



Black and White Men Together

by Linda Rapp

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The National Association of Black and White Men Together is an organization with a double purpose. It educates association members and the public about racial and glbtq issues and it provides opportunities for racially-mixed couples to socialize in an open and accepting atmosphere.

Black and White Men Together (BWMT) was founded by Michael Smith, a white man whose African-American partners included Glenn Burke, the first major league baseball player to come out publicly as gay (albeit after his retirement from the sport).

Interested in meeting other gay men in interracial relationships, Smith placed an ad in *The Advocate* in 1980. As a result of the response, BWMT chapters formed in San Francisco, Kansas City, Chicago, New York, and Boston, and more were soon added.

The name Black and White Men Together was "deliberately chosen for its shock value," but quickly became an inaccurate description of the group, which welcomes men of all racial backgrounds. After extensive discussion in 1987 the national organization chose to retain the original name, but many chapters opt to call themselves Men of All Colors Together (MACT). Some chapters have lesbian members and are known as People of All Colors Together (PACT).

The National Association of Black and White Men Together (NABWMT) is headed by two co-chairs, traditionally of different races. The national organization articulates a political philosophy and issues statements reflecting the general consensus of the membership, but individual chapters have considerable autonomy in their own governance.

In response to the AIDS epidemic, the NABWMT was active in education programs, particularly in the African-American community. Reggie Williams, executive director of the NABWMT's AIDS program was especially vigorous in his efforts on behalf of AIDS patients. He initiated a protest in Washington, D. C. in December 1989 to call for increased federal funding for research, as well as for health care and practical assistance with such basic needs as food and housing for people with AIDS.

Williams also headed the National Task Force on AIDS Prevention for six years before moving to Amsterdam in 1994 to be with his partner, Wolfgang Schreiber, who was barred from entering the United States because he was HIV-positive.

A consistent theme of the NABWMT has been eliminating racism and improving communication among people of different ethnic groups. To that end the association founded the Multiracial/Multicultural Institute (MRMCI) in 1996. The institute offers workshops designed to combat racism and homophobia and to foster good communication among people of different races.

The NABWMT has chapters in more than thirty cities around the United States. The organization holds an annual convention at which members attend educational workshops, discuss political and cultural issues,

and also enjoy entertainment and social events.

The activities of local chapters vary, but many feature lectures and discussions about enhancing understanding among people of diverse backgrounds. Chapters also organize excursions to cultural venues such as museum exhibitions, films, and restaurants.

NABWMT members regularly participate in pride marches and were represented in the march commemorating the fortieth anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech in Washington, D. C. in August 2003. In addition, members meet in purely social situations, such as excursions to beaches or potluck dinners at individuals' homes, where interracial couples can interact in congenial and accepting settings.

The NABWMT is dedicated to the mission of "fostering supportive environments wherein racial and cultural barriers can be overcome and the goal of human equality realized."

Through its political actions and statements, its educational endeavors, and its social activities, the NABWMT strives to affirm the dignity of all people of all races and sexual orientations and to provide them with opportunities to explore, value, and comprehend their differences while celebrating their common humanity.

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