

## 2 Tracing the rainbow: an historical sketch of the American gay and lesbian movement

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To be overtly homosexual, in a culture that denigrates and hates homosexuals, is to be political. Michael Bronski

An historical analysis of the American gay and lesbian movement utilizing the political process model seeks to answer a variety of questions. What changing opportunity enabled the movement even to be contemplated? What types of organizations existed to capitalize on this opportunity? When did members of this disenfranchized minority realize their inherent agential power thereby experiencing cognitive liberation? What organizations did the movement spur? What type of response did the movement elicit from both the government and other citizens? How has the movement changed over the course of its existence? What factors have influenced this change? This chapter attempts to address these questions by sketching the evolution of the American gay and lesbian movement throughout the post-war period. Starting with an analysis of the effect of the Second World War on homosexual identity and community, this chapter traces the development of the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, explores the effect of the Stonewall riots of 1969, examines the ideology of gay liberation in the 1970s, analyzes the complex impact of AIDS on the movement, and assesses current notions of gay and lesbian visibility and the present status of the movement. Although homosexuals have obviously existed before this time, and a homosexual subculture had been emerging since the late nineteenth century, the onset of the Second World War ushered in a new era of visibility that would profoundly shape not just the lives of American gay men and lesbians, but question the understanding of sexuality itself.

### **No longer alone: World War II and changing opportunity**

Despite and sometimes because of the mounting political war against them, the generation of the Second World War gay veterans did find ways to break through

their isolation. They responded to a hostile environment by expanding their “closet,” making it a roomier place to live. Previous generations had invented the closet – a system of lies, denials, disguises, and double entendres – that had enabled them to express some of their homosexuality by pretending it didn’t exist and hiding it from view. A later generation would “come out of the closet,” learning to live as proud and open gay men and women and demanding public recognition. But the World War II generation slowly stretched their closet to the limits, not proclaiming or parading their homosexuality in public but not willing to live lonely, isolated lives. (Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire*)

The emergence of the gay and lesbian movement in the United States is sometimes pinpointed to an exact date and time: 1:20 a.m. on Saturday, 28 June 1969. On this day, police officers from Manhattan’s Sixth Precinct raided a well-known gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village.<sup>1</sup> The police raid was not so uncommon; innumerable gay bars experienced such hostile actions from law enforcement. Yet, the reaction of the patrons was extraordinary: they fought back sparking two days and nights of riotous confrontation between approximately four hundred New York police officers and two thousand gay men and women, especially people of color.<sup>2</sup> This event is so crucial because it signifies the emergence of group action among a previously docile, powerless, and seemingly invisible minority. Soon after the riots, various organizations, such as the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), were created to help mobilize gay men and lesbians into a viable political force. Yet, as historian John D’Emilio demonstrates, a curious contradiction developed between the GLF rhetoric and the reality of the homosexual community. Activists of the early 1970s excoriated the invisibility and silence which many felt characterized the homosexual lifestyle. However, leaders of liberation movement organizations demonstrated a remarkably uncanny ability to mobilize these supposedly silent and isolated men and women: by the middle of the 1970s over one thousand gay and lesbian organizations existed in the United States.<sup>3</sup> This apparent inconsistency can be resolved if we take D’Emilio’s advice: “clearly what the movement achieved and how lesbians and gay men responded to it belied the rhetoric of isolation and invisibility. Isolated men and women do not create, almost overnight, a mass movement premised upon a shared group identity.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, the gay and lesbian movement did not suddenly start at a given hour on a certain day following a specific event; rather, it embodies an historical process marked by diverse opportunities, multiple organizational networks, and instances, such as the Stonewall riots, which ushered in some shift in the personal perspectives of gay men and lesbians themselves.

If we acknowledge that the gay and lesbian movement is a movement grounded in a shared and community identity, then we must also recognize that such identity formation takes time. Numerous theorists, including Michel Foucault, contend that the homosexual *per se* does not inherently exist but is a social construction dating from the late nineteenth century:

As defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history, and a childhood, in addition to being a type of life form, and a morphology, with an indiscreet anatomy and possibly a mysterious physiology. Nothing that went into his total composition was unaffected by his sexuality. It was everywhere present in him: at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; written immodestly on his face and body because it was a secret that always gave itself away. It was consubstantial with him, less as a habitual sin than as a singular nature . . . Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed for the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault contends that the transformation from homosexual behavior to homosexual identity was induced by a shift in societal norms, particularly from a medical angle. Foucault isolates the transference of a type of *behavior* to a type of *person*, indeed the confluence of the behavior with the person and thereby the construction of a new identity. The characterization of the Victorian era as prudish and sexually repressed is entirely incorrect according to Foucault; rather, this age saw a proliferation of studies and discourses which attempted to categorize various forms of sexual deviancy including prostitution and homosexuality.<sup>6</sup> In doing so, sexual acts were no longer mere practices, but, instead, became reflections of the individual essence; the acts became symptoms and expressions of a deeply ingrained identity.

Even if homosexuality is considered an identity and not an act, it does not necessarily follow that homosexual individuals would come together to form a community and a unified social movement. If homosexuality was no longer an act to be avoided, but a description of a person, that person could still remain isolated from similar individuals. However, the altered social conditions of the Second World War, i.e., a sex-segregated society marked both by men under the strain of warfare and a predominantly female domestic labor force, provided a critical opportunity for gay men and lesbians to come into contact with one another.

John D'Emilio refers to the Second World War as fostering "a nationwide coming out experience."<sup>7</sup> The sex-segregated atmosphere created

by militarization immensely disrupted the heterosexual patterns of peace-time life; this phenomenon is no more apparent than in the armed forces. The war functioned as an opportunity to promote homosexual visibility in a variety of ways. First, by asking recruits if they had ever felt any erotic attraction for members of the same sex, the military ruptured the silence that shrouded a tabooed behavior, introducing some men to the concept for the first time.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the act of considering a homosexual unfit for service illustrates both a sharp shift in the language of military policy as well as a change in the common perception of the homosexual. Previously the sexual act was the problem; individuals discovered in sexual relations with a member of the same sex were punished accordingly through the military's criminal justice system. Yet, the drafting procedure initiated by the Second World War viewed the person as mentally ill. In an interesting parallel to Foucault's argument, the homosexual act was *not* banned, rather the homosexual himself was banned.<sup>9</sup> Second, the war functioned to bring previously isolated homosexuals together. Given that the recruits could merely lie about their sexual inclinations and that the draft preferred young and single men, it was likely that the armed forces would contain a disproportionately high percentage of gay men.<sup>10</sup> Third, soldiers often resorted to antics which exaggerated common homosexual stereotypes to alleviate sexual tension. Soldier slang utilized derogatory homosexual terms to heterosexualize military life. Soldiers called each other "cocksucker" or "sweetheart." When reproached by a commanding officer, the private was said to have "his ass reamed," and a close friend of the soldier was called his "asshole buddy."<sup>11</sup> The practice of pairing off with another intimate friend, or "asshole buddy," was quite common. Howard Brotz and Everett Wilson, two sociologists who studied military life, commented that "covering up for, defense of, and devotion to one's buddy [were] expected"<sup>12</sup> and that these buddies often expressed "sentiments that would be considered maudlin under other circumstances."<sup>13</sup> In his work, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, historian Paul Fussell explores the homoerotic feelings that soldier buddies expressed for each other during the First World War; one soldier, Anthony French, wrote to his "buddy," Albert William Bradley, who had been killed in combat:

