

*The Lafayette*  
Staff Editorial  
"Reaching Goals"

It is always important for new organizations to establish themselves on campus. Lafayette College must learn to adjust to the changes happening outside of its small community to be informed of current issues. F.L.A.G.B. (Friends of Lesbians and Gays & Bisexuals) is such an organization which established on campus in order to educate students about the issues which people are afraid to face, alternative lifestyles.

We think it is great that this group has organized, and intends to increase awareness of gay and lesbian issues, however we disagree with the manner in which the organization is using to fulfill its goals.

F.L.A.G.B. has celebrated such national holidays as "Come Out of the Closet Day," and the organization hopes to celebrate a day in which blue jeans are worn in support of gay and lesbian rights. Unfortunately, the organization is forced to deal with Lafayette students who need more education and information on the topic of homosexuality before these students can be asked to reveal their preferences or even show support.

Perhaps a solution for the lack of student knowledge or concern would be for F.L.A.G.B. to sponsor various educational programs to increase the awareness of students. We must overcome our fears and ignorance before we can take any kind of stand on such issues. Admitting our sexual preferences by "coming out of the closet" or by wearing blue jeans might not be a stand that many Lafayette students are willing to make at this time.

We are not condemning the actions of F.L.A.G.B., rather we are proposing other options for the organization to utilize in order to gain the support from the Lafayette community while providing us with valuable and much-needed knowledge. F.L.A.G.B.'s goals can be reached, but as the cliché states, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks."

Dear Editor:

The other day as I walked into Farinon, I was interrupted by the presence before me of a large structure of questionable stability and craftsmanship.

It became obvious to me from the word 'closet' that appeared on the structure that this was a 'statement' being made by a group advocating Gay and Lesbianism. It occurred to me that for my beliefs, it would be best to walk on, and not engage the few who stood hoping to elicit shock from passersby. Here is my response:

I am against Gay and Lesbianism. Further, I am against the Skinheads, Radical Feminists who assert that all sex is rape, and every other group whose doctrine is 'We are correct, so live with it, because your rights are meaningless in our eyes.'

To examine this, consider the following. I believe in the doctrine of 'to each his own.' That is, as long as my rights are not violated or offended by the presence of something, let it be. It would follow then, that I believe that homosexuals should be left alone, and that they should have no greater scrutiny applied to their lives than any other individuals in society. They are people too.

The same cannot be said of Gays and Lesbians. Those terms,

the idea of 'coming out,' with much fanfare and parades and whatever else, are wrong. I do not identify myself in public solely on the basis of my preferences; that I am a heterosexual male, or that I find myself attracted to women who respect themselves. Rather, I am an individual who respects the rights of others, and the idea of decency, so I identify myself as a person, and leave the details of my private life in my private life.

Do not be fooled; Gay and Lesbian groups are political groups, and they do not have membership roles consistent with the actual numbers of homosexuals in our world. They represent only a minute number of radical individuals, and most likely do not represent the views of most homosexuals, just as radical groups like the K.K.K. do not represent the views of most whites. I would urge that people ignore displays such as the one I witnessed outside Farinon, and that they keep in mind that radicals never represent the majority, although they somehow always seem to be the ones getting all of the attention.

Marshall Tawney

# Letter to the editor

Dear Editor,

As a member of the organization F.L.A.G.B. (Friends of Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals), I feel compelled to respond to two items that appeared in the last issue of *The Lafayette* (14 October 1994). First, the staff editorial entitled "Reaching Goals" was, to me at least, the result of either misinformation or perhaps plain ignorance. To correct one mistake, there is no such "national holiday" as "Come Out of the Closet Day", but rather a day (11 November) which is considered "Coming Out Day." This day is designated as a day on which those who have not openly declared their homosexuality can do so. Such an inaccuracy could have been corrected by a minuscule amount of research, or by information supplied by one of the several members of F.L.A.G.B.

However, my point in writing is not to give the newspaper editing tips. Rather, I should like to ask the editors of *The Lafayette* what they mean when they suggest that F.L.A.G.B. is an organization that is not providing the campus with "education and information on the topic of homosexuality". Furthermore, what do the editors mean when they suggest that F.L.A.G.B. should "sponsor various educational programs to increase the awareness of students." Exactly what is it that the editors of *The Lafayette* feel members of F.L.A.G.B. are doing? Since the inception of the organization, its goal has been to provide information and education on homosexuality and its related topics. In the years the organization has existed,

F.L.A.G.B. has brought numerous speakers to campus, held various panel/discussion groups, participated in conferences at other campuses, raised money for AIDS research in addition to many other activities and functions that are already planned for this year.

