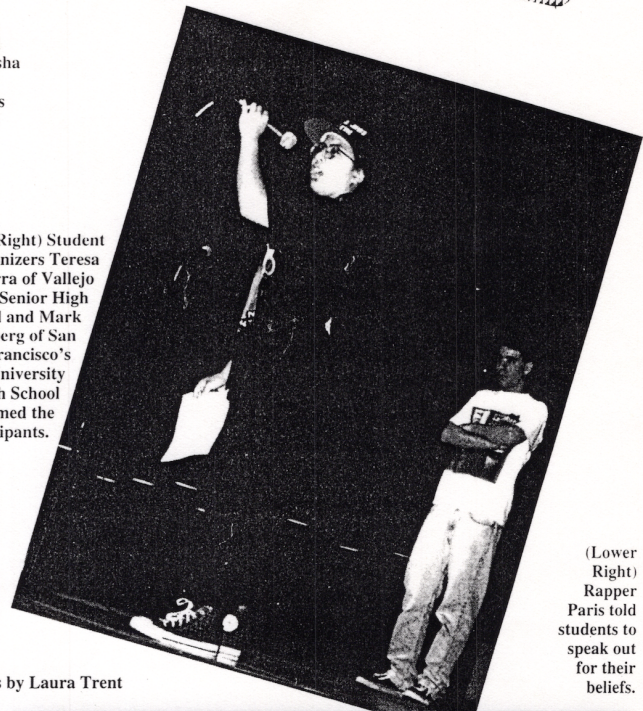


Say What??!!

Conference Draws 1,000 Students



(Left) COPWATCH representative Maisha Jameson answers students' questions after the panel on dealing with the police.



(Right) Student organizers Teresa Esguerra of Vallejo Senior High School and Mark Weinberg of San Francisco's University High School welcomed the participants.

(Lower left) Students creating a mural for President Bill Clinton with their messages of advice, dreams and plans for the future.

(Lower Right) Rapper Paris told students to speak out for their beliefs.

Conference photos by Laura Trent



by Chris Wu

More than 1,000 northern California high school students gathered at the 1993 ACLU-NC "Say What??!!" conference celebrating freedom of expression on May 10. Students from more than 15 high schools in Milpitas, Oakland, San Jose, Fort Bragg, Hercules, Vallejo and San Francisco spent the day at workshops, panel discussions and performances at the Bill Graham Civic Auditorium in San Francisco.

Members of the ACLU-NC Student Advisory Committee, organized by the Howard A. Friedman First Amendment Education Project, coordinated the event, which addressed issues ranging from censorship of art and music, the use of discriminatory "gang profiles," and contraceptives on campus, to lesbian and gay rights, the death penalty, drug legalization, police relations, women's and student's rights. Speakers included San Francisco School Board President Tom Ammiano, KMEL radio disc jockey Renell Willis, San Francisco Juvenile Court Judge Donna Hitchens, as well as controversial music stars Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys and rap artist Paris. In addition, local music groups Without Reservation, Skankin' Pickle, Blear and Soma Holiday performed.

"The students who organized the conference did an incredible job putting together a program that really dealt with

teen issues," said Marcia Gallo, Director of the Friedman Project. "I was impressed by the knowledge and involvement of all the conference participants."

"The issues addressed were really controversial," said Candice Tolin, a junior at Lowell High School in San Francisco. "Everyone was really interested and into it because there were so many different ethnic groups represented and everyone had a story to tell."

At the opening session, special emcee Dominique Di Prima, formerly of KRON-TV's "Home Turf," and comedian Margaret Cho urged the participants to speak out for their civil rights.

"You have to know your rights so that people can't take advantage of you. I was always an activist. I believe in the issues," said Di Prima.

After the welcoming remarks, students broke off into different information sessions, which featured panels of community activists and student moderators who encouraged audience participation.

In the Gang Profiles session, panelists discussed police discrimination against teenagers. "When they apply gang profiles, it's based on race. It's a form of race discrimination," said ACLU-NC staff attorney Ed Chen.

In a session focusing on whether drugs should be legalized, Dr. Eugene Schoenfeld, an addiction treatment specialist, and Sergeant Ron Jones from the Oakland Police Department debated the pros and

cons of drug legalization.

"The effects of drug wars are far worse than the effects of drugs," Schoenfeld argued, advocating legalization.

Jones, on the other hand, said, "Legalization of drugs would be a way of giving up. We should put more effort into education and prevention."

Lesbian and gay issues also were addressed at the conference. Panelist Carmen Vázquez, board member of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, discussed the effects of homophobia. "Homophobia isn't just about words, it hurts," she explained.

Speakers on the "Dealing with Police" panel talked about problems that many of today's youth encounter with the police. "Judges know that police reports are not always accurate," said Judge Hitchens. "The power to assert your rights is a very important power, but it must be done wisely."

The death penalty was another hot topic at the conference.

Panelist Stanley Currier, President of the Amnesty International Club at South San Francisco High School said, "Putting someone to death is one of the most cruel and unusual punishments — there is no return."

In the final session of the day, musicians Jello Biafra and Paris spoke on the panel, "Fighting Censorship of Art and Music," along with comedian Cho and Mohammad Bilal and William Wylie of the rap group Midnight Voices.

"No one can tell you what your values are. Only you can decide that," said Cho. "The government should not be able to regulate what you can see and what you can hear. Through communication and being aware, you can really change the world."

"Be true to yourself and don't let other people influence you," said Paris, who thanked the ACLU for supporting him in his fight against censorship of his song "Bush Killa."

The members of the Conference Planning Committee/ACLU Student Advisory Council are Co-Chairs Teresa Esguerra and Mark Weinberg; and Atasha Abeyta, Randall Johnson, Natalie Adona, Anne Kelson, Barrett Brown, Anna Martinez, Jennifer Cheng, Erin McClure, Josh Clark, Matt McGiffert, Jessica Coffin, David Melaugh, Robby Cronholm, Ryan Omega, Tiffany Davis, Robin Patronik, Chad Elliot, Karen Soderberg, Colin Harris, Miranda Thorman and Chris Wu.

Food donations were provided by Ted's Market.

Chris Wu is a junior at Lowell High School and a member of the ACLU-NC Student Advisory Committee.

Additional conference reporting was done by ACLU-NC Public Information Department interns Rachel Cohen and Yana Wiregard, and staff members Jean Field and Michele Hurtado.