'This, my dear Bert, is your day, and I'm more than ever reminded of you . . .'  
As I wrote a deep sadness afflicted me . . . I drafted some verses of a lyric of unadulterated sentimentality that told of a friendship and what it had meant to me. It ended with

. . . one happy hour to be  
With you alone, friend of my own,  
That would be heaven to me.<sup>14</sup>

Not all soldiers who experienced homoerotic feelings toward other soldiers or who even engaged in sex with other men were gay. Often heterosexual men engaged in “situational homosexuality,” having sex with other men only to attain a level of physical intimacy deprived by the war experience.<sup>15</sup> It was not uncommon for men to dance together at canteens, to share beds at hotels when on leave, or to share train berths while in transit.<sup>16</sup> The critical point is not that the Second World War led to an increase in the number of homosexuals; such a statement can neither be confirmed nor denied. Rather, *the war created a sexual situation where individuals with homosexual feelings or tendencies could more readily explore them without the absolute fear of exposure.*

As men were sent abroad, women were increasingly needed to fill the gap left in the labor force. Often women moved to urban centers and lived in boarding houses and apartments occupied mostly by other women. The lack of men forced women to reorient their social lives around female companions. Just as the military environment did not necessarily foster the expression of homosexuality among soldiers, this predominantly female environment did not necessarily cause heterosexual women to become lesbians. However, the social space in which women could interact with one another greatly expanded, and, as a result, lesbians had an increased chance of meeting one another within the cover of the primarily female environment.<sup>17</sup>

Approximately 150,000 women participated in the Women’s Army Corps (WACS). Like the draft, WACS recruitment isolated a population likely to include a disproportionately high percentage of lesbians. The vast majority of WACS were single, childless, and under thirty. Coupling this population with the popular conception that military service was a masculine pursuit, WACS acquired a reputation for being overridden with lesbians.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, the official military response to lesbianism was relaxed. Training manuals praised the formation of intense friendships among women, and officers were instructed not to speculate about the prevalence of lesbians in the corps, to ignore damaging hearsay, and to attempt to provide guidance rather than punish a known lesbian.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the military provided women with a relatively safe outlet to explore their sexuality.

The Second World War altered the prevailing heterosexual gender dynamic by creating the necessary single-sex segregation of the military leaving women home to take on traditionally male roles. As D’Emilio notes, “the war temporarily weakened the patterns of daily life that channeled men and women toward heterosexuality and inhibited homosexual expression.”<sup>20</sup> Men and women who were aware of a same-sex attraction, but had not acted upon it, could explore it in a relatively safe

environment. Individuals already aware of their homosexuality could meet others, embark on relationships, and build further ties to help foster the development of a gay community. The point is not that the war experience fostered homoerotic feelings and a rise in homosexuality. Rather, the disruption in the social environment caused by the war provided the *opportunity* for homosexuals to meet, to realize others like themselves existed, and to abandon the isolation that characterized the homosexual lifestyle of the pre-war period.

The return of peace brought with it the re-establishment of pre-war heterosexual gender norms; men replaced women in the work force, and women resumed their role in the home. Yet, the war had enabled gay men and women to discover one another and to start building networks that could not easily be torn down; thus, the immediate post-war years witnessed early forms of homosexual-oriented organizations. The Veterans Benevolent Association was established by several honorably discharged gay men in New York City in 1945 to function as a social club for gay ex-servicemen hosting parties and dances. In Los Angeles, interracial couples organized the Knights of the Clock to discuss mutual problems of their relationships.<sup>21</sup>

The late 1940s and the early 1950s also saw a proliferation of novels which featured predominant gay characters and themes. Claire Morgan's *The Price of Salt* (1951) and Jo Sinclair's *The Wasteland* (1946) relayed the stories of strong lesbians and their acceptance of their sexuality while Charlie Jackson's *The Fall of Valor* (1946) discussed the homoerotic social environment experienced by men during the war. While these texts tended to bow to contemporary beliefs on homosexuality portraying the characters as usually unhappy and fundamentally tragic, their publication signaled a small opening of social mores and a shift in the traditional attitude toward homosexuality.<sup>22</sup>

The most significant indication of this transformation was the publication of Donald Webster Cory's, a.k.a. Edward Sagarin,<sup>23</sup> *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* in 1951. In this text, Cory touches on some fundamental issues that still confront the movement today: the need to come out, the controversy of same-sex marriage, and the use of popular culture as a tool of visibility.<sup>24</sup> He was also remarkably ahead of his time in both his contention that the United States was not a heterosexual society, but rather an anti-sexual society in which all sex is viewed as dirty – heterosexual acts are only privileged due to their procreative function – as well as in his notion that homosexuals were inherently progressive.<sup>25</sup> Such ideas were not common until the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s; they resurfaced with Queer Nation in the early 1990s, and now are common themes of

academic queer theory.<sup>26</sup> Cory cites the dilemma in which the homosexual found himself or herself locked in the 1950s:

If he [the homosexual] does not rise up and demand his rights, he will never get them, but unless he gets those rights, he cannot be expected to expose himself to the martyrdom that would come if he should rise up and demand them. It is a vicious cycle, and what the homosexual is seeking, first and foremost, is an answer to this dilemma.<sup>27</sup>

Cory suggests that the answer lies in the liberalization of the media and the discussion and inclusion of homosexuality in the newspapers, radio, and theater.<sup>28</sup> If the heterosexual majority becomes more comfortable with the concept of homosexuality through film, literature, and press coverage, then the danger of identifying as homosexual significantly declines. The tone of this idea is obviously mild as it seeks heterosexual tolerance rather than affirmation on one's own terms. However, this type of inclusion in popular culture (as well as more affirmative representations) is precisely how the movement could be characterized today. Adamantly fought for since the 1960s and expanded in later decades, this visibility in television and film has opened new questions regarding what kind of gay men and lesbians are seen and who remains invisible. Such selective visibility has led some activists to question whether it is undermining the movement itself.<sup>29</sup>

Gay subcultural institutions proliferated in the immediate post-war period. Gay bars, while more common in large cities such as New York City or Los Angeles before the war, now opened in smaller cities including Worcester, Massachusetts, Kansas City, Missouri, and Richmond, Virginia.<sup>30</sup> The gay bar provided a relatively safe place for gay men to meet each other without having to maintain a facade of heterosexuality.<sup>31</sup> The bars also shaped a gay identity that went beyond a so-called individual "affliction" toward a sense of community.<sup>32</sup> The bar therefore functioned as a vehicle by which to promote a primitive notion of collective identity before the era of gay liberation. As Urvashi Vaid, former Executive Director of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force notes, the bars helped to establish a "nascent post-war community of gay men and women [which] was, like its nongay counterparts, ripe for political organizing. As the climate grew more overtly hostile toward gay men and lesbians, a new social movement came into being."<sup>33</sup> Given the importance of the gay bar as a community-building institution, it should come as no surprise that the first major backlash by the gay community toward heterosexual oppression emerged at a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn.

