

Lasting Legacy

LIONEL CUFFIE PIONEERED GAY RIGHTS AT RUTGERS—AND INSPIRED OTHERS TO DO THE SAME AT UNIVERSITIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY

If Lionel Cuffie were alive today, he would surely have a thing or two to say on the issue of gay marriage. Cuffie, founding chairperson of the second student organization for gay men and women in the country on the College Avenue campus in September 1969, was a key player in the early days of the gay movement. This academic year marks 20 years since Cuffie's death and 35 years since the Rutgers Student Homophile League was established.

"I was a Rutgers student who hadn't come out yet as gay but I knew of Lionel; he was a black Rutgers College sophomore who had a special talent for organizing people and educating them on issues of homosexuality and sexuality," says Cheryl Clarke, director of Rutgers' Office of Diverse Community Affairs and Lesbian and Gay Concerns (GSNB'74,'00; SSW'78). In 1998, Rutgers presented its first Lionel Cuffie Award for activism to James Dale (RC'93), who successfully sued the Boy Scouts after they revoked his right to lead a troop when they learned he was copresident of the Lesbian and Gay Alliance at Rutgers.

Clarke says that before her office was created in 1992, the league—renamed several times



and known today as the Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian Alliance at Rutgers University—was a student-run group that sponsored New Brunswick campus outreach and social programs, as well as training programs for members of the university community. Today, Clarke adds, there is also university-sponsored programming on the Newark and Camden campuses and a host of gay, lesbian, and transgender student organizations on all three campuses.

"Our gay movement helped influence similar movements at places like Berkeley, the University of Michigan, and the University of Massachusetts," says Clarke.