see it, that's another question. The difference between my experience and that of white America, even the very best of white America, is that they have difficulty believing that the country was set this way. And that is not my problem at all, I've always known it could, it always has in my experience and I'm no longer young.

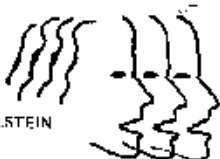
Q: WHY IS IT THAT GROUPS LIKE SCLC, NAACP, URBAN LEAGUE, AND GROUPS LIKE THEM ARE JUST BEGINNING TO COME OUT IN SUPPORT OF THE PANTHERS?

J.B.: The whole black situation in this country from the start has been very complicated. The battle between W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington was almost the battle in microcosm. There's always been something very closely resembling a hoax, the very heart of the American dream. And it applied to black people in great force, because for a while it was very useful to what is called the power structure to have certain niggers in the window. To prove to Americans that they were really what they said they were, and to prove to black people that they were what they said they were. And the nature of the bargain was that the nigger in the window could wrest some concessions from the status quo, in return for the tranquility of the natives.

But the table on which these people operate has vanished. Once Martin Luther King was shot, though some people think it was so long before that, it was perfectly clear that there was no way to be a good nigger. And that's not even pejorative because Uncle Tom played a very important role historically. But the role that he played is no longer possible to play. The defenders of the status quo have in effect given as much as they can give. And now even the most respectable black cat is very much, whether or not he likes it or whether or not he wants to admit it, no matter what his age — he is also part of the target no matter how famous or how rich he is.

We are all the Viet Cong, none of us can really be trusted from the point of view of the defenders of the American power. Not even the most agile Uncle Tom can hope to have any meaningful discussion or dialogue with Attorney General John Mitchell.

GAY YOUTH LIBERATION



IAN EDELSTEIN

Gay Youth began in late February in response to the desire expressed for an alternative to predominantly adult Gay groups. Those who suggested the group's formation felt distinct differences between their attitudes and those of older Homosexuals on various sexual, social and political issues. One prime guideline is the avoidance of racism and the constant view of Gay Liberation articulated by various, and often conflicting, political ideologies.

Gay Youth's functions began with a mixer on May 2nd. Over 50 people came to enjoy dancing, food and refreshments in a comfortable haze of drugs, alcohol and social equanimity. Such mixers will be continued throughout the summer.

Gay Youth invites all young Homosexual men and women to join.

MEETINGS: every Sunday 8PM; 300 9th Avenue.

GAY YOUTH LIBERATION PAPER

For our high schools for years we have been socialized, indoctrinated by teachers maintaining big-

otably sexist attitudes towards Homosexuals. I can remember very clearly discussing a book with allusions to someone's Homosexuality and the teacher blushing out in laughter. I, with all these references to boys you know what he was. Well this is getting too risqué, let's go on...

But these sexist views are not tied to us only in high school. Since sexist attitudes are profitable to society, they are carried out into the family, the schools and other institutions. They are part of the dogma that these institutions tell our heads with. The institution's function is to perpetuate the views which turn the wheels of society. Our sexist attitudes are the qualification for good citizenry of our society (socially aware) and a way of supporting commodities of our society (masculinity and femininity).

I'm tired of being used as a symbol of the gain and loss of society. No more of this shit! Confront and recognize your problems. The fact that you are oppressing me is a symptom of the repression and fear of the Homosexuality in your own bodies.

By not being easily identified by the superficial roles of society we threaten this society. Putting people up

light about their own assigned identity. Smashing that trick mirror which reflects the luxury of the society 'they' have constructed.

As a radical Homosexual no longer demand tolerance or acceptance. I don't like shit that goes 'you can do what you like in private.' Proud of my identity, I wish to introduce my lover as my lover. And no amount of that shit that goes 'well you can do what you like' while secretly saying to yourself 'what a relief that I don't indulge in such things.' That attitude which implies how superior you feel that you don't do that kind of thing is being shattered. The people who maintain that view are in for a rude awakening.

We are demanding understanding: an understanding of your Homosexual feelings. And the ending of society's fantasies and distortions, getting down to your own human nature.

You will have to confront us. No longer can you reject Homosexuals or Homosexuality. We reproduce within you, you can't be rid of us. An awakening is inevitable.



REPORT: CHICAGO GAY LIB

By Warren Shelton

The City of Chicago is covered by a giant glass ball which makes even the brightest day seem slightly grey, and the air always slightly stale. A news blackout contributes to the strong impression of pessimism under-glass (all of us - I am not trying to imply that Chicagoans are more provincial but that we are all persons under the milky glass) and the New York Times seems like radical journalism out there. Mayor Daley keeps the city clean except for the ghetto and, I'm sure, messes the trains up a lot.