Despite these advances in gay subcultural and community development, gay men, lesbians, and any other individuals who failed to fit into

the heteronormative pattern of post-war life encountered oppression from the religious, legal, and medical fields. Judeo-Christian tradition denounces homosexuality as a sin.<sup>34</sup> At this time, engaging in consensual homosexual sex was a criminal act throughout the United States. The medical sphere tended to view homosexuals as diseased or mentally ill.<sup>35</sup> Yet, within this last field, homosexuals tended to make the most advances even if they were merely indirect and unplanned. Since homosexuals were believed to suffer from a psychological disease, they could elicit compassion and a sympathetic attempt to find a “cure.” Indeed, Foucault suggests, as homosexuality became a subject of scientific inquiry, further theories could be suggested which differed from the disease model. Medicine, unlike religion, could suggest dissenting ideas without blasphemously confronting the Bible’s teachings.<sup>36</sup>

The foremost example of medical studies of sexuality put forth at this time was Alfred Kinsey’s *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male* and *Sexual Behavior of the Human Female*, both published in 1948 and 1953. Although widely discredited now, Kinsey’s survey provided the most comprehensive study of the sexual behavior of Caucasian Americans. After interviewing more than ten thousand subjects of both sexes, Kinsey recorded the following observations. Approximately fifty percent of men had at some time experienced a homoerotic feeling, thirty seven percent had reached orgasm in a post-adolescent homosexual act, four percent considered themselves exclusively homosexual, and slightly more than twelve percent engaged in same-sex encounters for at least three years. Twenty-eight percent of females recorded having homoerotic feelings at some point in their life, thirteen percent had reached orgasm with another woman, and about two percent considered themselves to be exclusively homosexual.<sup>37</sup> Kinsey drafted a seven-point scale to detail the fluidity of sexual orientation in which at least eighteen percent of Americans did not consider themselves universally or mostly heterosexual.<sup>38</sup> Such results led Kinsey to conclude that “persons with homosexual histories are to be found in every age group, in every social level, in every conceivable occupation, in cities and on farms, and in the most remote areas of the country.”<sup>39</sup> These findings helped to tear away the ideological barriers that hindered equality for gays and lesbians by opening up for discussion the formerly taboo topic of sexuality. *In short, the reports enlarged the already existing opportunity structure provided by the war; the political environment was ripening for the formation of a homosexual movement.* Yet, the Kinsey reports were also utilized throughout the repressive decade of the 1950s as ammunition against the increased visibility of homosexuality in the United States.

The onset of Cold War anti-Communist repression spearheaded by



Senator McCarthy marked the 1950s as a decade rife with political repression. Yet, communists were not the only target; individuals who did not conform to the mainstream heteronormative image reminiscent of the pre-war period were perceived as enemies of the state.<sup>40</sup> According to historian Barry Adam,

in McCarthyism as in other reactionary ideologies, psychosymbolic connections between gender and power assigned a place to homosexuality. For the authoritarian mind, male homosexuality signified the surrender of masculinity and the 'slide' into 'feminine' traits of weakness, duplicity, and seductiveness . . . the McCarthyites drew together personal feelings of self-esteem expressed in terms of 'manhood' with national self-esteem and belligerence. Working within a gender discourse that associated maleness with toughness and effectiveness, in opposition to supposedly female weakness and failure, male homosexuality symbolized the betrayal of manhood – the feminine enemy within men.<sup>41</sup>

In March of 1950, John Peurifoy of the State Department classified homosexuals as "security risks." A month later, Guy Gabrielson, national chairman of the Republican Party sent a letter to seven thousand party employees declaring that "perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual perverts who have infiltrated our Government in recent years."<sup>42</sup> A month later, the Republican Governor of New York, Thomas Dewey, "accused the Democratic national administration of tolerating spies, traitors, and sex offenders in the Government Service."<sup>43</sup> Amidst these growing fears that homosexuals were infiltrating the highest levels of government and threatening national security, the Senate Investigations Subcommittee of the Committee on Expenditures in the Executive Department began an inquiry in June of 1950 and released its report, "Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in the US Government," in December of 1950.

The report's attack on homosexuals was twofold: it degraded the personal character of gay men and lesbians, and it contended that homosexuals embodied a threat to national security.<sup>44</sup> The report used Kinsey's data regarding the greater prevalence of homosexuality than previously thought to promote a sense of paranoia: these diseased individuals were everywhere and, worse yet, they could not be detected by any physical features. The committee concluded that gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals exhibited emotional instability, and their tendency to engage in so-called "perverse" sexual acts was indicative of weak moral integrity.<sup>45</sup> The committee contended that

the presence of a sex pervert in a Government agency tends to have a corrosive influence upon his fellow employees. These perverts will frequently attempt to entice normal individuals to engage in perverted practices . . . Government officials have the responsibility of keeping this type of corrosive influence out of

the agencies under their control . . . One homosexual can pollute a Government office.<sup>46</sup>

According to the Senate report, employing homosexuals would not only put fellow workers at risk, but would endanger the security of the entire nation. The notion that homosexuals were inherently a security risk was defended by using a story of Russian spies blackmailing an Austrian counterintelligence officer in the First World War by threatening the exposure of his homosexuality.<sup>47</sup> The report asserted that

It is the experience of intelligence experts that perverts are vulnerable to interrogation by a skilled questioner and they seldom refuse to talk about themselves . . . The pervert is easy prey to the blackmailer. It follows that if blackmailers can extort money from a homosexual under the threat of disclosure, espionage agents can use the same type of pressure to extort confidential information or other material they might be seeking.<sup>48</sup>

The ultimate conclusion of the report was that gay men and women were fundamentally unsuited for employment in the federal government. The report profoundly affected the ability of gay men and lesbians to maintain their government positions. Between 1947 and 1950, the dismissal rate of homosexuals from an executive branch office averaged five per month.<sup>49</sup> By mid-1950, between forty and sixty dismissals per month were based on homosexuality. This rate continued through 1955, and homosexuals were officially banned from the government with the passage of Executive Order 10450 under President Eisenhower in April of 1953.<sup>50</sup> In total, between 1947 and 1950, 1,700 applicants for government positions were turned away because of professed homosexuality, 4,380 individuals were discharged from military service, and 420 gay men and lesbians were dismissed or forced to resign from government posts.<sup>51</sup>