The two activities which the editorial speaks of ("Coming Out Day" and Blue Jeans Day) are supplementary activities to F.L.A.G.B.'s already existing educational programming. These two activities are part of F.L.A.G.B.'s agenda insofar as they help to foster a niche within the Lafayette community that expresses to homosexuals that the entire campus is **not** as homophobic as some claim it to be.

However, as can be painfully evidenced by the letter to the editor written by Marshall Tawney, F.L.A.G.B. and the Lafayette community at large have long strides to make in terms of combatting homophobia on this campus. Mr. Tawney's letter, while rampant with inaccuracies, inconsistencies and self-contradictions, is the perfect example of the attitude F.L.A.G.B. expected would surface as a result of our constructed closet which sat in front of Farinon on 11 October.

Mr. Tawney writes his letter to inform the Lafayette community that not only is he "against Gay and Lesbianism" and that "...the idea of 'coming out,' with much fanfare and parades and whatever else, are **wrong**." Well, I would like to be the first to thank you, Mr. Tawney, for your straight-forwardness and honesty, but please, when you are denigrating certain mem-

bers of our community (gays, lesbians, and bisexuals), be sure not to fall into those same habits of which you are accusing others of being guilty (namely "identifying (myself) in public solely on the basis of (my) preferences").

You, Mr. Tawney, evidently, do not prefer to be in the presence of gays, lesbians and bisexuals. You seem to feel that their rights to exist and to carry on normal lives in society are somehow secondary to your own. You seem to express that gays, lesbians and bisexuals should not publicly acknowledge their feelings. Yet you, Mr. Tawney, express your feelings quite publicly by writing a letter to the editor. How ironic.

Obviously, I disagree with Mr. Tawney's beliefs. However, the core of my problem lies with Mr. Tawney's refusal to allow others to express their beliefs. Mr. Tawney's greatest fear seems not to be **what** we in F.L.A.G.B. believe, but rather that **we dare express our beliefs publicly**. So it is with one hand that I find Mr. Tawney's beliefs reprehensible, but with the other that I grant him the right to have and express these beliefs. I only ask that he extend the same courtesy to those who have contrary beliefs and lifestyles to his own. After all, it was Mr. Tawney himself who wrote, "as long as my rights are not violated or offended by the presence of something, **let it be.**"

-Sara Barnett, '95



## Letters to the editor

Dear Editor,

Your Friday, October 14 issue of the paper contained two pieces that I read with great sadness. The first was the staff editorial taking FLAGB to task for its methods, and the second was the cryptic letter attacking FLAGB for being radical "Gay and Lesbianists."

The staff editorial was so dismaying for a number of reasons, the most galling of which, to me, was the suggestion that FLAGB "sponsor various educational programs to increase the awareness of students" before we can ask students to show their support. I am utterly dumbfounded that one of the most active groups on campus can be virtually unknown to the editorial staff. On almost every Monday night of the semester a FLAGB banner hangs in Farinon, inviting everyone to attend our meetings. I will not rehearse here the complete list of events, forums, and other "educational programs" FLAGB has sponsored in its nearly two years; do you remember Tom Pannicea speaking on gays in the military? Eric Marcus? Warren Blumenfeld on homophobia? The panel on coming-out stories? The spring break condom distribution? Why after so long and so much do you call FLAGB a "new" group? Perhaps our campus newspaper needs to get some reporters out of the editorial office and into the field before it editorializes in such clear ignorance.

The truly sad aspect of the editorial was that though it was trying to be progressive it was only confused. You suggest that people need to be taught, but also that they cannot be taught; that people need to learn before they can take a stand on threatening issues, but that they can only learn in ways that do not confront the very fears that make the issues so threatening. We constructed the closet to dramatize its presence here at Lafayette, not to dare people to expose their sexual preferences. We painted homophobic slurs all over it to show that the walls of the closet are created by the sometimes intense and insane hatred and fear of homosexuality that can be found here. You editorialized against our display; perhaps you would have found

something more important to editorialize about had you stood just a little way off from our closet and listened to the more or less steady stream of hissed expletives coming from passing students. I am glad you at least say you "are not condemning the actions of FLAGB," and I want to commend you on those parts of the editorial that reflect an enlightened attitude. But one can only wonder why you never found the space to condemn homophobia.