I was in Chicago on April 10 and 11, a guest speaker at a rally in Grant Park called by University of Chicago Gay Liberation. Two hundred fifty people attended, and though we didn't have a permit, the cops seemed indifferent to us. There were four speakers - a fellow from A.C.L.U., the President of Mattachine Society Mid-West, Lee Weiner of the Conspiracy Eight, and myself. Lee Weiner called himself a certified member of the Fracking Fog Revolution, but didn't seem too aware of what gay oppression is all about, though it was clear to him that we are oppressed (I don't remember what the other fellows said, as I had just been let out of jail and hadn't had sleep for three days, and I'm sorry about that). I did rap about what GLF was doing in New York, and about the jail experience, and the common bond of oppression that unites Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation.

Then we all marched down the street, chanting "Ho, ho, homosexual" and "out of the closet, into the streets!" and singing "We're here because we're queer..." and generally freakin' out the solid citizens of Chicago. We marched to the jail, where one of our men was being held for solicitation or some other ridiculous charge, and camped in front of the jail. A fair-haired young cop was there, officer Manly (dig it), a member of the vice squad whose favorite vice is queer beating. People sang out, "Yoo-hoo, Officer Manly," embarrassing the hell out of him. Guess he doesn't want people to know that we know him.

Afterwards, we went home, talked and talked, and I was finally allowed to pass out. The next morning we talked again, and ran around trying to get insurance to cover the rental of a hall for a GLF dance.

GLF in Chicago has somewhat different problems than GLF in New York. Chicago is a city of neighborhoods, with no central area like the Village, so there is a north side GLF and a Hyde Park GLF, and GLF's on every campus in northern Illinois. Since the left is so small there, the GLF's are well-integrated racially. There are divisions between men and women.

Gay life is pretty tough there, and the few mafia bars don't appeal to most gays, so a GLF dance attracts as many as three thousand people. The dance we were trying to insure was being held in a convention hotel -

and the only company that would insure was a back company. The only medium that covered the demonstration was the black radio station.

As in New York, GLF's in Chicago are leaderless groups counting on workers, not on elected officers. However there is still a hang-up on the star system, and I got treated as a star, partly because some people there had read some stuff I wrote, partly because I was from New York, and partly because people there were so hungry for news from the outside world. This was not only embarrassing, it was exhausting. I tried to talk about consciousness-raising as a technique for developing one's political awareness and strength. A revolution can't wait for messiahs - it succeeds or fails according to the degree of development of everyone involved in it. We must all liberate ourselves; we are all the heroes of history.

It seemed to me, coming back, that what we need is a GLF clearing house so we can get information rapidly, instead of waiting for travelers to report what the over-ground media won't tell us. Our communications now are slower than pony express. Perhaps a nation-wide GLF clearing house could be headed through *Case Our*.

We ran into a little trouble with some cops who wanted to bust a sister for her manner of dress - and when I asked if she were actually under arrest, they threatened to bust me too. In Chicago, the pigs will bust you for asking questions - but GLF will bail you out and give you hospitality.

BANDERSNATCH'S AGAIN

By Lois Hart

Ya gotta DO IT - read Jerry Rubin's handbook of social revolution and waste change. He is a shitty, fuckhead heterosexual chauvinist big supremacist and he hasn't looked around to see the revolution (nazi's nipping at his ass - but it's O.K. cuz it's dynamite bomb that delivers the viewpoint and attitude that is going to do it: the things we have been talking about doing. Really tips through shit of eliding mystifying illusory stuff that keep us in the clichés and postures of the MONSTER CULTURE. If you haven't seen the show from where we're standing you are still in the woods and besides it's a good guide to the guerrilla warfare for the public mind and you might see some good ideas for some actions. So DO IT. STALL IT. READ IT only here in mind you will be shaking over. The biggest-ass socialist on the scene. He sees a world for men to be children in and women are to deliver the chicken soup (Nancy, for godssake!?!?)

Gay Student LIBERATION!

We of GSL/NYU actively support the 3 resolutions of the Student Strike:

1. U.S. out of LAOS, CAMBODIA, VIETNAM NOW
U.S. out of HOMES, UNIVERSITIES, PEOPLES PARKS, BEDROOMS and OUR LIVES
 2. Free all Political Prisoners
Free all Prisoners of Crimes without Victims (Homosexuals, Prostitutes)
 3. War Machines Off Campus
ROTC and ARMY Who Chase Who is Mural Enough to Kill - Get Off Campus
- WE SUPPORT THE STRIKE! WE DEMAND THE RIGHT TO LIVE AS WE CHOOSE! FREELY AND OPENLY!!