While the national government endorsed an anti-homosexual stance, gay men and lesbians encountered the more immediate danger of police harassment. Bar raids became quite prevalent. In the 1950s, approximately one hundred gay men were arrested each month in Philadelphia on misdemeanor charges, and approximately one thousand gay men were arrested each year in Washington, DC. During the 1953 New York City Mayoral election, raids on gay bars increased dramatically.<sup>52</sup> The wearing of drag was outlawed in Miami in 1953, and a year later, after the murder of a gay man in Miami, newspapers “demand[ed] that the homosexuals be punished for tempting ‘normals’ to commit such deeds.”<sup>53</sup> In such a seemingly backward environment where the victim is blamed for murder, the American Civil Liberties Union refused to support gay and bisexual individuals in their attempts to attain equality.<sup>54</sup>

The Second World War coupled with the Kinsey studies of the late 1940s created the *opportunity* for men and women unsure of their sexual orientation or already aware of their homosexuality or bisexuality to meet others like themselves and realize their commonality. The proliferation of gay bars enabled the community development and identity formation initiated during the war to continue. However, anti-Communist repression, military and government witch hunts, and bar raids continued to demonstrate the enormous challenges that gay men and women encountered daily. The increasing attacks on homosexuals may have actually promoted community development by making homosexuality a topic for national-level discourse; indeed, in their analysis of sexual minority movements around the world, sociologists Barry Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and Andre Krouwel, found that “politicization of a social group seems to be facilitated, rather than hampered, when political repression is evident but not too strong.”<sup>55</sup> D’Emilio makes a similar point by contending that these attacks “hastened the articulation of homosexual identity and spread the knowledge that they [gay men and women] existed in large numbers. In other words, the repression was enough to make people want to fight it, but not strong enough to quell any reactionary spirit. Ironically, the effort to root out the homosexuals in American society made it easier for them to find one another.”<sup>56</sup> Yet, even if they could find one another, the widespread condemnation of homosexuality led many gay men and lesbians to consider homosexuality to be an individual problem not indicative of injustice but disease.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of the opportunity provided by the Second World War for gay men and lesbians to explore their identity and the subsequent repressive environment of the 1950s fostered a dissonant atmosphere from which the first politically active gay and lesbian organizations emerged.

### **Making a minority: the homophile movement and expanding opportunity**

Above all, audacity. (Henry (Harry) Hay)

The important difference between the male and the female homosexual is that the Lesbian is discriminated against not only because she is a Lesbian, but because she is a woman. Although the Lesbian occupies a “privileged” place among homosexuals, she occupies an under-privileged place in the world. (Shirley Willer, “What Concrete Steps Can be Taken to Further the Homophile Movement?”)

I say that it is time to open the closet door and let in the fresh air and the sunshine; it is time . . . to discard the secrecy, the disguise, and the camouflage;

it is time to hold up your heads and to look the world squarely in the eye as the homosexuals that you are, confident of your equality, confident in the knowledge that as objects of prejudice and victims of discrimination you are right and they are wrong, and confident of the rightness of what you are and the goodness of what you do; it is time to live your homosexuality fully, joyously, openly, and proudly, assured that morally, socially, physically, psychologically, emotionally, and in every other way: *Gay is good*. It is. (Frank Kameny, "Gay is Good")

A historical sketch of the American gay and lesbian movement reveals that the movement's guiding ideology exhibits a bipolar pattern exacerbated by gender-based rifts. Movement philosophy tends to swing between periods of moderation or assimilationism on one side and militancy and liberationism on the other. These seemingly oppositional ideologies have divided the movement throughout the post-war era. The homophile movement, initiated in 1951 with the formation of the first modern gay rights organization, the Mattachine Society, illustrates the effect of these conflicting ideologies on mobilization. The history of the Mattachine Society specifically, and of the homophile movement in general, follows a pattern of brief militancy followed by a long period of assimilation and moderate leaders leading to a crescendo of renewed radicalism climaxed by the Stonewall riots.

Founded by Harry Hay in April of 1951 in Los Angeles, and modeled after the communist party, the Mattachine Society became the first organization of what would become the homophile movement.<sup>58</sup> The secret hierarchical and cell-like organization adapted from the communist party was necessitated, according to the founders, by the oppressive environment fostered by McCarthyism. Yet, Mattachine drew on the communism for more than just a structural guide; Marxist ideology functioned as a means to mobilize a mass homosexual constituency for political action. Utilizing a Marxist understanding of class politics, that is, a class as merely a socioeconomically determined entity until it gains consciousness enabling recognition of its inherent political power, Hay and the other founding members theorized that homosexuals constituted a similarly oppressed minority group. Homosexuals, like members of the proletariat, were trapped in a state of false consciousness purported and defended by the heterosexual majority which maintained homosexuality to be a morally reprehensible individual aberration.<sup>59</sup> Hence, the early Mattachine attempted to promote a measure of cognitive liberation and homosexual collective identity. During a time when both religion and law condemned homosexuality, and medicine viewed it as an individual psychological abnormality, the Mattachine Society was advocating the development of a group consciousness

similar to that of other ethnic minority groups in the United States.<sup>60</sup> The parallel to Jews, Catholics, and African-Americans as conscious minority groups is readily apparent in the Mattachine statement of purpose:

1 TO UNIFY: While there are undoubtedly individual homosexuals who number many of their own people among their friends, thousands of homosexuals live out their lives bewildered, unhappy, alone – isolated from their own kind and unable to adjust to the dominant culture. Even those who may have many homosexual friends are still cut off from the deep satisfactions man's gregarious nature can achieve only when he is consciously part of a larger unified whole. A major purpose of the Mattachine Society is to provide a consensus (sic) of principle around which all of our people can rally and from which they can derive a feeling of "belonging."

2 TO EDUCATE: The Mattachine Society holds it possible and desirable that a highly ethical homosexual culture emerge, as a consequence of its work, paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow minorities . . . the Negro, Mexican, and Jewish Peoples . . . The Society . . . is in the process of developing a homosexual ethic . . . disciplined, moral, and socially responsible.

