## STEP BY STEP

## Antics aren't always activism

friend Niva in an outdoor cafe near Dupont Circle. Across the street was a before my own recovery when I had lalocal Gay bar, and as Niva and I finished eating we noticed that several patrons of levied against Gays. But it was rare, in the bar had gathered outside to enjoy the balmy summer night. This would have been fine, but for one thing: Most of the men there were so intolerably drunk that I wondered if they hadn't actually been thrown out of the bar.

They were creating a horrible scene, hooting at the straight men who drove by in their cars, harassing passersby, and destructive. While it was true that Gays camping it up in the most vulgar ways abused drugs and alcohol to an alarming they could devise. People sitting at neighboring tables in the cafe turned to stare at us—two-thirds—dealt with the challenge the spectacle, and several of them com- of being Gay without the help of drugs or mented on the floor-show being enacted alcohol. It wasn't accurate, then, to conby "the queers" outside the bar. Inwardly, clude that Gays were helpless against I cringed.

## Anthony Copeland

that same day I came out to her.

She had handled the news well too happy to dismiss us as inferior. enough, though not before she'd voiced I remembered the recent controversy some concern over what she called the which had erupted when people living "Gay lifestyle." Like a good activist, I'd near the bars complained about the quickly assured her that Gays had moved ruckus caused by patrons as they were beyond the stereotypes which portrayed leaving each night. For weeks the battle them as wretched, boozy characters had raged over whether to close certain

Now, weeks later, she sat watching the drunken confrontations. and I knew that

Not long ago, I was sitting with my for those not willing to confront their own alcoholism. There were many times mented the injustice and the oppression those days, for me to actually take any action for the Gay cause. It was much easier, instead, to get drunk and act up. I reasoned that my public displays had become a type of activism all their own.

Second, and more insidious, was the smug conviction on the part of many straights that Gays were inherently selfdegree, it was equally true that most of their addictions, yet this was the message so clearly rendered, time after time, to mainstream society.

All too often, it seemed we pandered Niva, a straight woman, had not long to these stereotypes by adopting the been exposed to the unique notion of per- drunken personae. We vented our frustraceiving Gays as human beings. Less than tions in ways that worked to our own a month before she had confided to me detriment by engaging in types of bethat, while she had nothing against Gays, havior that did nothing to improve pershe'd never actually met one. It would ceptions of who we are. We played the have been cruel to keep her ignorant, so tragic, angst-ridden roles assigned to us by a society which would have been all

skulking through dingy, back-room bars. bars because of noise, vandalism, and

While it was true that many of the life- charges were exaggerated, masking as

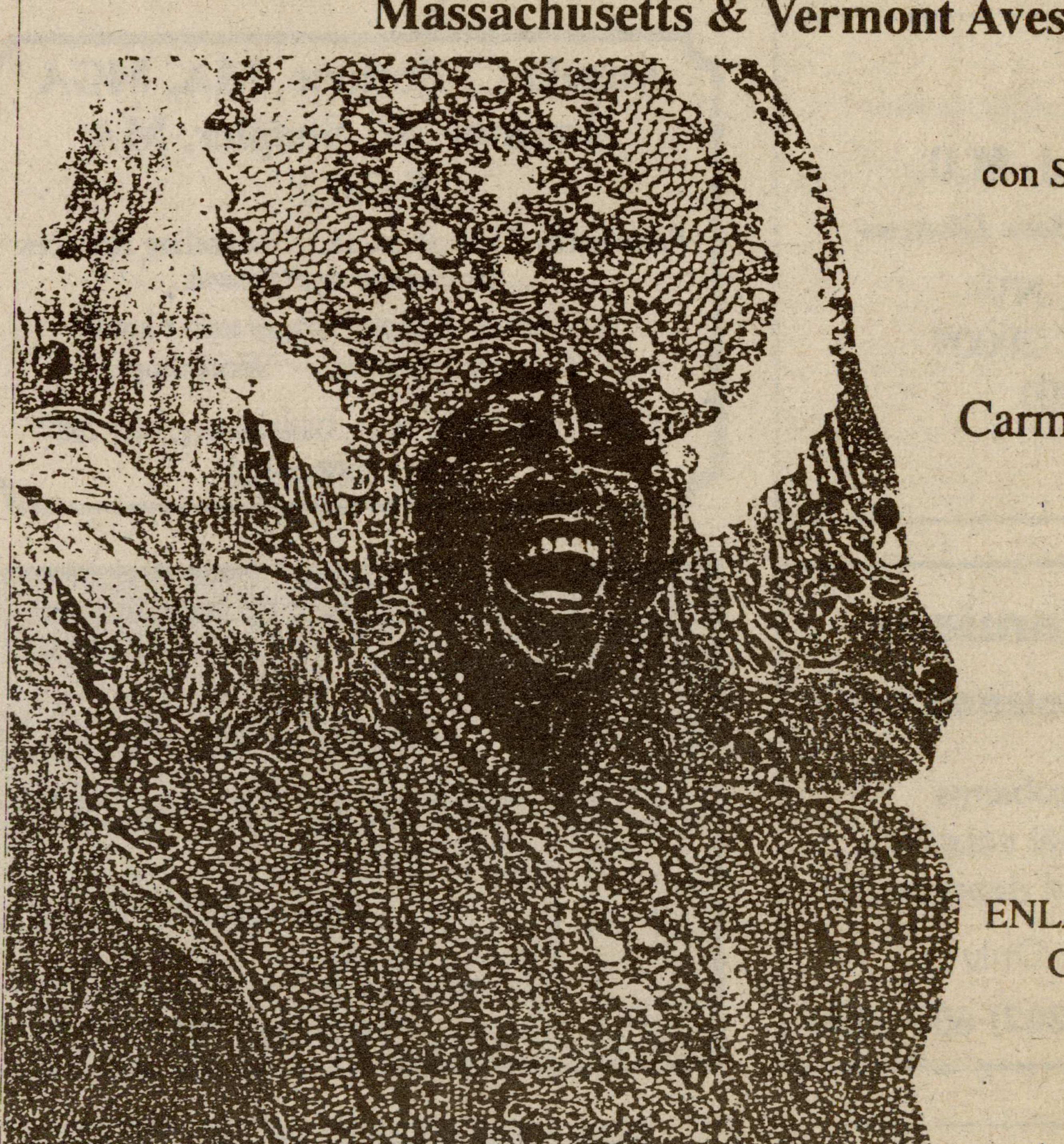
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