THE TRANSVESTITE IN AMERICA by Laura McVister

The homosexual community and women's liberation groups at long last have started demanding the rights and privileges the rest of America enjoys. They have begun to achieve a small degree of success. One oppressed group, however, has not yet launched anything resembling a demand for recognition and acceptance — the transvestites. Transvestism, unfortunately, is a practice frequently misunderstood by nearly everyone, including gay people, and this misunderstanding has bred much intolerance. The time has now come to change this.

First of all, the psychiatric profession generally agrees that transvestism, in all its various forms, is a phenomenon occurring almost as frequently as homosexuality. Nevertheless, very few people know much about it and informative literature on the subject is rare, generally unavailable to the wide reading public, and frequently these sources are full of unhealthy assumptions and prejudices. There are very few books that contain the knowledge and understanding of Dr. Harry Benjamin's *The Transsexual Phenomenon*. In addition there are almost no popular publications on the market about transvestism; even *Times Square*, that remarkable repository of exotic books, has only one bookstore that regularly carries books and magazines on the subject. The quality of these productions is generally quite poor, except for *Transvestia*, and its future is very doubtful right now.

Socially, transvestites do not fare much better. Aside from a few private social groups, and the occasional correspondence club whose chief aim appears to be that of finding people for a few dollars, there are no permanent organizations to help and enlighten transvestites either socially or politically.

The result of all this is mass ignorance on the subject, which in turn has produced enormous anxieties, guilt feelings, and a terrible sense of isolation in many transvestites, and has also given rise to oppressive laws and attitudes in our society. In short, this is the familiar profile of all oppressed minorities.

To better the situation in New York by providing some information on the practice of transvestism, a series of three discussions took place in October and November at the Christopher End Cafe. The West Side Discussion Group also featured an excellent program one evening in January on the topic of transsexualism. (This same topic was also treated fairly well in the January 27, 1970 edition of *LOOK*.) Unfortunately neither of these discussions was intended as a permanent forum on transvestism, so most of the people they drew soon melted back into their closets. Nevertheless, the information revealed during these discussions appeared to confirm some general theories explaining and describing the phenomenon of cross dressing.

There seem to be two essentially different categories of people who dress as members of the opposite sex: transvestites and transsexuals. Transsexuals are those who so completely feel as if they are members of the opposite sex that they remain unhappy until their genders are changed physically. To simply dress like the other sex is unsatisfying and frustrating for them. Transvestites, however, are those who receive a psychic and physical thrill from wearing the clothes of the opposite sex. But the variations of attitudes within this group are quite numerous and complex. Many are heterosexually oriented and these are the ones who seem to receive the greatest thrill from the clothing itself; it is to these persons that the word "transvestite" is most appropriate. Some cross dressers are homosexual and they are frequently called "drag queens." Their interest in cross dressing is a desire to complete a basically feminine attitude towards things and to be treated in a special manner by men.

It is essential to realize, though, that these categories are at best tentative, for there can be a lot of movement by an individual within this entire range. Many transvestites in the heterosexual group have found that they grow to be asexual or transsexual as time went by. Many find themselves increasingly attracted to the idea of taking hormone injections to alter the secondary sexual

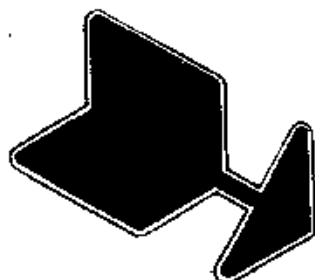
characteristics. The reverse of this occurs when persons who have undergone the sex-change operation sudden find they are very unhappy with the change and wish they had not done it; these are frequently people who were not genuinely transsexual but were confused by the maze of feelings they had and the variety of opinions on the subject. Many true transsexuals never have the operation, though, because of the expense and danger involved.

Also, the varieties of personalities among transvestite and drag queens are quite diversified. Transvestites tend to be introverted and quiet, although many are quite opposite while drag queens tend to be more exhibitionistic. Both groups have their fair share of neuroses, and all individuals involved in cross dressing undergo great changes in personality as well as appearance when drag.

Theories explaining the origins of the transvestite personality are as elusive as those explaining homosexuality. In fact the theories are very similar. So in the final analysis the transvestite is left to his own wits to try to find some relative happiness and understanding life. This is a difficult task when such persons feel alone, so mystified by their own nature, and harassed by the law and society as well.

Solutions to some of these problems will be difficult but some things clearly can be done now. Political pressure groups such as those within the homosexual community are probably vain wishes for the transvestite right now, but at the very least some strong social organizations must be started so that a sense of identity can be established. From this, political action could be started. It is likewise time for everyone else to begin realizing that transvestites, homosexuals, blacks, women, etc. must be taken as the various components of society at large and must be allowed the same rights and dignities as the "middle American."

Anyone interested in information on the possible development of a discussion group for transvestites in the N.Y.C. area, please write to the author of this article in care of COME OUT.



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