3 TO LEAD: It is necessary that the more far-reaching and socially conscious homosexuals provide leadership to the whole mass of social deviants if the first two missions (the unification and the education of the homosexual minority), are to be accomplished . . . Only a Society, providing an enlightened leadership, can rouse the homosexuals . . . one of the largest minorities in America today . . . to take the actions necessary to elevate themselves from the social ostracism an unsympathetic culture has perpetrated upon them.<sup>61</sup>

Phrases such as "own people," "derive a feeling of 'belonging,'" "homosexual culture," and "homosexual ethic" illustrate a fundamental shift in the way the leaders of Mattachine perceived themselves and how they wished to be viewed by others. The influence of Marxist notions of an oppressed group are clearly visible in the description of the "unsympathetic" and "dominant" heterosexual culture. The bourgeoisie is now the heterosexual, and the proletariat has become the homosexual. By asserting that homosexuals constituted a minority comparable to other ethnic groups, Mattachine defined itself rather than being defined by the dominant culture: homosexuality was distinct from and morally equivalent to heterosexuality. Self-definition is a recurring theme in the attempts to create a validating and positive collective identity, and the sexual minorities community continued the trend with the adoption of "gay" in the 1970s and the less widespread adoption of "queer" in the 1990s.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, the comparison to ethnic minorities provided a model for action; homosexuals should follow the lead of other groups and politically organize for equal civil rights.<sup>63</sup>

In order to help develop the homosexual consciousness, the

Mattachine Society coordinated public discussion groups. By late 1951, approximately twelve discussion groups existed throughout southern California; Mattachine billed these events as positive alternatives to the anonymous sexual encounters fostered by the bar and bathhouse subculture.<sup>64</sup>

Mattachine increased in popularity and visibility during 1952 when Dale Jennings, a founding member, was arrested for lewd behavior and claimed to be a victim of police entrapment.<sup>65</sup> The organization received many letters of support and financial contributions. After thirty-six hours of debate, the jury returned deadlocked; the charges were dismissed, and the Mattachine Society declared a victory.<sup>66</sup>

After this initial small show of political force, Mattachine guilds proliferated throughout southern California. By 1953, the Society had an estimated two thousand members and one hundred discussion groups stretching from San Diego to Santa Monica.<sup>67</sup> In that same year, the organization launched *One*, a magazine expressly devoted to discussion of homosexual concerns.<sup>68</sup> As the organization expanded, members became increasingly uncomfortable with its secretive structure and leftist orientation. Given the rise of McCarthyism, some members wanted to distance themselves from communism as much as possible. Already putting themselves at political risk by joining a homosexual organization, these individuals did not want to endanger their lives any further.

In order to mitigate some of the growing dissension, the original five members called for a convention in April of 1953 to convert the Mattachine Society into an above-ground organization. However, rather than ameliorating tension, the conference merely exacerbated the rift between the moderate and militant perspective. Chuck Rowland and Harry Hay were confronted by the demands of Kenneth Burns, Marilyn Reiger, and Hal Call. The former individuals stressed the need to build an ethical homosexual culture and to end the prejudice that privileges heterosexuality as morally superior.<sup>69</sup> Burns, Reiger, and Call took the opposite stance. They emphasized assimilation and suggested that homosexual behavior was a minor characteristic that should not foster a rift with the heterosexual majority. Reiger contended that

we know we are the same . . . no different than anyone else. Our only difference is an unimportant one to the heterosexual society, unless we make it important . . . [equality will result from] integrating . . . not as homosexuals, but as people, as men and women whose homosexuality is irrelevant to our ideals, our principles, our hopes and aspirations.<sup>70</sup>

By declaring homosexuality to be an unimportant difference that the heterosexual majority cares little about, Reiger failed to take into

account the staunch anti-homosexual campaigns associated with McCarthyism. Yet, by reaffirming that homosexuals were human beings, she managed to strike a chord in an audience that still, despite the Mattachine discussion groups, internalized the negative views of homosexuality espoused by dominant culture. Reiger's speech coupled with growing fears about the current leaders' communist backgrounds led to a dramatic shift in leadership. Burns, Reiger, and Hall took control of the organization and steered it towards what historian John D'Emilio calls a "retreat to respectability."<sup>71</sup>

Abandoning its communist-based ideology, the post-convention Mattachine Society no longer sought to promote a homosexual culture or mass movement. Instead, it established an assimilationist tendency emphasizing homosexuality as primarily an individual problem, and it turned to psychology to provide theories on homosexuality. The new leadership proposed, and members endorsed, an elimination of any mention of "homosexual culture" from the statement of purpose. Indeed, the statement no longer even identified the Mattachine Society as a homosexual organization; the word "homosexual" was eliminated from the passage altogether.<sup>72</sup> Shortly after the conference, attendance at discussion groups fell off sharply. Despite the decline in Mattachine, *One* magazine remained vibrant, attracting the more radical elements of the Society and maintaining its reputation as a forum for topics relating to homosexuality.<sup>73</sup>

By the end of 1955, membership in the Mattachine Society increased and chapters developed in San Francisco, New York, and Chicago. On 21 September 1955, another homophile organization, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), was established by four lesbian couples in San Francisco though Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon are mostly credited with maintaining it in early years.<sup>74</sup> This organization, similar to the assimilationist Mattachine, emphasized education and self-help activities. The DOB's "Statement of Purpose" cites as its main goals "education of the variant, with particular emphasis on the psychological, physiological and sociological aspects, to enable her [the lesbian] to understand herself and make her adjustment to society in all its social, civic, and economic implications."<sup>75</sup> Despite its commitment to legal reform, stated as its final aim in its statement of purpose, the DOB functioned ultimately as a safe meeting space for lesbians and bisexual women who did not feel comfortable in the lesbian bar scene. As one flyer notes, the DOB was "a home for the Lesbian. She can come here to find friendship, acceptance and support. She can help others understand themselves, and can go out into the world to help the public understand her better."<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the early Mattachine, the DOB had no interest

in collectively organizing lesbians for political action; it had no agenda to promote group identity. Rather, its main function, like that of Mattachine as directed by Ken Burns, was to help integrate the homosexual into heterosexual society by de-emphasizing the importance of sexual difference and seeking the acceptance of the majority culture.

Yet the ascension of the assimilationist and moderate perspective did not drown out the voices of more radical homosexuals who desired to end oppression through direct action. One such individual was Frank Kameny who started a Washington, DC, branch of the Mattachine Society (MSW) in 1961. Kameny unabashedly asserted his beliefs in a speech at a convention of the Mattachine Society of New York (MSNY) in 1964. Tired of the homophile obsession with discovering the cause of homosexuality and the organization's deferment to the psychology establishment's labeling of homosexuality as a mental sickness, Kameny criticized his colleagues. There was no reason to find a cure for homosexuality because homosexuality was not an illness; rather it was a characteristic marking a particular group of people. In his discussion he utilized the cultural frame established by the African-American civil rights movement. He contended

I do not see the NAACP or CORE worrying about which chromosome and gene produces [a] black skin or about the possibility of bleaching the Negro. I do not see any great interest on the part of the B'nai B'rith Anti-Defamation League in the possibility of solving the problems of anti-semitism by converting Jews to Christians . . . we are interested in obtaining rights for our respective minorities as Negroes, as Jews, and as homosexuals. Why we are Negroes, Jews, or homosexuals is totally irrelevant, and whether we can be changed to whites, Christians, or heterosexuals is equally irrelevant.<sup>77</sup>

Beyond a mere scolding of the current homophile leaders for guiding the movement down a useless path that failed to promote full homosexual equality, the above passage reveals a resurgence of the ethnic minority model utilized by Hay and the original founders of the Mattachine. Yet, by the middle and late 1960s, activists no longer had to rely on Marxist teachings to learn about the development of group consciousness and social insurgence. Kameny merely drew on the burgeoning civil rights movements and feminist movements in the United States. Both of these movements, especially the later stages in which black power and radical feminism took hold, exemplified the development of New Left politics. The New Left engendered renewed militancy in the homophile movement and led to a situation ripe for the full emergence of a gay rights movement by the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s.