Mr. Tawney's letter attacking FLAGB was sad because of its blatant and overwhelming ignorance. Mr. Tawney claims that FLAGB is a group "advocating" what he calls "Gay and Lesbianism," whatever that might be. Does campaigning against homophobia-inspired violence make us advocates of anything more than the belief that we are all entitled to our personal safety, homosexuals included? What we are advocating is tolerance and acceptance, nothing more, nothing less. Mr. Tawney believes by some strange logic that advocating equal rights is a denial or rejection of his rights.

Mr. Tawney in fact lives in a dream world, where everyone understands everyone else's rights, where everyone is perfectly content to live and let live. In the real world, women earn substantially less than men for equal work, and so they have to work hard to secure equal pay, and unfortunately become, in Mr. Tawney's world, feminist mon-

sters who want to castrate or kill all men.

It is a frighteningly sad world we live in when advocating justice and equality and acceptance becomes "radical," when groups like FLAGB get mentioned in the same sentence as the K.K.K.

I ask Mr. Tawney to consider for just one second the idea that it is the homophobic world we live in here that denies gays the rights he so blithely takes for granted. Gays want what he wants, the right to just get along without being threatened or beaten for what you may or may not do in the privacy of your home.

A few days after I first read Mr. Tawney's letter, I was walking through campus around sunset with my partner. Enjoying the beautiful foliage and light we naturally found ourselves walking closely hand-in-hand, consequently but without ever thinking about it "identifying ourselves in public" as heterosexuals. Were two men or two women walking the same way here, they would be, I suppose, radical Gay and Lesbianists. Mr. Tawney's letter encourages the hatred and fear that makes such a scenario here at Lafayette dangerous if not impossible.

FLAGB's event was not about getting gays out of the closet—it was about getting this community to stop building closets around decent and honest people who then find themselves trapped in them. It is hard to see the leaves through the walls.

-Jeff Poggi- asst. prof. English

Dear Editor,

I am writing this in response to Marshall Tawney's Letter to the Editor on October 14. What Mr. Tawney does not seem to realize is that his stance "against Gay and Lesbianism" is exactly what makes things like National Coming Out Day so necessary. Unfortunately, his "to each his own" concept is not something that everyone adheres to or believes in, and demonstrations and displays like the one front of Farinon hope to raise consciousness, and hopefully opens minds. This last goal seems to have been lost on Mr. Tawney.

He writes that "fanfare and parades and whatever else are wrong." Well, the fanfare and "whatever" are the things that get attention and force people to deal with their prejudices and stereotypes. Does Mr. Tawney also believe that there should have been no Civil Rights movement? Unless I was taught incorrectly, in my history classes we learned about marches and sit-ins and demonstrations (so eloquently described as "parades and whatever else") that were staged so that blacks could gain racial equality. It seems that Mr. Tawney thinks that Rosa Parks should have kept her mouth shut and just sat in the back of the bus so that she did not "offend" anyone.

How about the Women's Movement? Did that also go against Mr. Tawney's "beliefs" or

"violate" his "rights"? As for his comment about "Radical Feminists who assert that all sex is rape," I would be very interested in learning about these so-called groups, because to my knowledge none exist. A specific organization name would have been helpful.

Demonstrations and marches and displays are things that must be done to raise awareness and foster an atmosphere of tolerance, and eventually, acceptance. These methods are employed because they are effective. To get a message across to people, it must be seen by as many people as possible. If such demonstrations make some people angry or irritated, at least it makes them think. To gain equality gays and lesbians must use the tactics that Mr. Tawney seems so perturbed by. They are the same methods used by Martin Luther King, Jr. during the Civil Rights movement and by the Women's Rights movement. Those two fights for equality and acceptance would have gotten nowhere without "fanfare and parades and whatever else."

As for Mr. Tawney's belief that gays and lesbians should not stage large marches or displays, it should be noted that our Constitution guarantees the freedom of assembly and petition. It's called the First Amendment. Maybe he should check it out.

Sincerely,

Alison Mehr '98