Kameny utilized the civil rights movement and the role played by the NAACP, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), and the Student



Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) as a model of coalition building. In 1963, he organized a regional confederation, the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO), composed of MSW, MSNY, DOB – New York, and the Janus Society of Philadelphia. Kameny aimed to promote a more militant ideology that endorsed direct action. Yet, ECHO soon splintered when the DOBNY withdrew in June of 1965 claiming that Kameny's use of picketing was too extreme.<sup>78</sup> The presidents of DOBNY defended their withdrawal on the basis that "demonstrations which define homosexuality as a unique minority defeat the very cause for which the homosexual strives – *to be an integral part of society.*"<sup>79</sup> The tendency to cling to its more moderate stance was not the only reason the DOB pulled out of ECHO. Lesbians and bisexual women were in the unique position relative to gay and bisexual men of having to navigate a dual identity that suffered a dual oppression. Lesbians were oppressed because they were lesbians, but also because they were women; consequently, an internal debate erupted in many women about whether to remain active in the homophile movement through DOB or whether to defect to the women's movement through networks such as the National Organization of Women. The struggle was embodied in the personality of activist Shirley Willer. In an address to the National Planning Committee of Homophile Organizations in the summer of 1966, Willer contended that problems such as police harassment and sodomy law, which seemed to make up the majority of the homophile agenda, did not affect women.<sup>80</sup> Willer further claimed that:

there has been little evidence however, that the male homosexual has any intention of making common cause with us [lesbians] We suspect that should the male homosexual achieve his particular objective in regard to his homosexuality he might possibly become more of an adamant foe of women's rights than the heterosexual male has been. (I would guess that a preponderance of male homosexuals would believe their ultimate goal achieved if the laws relating to sodomy were removed and a male homosexual were appointed chief of police.)<sup>81</sup>

Such harsh comments were mitigated by Willer's simultaneous desire to maintain the DOB's participation in the homophile movement so as to at least expand the perspective of the male-dominated movement. In May of 1967, the DOBNY sponsored the first meeting of the Eastern Regional Conference of Homophile Organizations (ERCHO) to replace ECHO after its collapse in 1965.<sup>82</sup>

Besides experiencing gender-based conflict, the homophile movement was increasingly embroiled in the moderate versus militant debate throughout the late 1960s. The former perspective was embodied in the commentary of Dick Lietsch of MSNY whereas the latter was

symbolized by Frank Kameny of MSW. The debate was most clearly depicted in an ongoing dialogue between the two individuals. Lietsch asserted that Kameny's emphasis on building a homosexual communal identity was inappropriate. Only approximately 4 percent of the population was exclusively homosexual according to Lietsch. He saw the purpose of Mattachine to reach people who engaged in homosexual acts only on occasion, and "help them come to grips with themselves. We're not interested in 'bringing them out' and encouraging them to give up their heterosexual activities . . . We . . . encourage them to swing both ways and enjoy themselves, and try to help them avoid trouble."<sup>83</sup> Kameny recognized that Lietsch's emphasis on helping the individual cope with his homosexuality reflected not only a moderate approach, but more importantly and more dangerously, an unquestioning acquiescence to the dominant image of homosexuality as something that even necessitated coping with and avoiding trouble.

Kameny's response chides his colleague's assimilationist tendencies:

we must instill in the homosexual community a sense of the worth of the individual . . . We must counteract the inferiority which ALL society inculcates into him in regard to his homosexuality . . .

Our people need to have their self-esteem bolstered – singly, and as a community.

The very idea of changing to heterosexuality . . . is a tacit acknowledgment of inferiority . . .

People who are TRULY equal, and TRULY not inferior, do NOT consider acquiescing to the majority and changing themselves . . .

To submit to the pressure of immoral societal prejudice is immoral. Self-respecting people do not so submit. Self-respect is what *I* am trying to inculcate in my people, even if you are not.

When you acquiesce to "therapy" and "change" in the manner which you do, you simply confirm . . . all of the feelings of inferiority, wrongness, and self-contempt with which society has inculcated the individual homosexual. You harm the homosexual, and you harm the movement.<sup>84</sup>

Kameny's stress on the movement reveals an understanding for the desperate need to forge a collective identity-based movement if gay men and women were ever to achieve political, legal, and social change. As opposed to Lietsch, Kameny attempted to provide a more lasting equality by fundamentally confronting the prejudice of the heterosexual majority rather than attaining immediate objectives in a piecemeal fashion. Furthermore, Kameny's emphasis on repudiating acquiescence to the heterosexual norm suggests a prideful homosexual identity. As such, the ideology that Kameny espoused not only signaled a degree of cognitive liberation from victim to empowered agent, but it was also a subtle foreshadowing of the liberationist theories purported after the

Stonewall riots. This psychological shift took its cue from similar more militarist tendencies taking shape in the civil rights and feminist movements.

While various organizations of the homophile movement were mired in this unending debate, mainstream attitudes toward homosexuality continued to shift. The Mattachine Society defended its right to publish *The Mattachine Review* to the US Supreme Court in 1958. Throughout the 1960s, gay and lesbian-oriented novels such as Jean Genet's *Our Lady of Flowers*, Hubert Selby's *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and John Rechy's *City of Night* were published. Best-sellers of the decade including Allen Drury's *Advice and Consent* and James Baldwin's *Another Country* all contained gay characters and gay-themed subplots. In October of 1961, the Production Code Administration of Hollywood allowed homosexuality to be portrayed in film. In 1962 and 1963, films such as *The Children's Hour*, *Walk on the Wild Side*, and *The Best Man* all had gay characters. These films still usually portrayed the gay and lesbian characters as having some kind of tragic end. In December of 1963, *The New York Times* published a front-page feature detailing the emergence of a gay subculture, and related articles appeared in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Harpers*, and *Life*.<sup>85</sup>

Relative to the previous decade, the 1960s embodied a great deal of reform and liberalization of attitudes toward homosexuality. In the legal field, this change was not necessarily represented through an actual alteration or repeal of existing laws, but rather a broadening of support among the heterosexual community for an expansion of civil rights and the attainment of full gay and lesbian equality. For example, only Illinois and Connecticut repealed their anti-sodomy legislation; in 1961, Illinois became the first state to adopt the Model Legal Code of the American Law Institute that decriminalized private consensual homosexual sex.<sup>86</sup> Yet, Americans for Democratic Action, the New York Liberal Party, Wisconsin's Young Democrats, and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) all accepted the principle of a basic right to private consensual sex. Many legal writers of the middle and late 1960s favored complete decriminalization of homosexuality altogether. The supreme courts of California, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania all recognized the basic right of gay men and women to congregate thereby providing legal protection to the bar scene and recognition of the growing gay subculture. More gay-related legal cases were reaching federal appellate courts. Between 1960 and 1964 only twelve cases were heard, but this number increased 250 percent between 1965 and 1969. Finally, in 1967, the ACLU accepted the premise that individuals have a fundamental right

to privacy, reversed its policy towards homosexuals, and guaranteed them legal support.<sup>87</sup>

The religious and medical spheres, also traditional harbingers of anti-homosexual rhetoric, demonstrated some tendency towards reform. The Committee on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH) was established in 1964 in San Francisco. This organization sought to re-evaluate the traditional Judeo-Christian stance on homosexuality as sinful. While religious bodies continued to consider homosexuality to be immoral, numerous Protestant and Roman Catholic churches, following the lead of those in the United Kingdom, advocated the decriminalization of homosexuality.<sup>88</sup>

In the medical field, the model of homosexuality as indicative of psychological disturbance came under increasing attack. Columbia University students picketed a forum on homosexuality sponsored by the medical school. Dick Lietsch of MSNY was invited by NBC to discuss and debate homosexuality with numerous physicians on national television. In 1967, Evelyn Hooker was appointed by the National Institute of Mental Health to study homosexuality; the investigative committee's report, released in 1969, gave credence to the liberal notion that human sexuality covered a wide spectrum of behavior and that homosexuals exhibited no inherent signs of mental illness.<sup>89</sup> *In short, the political and cultural environment had undergone a liberalizing shift which had created the opportunity for the emergence of a mass homosexual movement.*

Despite this increasingly liberal environment and consequent ripening of opportunity initially provided by the Second World War, and despite a multitude of gay and lesbian organizations throughout the country, a mass gay rights movement failed to materialize at this time for three reasons. First, few examples of positive effects of gay mobilization existed. Coming out was considered too risky if social change had not yet been proven to be feasible, and the DOB and Mattachine had yet to demonstrate its ability to make any significant political changes. Second, while the political environment was entertaining more debate around homosexuality both in popular culture and medical circles, the vast majority of this debate was led by heterosexuals. While research proliferated, it was conducted by individuals lacking the experience of oppression.<sup>90</sup> Third, the homophile movement, after the 1953 convention and before the resurgence of militancy, engaged in the paradoxical process of disassembling itself. By advocating that homosexuals should assimilate, and that the only difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality was fundamentally unimportant, it destroyed any possibility of mass mobilization because it devastated the potential for collective identity formation.<sup>91</sup> Not until many more gay men and women were willing to

participate, overcome their self-perception as diseased persons, and recognize themselves as an oppressed minority with potential for collective action, would a full movement become possible.

### **Becoming gay: Stonewall and liberation**

You know, the guys there were so beautiful. They've lost that wounded look fags all had ten years ago. (Allen Ginsberg a few days after the Stonewall riot)

Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up. It reflects a few people of the same sex, it's anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustration. Heterosexual sex is fucked up too; ask women's liberation about what straight guys are like in bed. Sex is aggression for the male chauvinist; sex is obligation for the traditional woman. And among the young, the modern, the hip, it's only a subtle version of the same. For us to become heterosexual in the sense that our straight brothers and sisters are is not a cure, it is a disease. (Carl Wittman, *A Gay Manifesto*)

What we now perceive as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) movement at the beginning of the twenty-first century planted its roots in the 1970s; yet, the movement that took shape in that decade bears little resemblance to its modern form of various and highly organized state and national-level organizations. To conceive of a gay and lesbian rights movement in the 1970s is to confront a decentralized history of numerous short-lived organizations, clashing personalities, grassroots, local, and state-level activism, the rise of a religiously based conservative backlash, and the curious denouement of a movement before it seemingly reached political climax. The struggle for gay and lesbian rights in the 1970s unfolded in New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, Miami, Boston, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Eugene, Oregon, and Wichita, Kansas. The cast of activists is wide and varied: Craig Rodwell, Jim Owles, Jim Fouratt, Marty Robinson, Frank Kameny, Elaine Noble, Harvey Milk, Virginia Apuzzo, Barbara Gittings, Rita Mae Brown, Bruce Voeller, Steve Endean, Kerry Woodward, Jean O'Leary, Midge Costanza, Reverend Troy Perry, Barney Frank, Allan Spear, David Goodstein, Sheldon Anderson, David Mixner, and countless others. For the first time, the gay and lesbian rights movement attracted nationally known or soon-to-be-known politicians: Senator Edward Kennedy, President Jimmy Carter, President Ronald Reagan, Governor Jerry Brown, Senator Diane Feinstein, and Washington, DC Mayor, Marion Barry, among others.

The movement fostered a powerful countermovement. Spearheaded by Anita Bryant's "Save Our Children" Campaign to repeal Dade County, Florida's gay rights ordinance, the message of "traditional family values," carried forth by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson, led to a

rash of anti-gay initiatives and/or the repeal of recently won expanded civil rights protections inclusive of sexual orientation throughout the late 1970s. Yet, as the movement took shape in the 1970s, it suffered also from repeated internal fractures as lesbians fought to distinguish and ultimately separate from a gay male culture seemingly preoccupied with sodomy reform and other laws related to sexual activity. The movement struggled through each internal rupture managing to establish numerous lobby organizations and political action committees including the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activist Alliance, the National Gay Task Force, the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles, and the Gay Rights National Lobby. The decade ended with the unprecedented March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights on 14 October 1979 that attracted anywhere from the Parks Service estimate of 25,000 to marchers' estimate of 250,000 participants.<sup>92</sup>

By the end of the decade the political side of the movement almost seemed to fizzle faster than any of its predecessors. Spun out of similar concerns that grounded the civil rights and feminist movements, the gay and lesbian rights movement emerged as much of the leftist energy began to wane and as the national culture turned conservative. Having established a vibrant culture and exuberant lifestyle in safe enclaves of San Francisco's Castro district or New York City's Greenwich Village, the movement appeared to de-politicize just as it acquired the numbers, public visibility, and cultural confidence to become political. Characterizing the culture of the gay male community as it entered the 1980s, Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney note: "These men had no inkling of gay liberation . . . and, by all appearances, very little notion of oppression, at least now that they had escaped their hometowns for the gay life of San Francisco. Gay liberation had somehow evolved into the right to have a good time – the right to enjoy bars, discos, drugs and frequent impersonal sex."<sup>93</sup> Afraid to come out of the closet at the end of the 1960s, only ten years later gay men enjoyed an unprecedented hedonism and visibility that pushed political activism into an increasingly secondary position relative to embracing the new liberating gay lifestyle.

Gay liberation evolved from one transcendental moment that symbolized the shift from victim to empowered agent. It came in the late evening of Friday, 27 June 1969 at a seedy gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in Greenwich Village. Despite the bar's lack of running water and rumors that its filthy glasses caused a hepatitis outbreak, the Stonewall was popular because it was one of the few gay bars in New York City that allowed dancing.<sup>94</sup> Patrons of this particular bar usually ranged in age from late teens to early thirties and included what historian Toby Marotta has called "particularly unconventional homosexuals,"<sup>95</sup> e.g.,

street hustlers, drag queens, and “chicken hawks.”<sup>96</sup> When officers raided the bar at 1:20 a.m., numerous customers did not flee the scene. As the police arrested some of the drag queens, the crowd became restless, and, as some escapes were attempted, rioting broke out. The *Village Voice* reported that

the scene became explosive. Limp wrists were forgotten. Beer cans and bottles were heaved at the windows and a rain of coins descended on the cops . . . Almost by signal the crowd erupted into cobblestone and bottle heaving . . . From nowhere came an uprooted parking meter – used as a battering ram on the Stonewall door. I heard several cries of “let’s get some gas,” but the blaze of flame which soon appeared in the window of the Stonewall was still a shock.<sup>97</sup>

Perhaps their unconventionality freed these particular gay individuals from the more reserved tactics advocated by MSNY. Arrest or public embarrassment carries no substantial threat for a street hustler. Most likely, none of the patrons were particularly worried about losing a government or corporate job. Those individuals who rioted could do so because their personal circumstances enabled them to proclaim actively their homosexuality without the threat of gravely negative circumstances. Before the end of the evening approximately two thousand individuals battled nearly four hundred police officers.<sup>98</sup>

On Saturday morning a message was haphazardly scrawled on one of the bar’s boarded-up windows: “THEY INVADED OUR RIGHTS, THERE IS ALL COLLEGE BOYS AND GIRLS AROUND HERE, LEGALIZE GAY BARS, SUPPORT GAY POWER.”<sup>99</sup> Rioting continued on Saturday evening; by most official accounts, it was less violent than the previous evening. On Sunday morning a new sign was posted on the outside of the bar: “WE HOMOSEXUALS PLEAD WITH OUR PEOPLE TO PLEASE HELP MAINTAIN PEACEFUL AND QUIET CONDUCT ON THE STREETS OF THE VILLAGE – MATTACHINE.”<sup>100</sup> These two messages encapsulate the growing rift of ideology in the existing homophile movement. The former advocated a militant, adversarial, and radical position while the latter maintained more staid and conformist tactics. Phrases such as “gay power” belie how dependent the gay liberation movement was on the precedent-setting frames used by both the black power and radical feminist movements.

The movements that embodied the New Left – the student movement, the anti-war movement, the black power movement, and the feminist movement – began to utilize a new vocabulary to describe their present circumstances. Instead of viewing them in terms of discrimination, minority groups spoke of structural oppression inherent in the capitalist system. *Instead of aiming for equality and integration, the goal shifted to liberation and self-determination.*<sup>101</sup> These movements represented a new

blend of politics and culture that moved beyond standard Marxist leftist thinking to incorporate other areas of oppression which were perhaps more relevant at this time than economic class. Black power perceived oppression as fundamentally racial; feminism introduced the notion of gender as systematically enforced; and gay liberationists contended that underlying sexism was heterosexism.<sup>102</sup> Gay men and lesbians often participated in both the civil rights and feminist movement although often without disclosing their sexual orientation. Carl Whitman, who wrote “A Gay Manifesto” in 1970, was a national president for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). Robin Morgan, Charlotte Bunch, and Leslie Kagan were lesbians who were all heavily affiliated with the women’s movement.<sup>103</sup> Yet, despite the New Left’s commitment to equality, the movements that composed it were rampant with sexism and homophobia. Stokely Carmichael, one of the leaders of the SNCC, remarked that “the only position for a woman in the SNCC is prone”<sup>104</sup> and that “homosexuality is a sickness, just as are baby-rape or wanting to be head of General Motors.”<sup>105</sup>

The gay liberation theory which emerged in the post-Stonewall era was essentially New Leftist in that it was not concerned with the goals of gays and lesbians alone, but with overturning the white male hegemony which characterized modern capitalism. The theory entailed a shift away from the class-based Marxist principles to a struggle over cultural representation. Gay liberation theory assumed that all individuals are innately sexually androgynous. By asserting this supposition, it attempted to destroy the limitations of the patriarchal sex and gender dynamic that insists on a masculine/feminine and homo/hetero division.<sup>106</sup> Yet, gay liberationists contended that since they questioned the very notion of heterosexuality itself, they were also necessarily combating notions of sexism. In this sense, they saw themselves as not only integrally tied to the New Left but as the vanguard of New Left political action.<sup>107</sup>

Liberation theory was organizationally embodied in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) established in July of 1969. Gay men and women, but especially the former, disgusted with the moderate tactics and assimilationist aims of MSNY, established this new group as a militant arm of the New Left. The distinctions between Mattachine and Liberation philosophies are summarized by the GLF’s statement of purpose:

we are a revolutionary homosexual group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society’s attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions on our nature . . . Babylon has forced ourselves to commit to one thing . . . revolution!<sup>108</sup>



This statement makes no reference to fighting the ban on gay men or lesbians in the civil service or the military. It does not address discriminatory employment practices, the end of police harassment, or the repeal of anti-sodomy laws. In other words, the GLF made no explicit statement on the attempt to achieve civil rights legislation or work through the existing political system at all. Rather, as its name suggests, GLF sought liberation from constraint inherent in capitalism itself. It intended to work in concert with all oppressed minorities: women, blacks, workers, and the third world.<sup>109</sup>

In order to end structural oppression, the GLF, following the lead of radical feminists, sponsored consciousness-raising sessions. Consciousness-raising served to bring gay men and women together, to share their experiences, and to discover commonality. Discussion topics ranged from sexual attraction to relationship problems. Similarity of experience fostered a collective identity. It also encouraged the notion that such similarity could not exist if oppression were not inherent in the system itself.<sup>110</sup> The liberationist ideology that infused consciousness-raising sessions inspired cognitive liberation; it provided gay men and women with a basis to reject legal, medical, and religious definitions of homosexuality and, for the first time, to define themselves. Such definition is apparent in the name "Gay Liberation Front." The term homosexual was imposed upon gay men and women by the medical establishment as a term of illness. The term "homophile" symbolized the assimilationist and tactics of the Mattachine and DOB.<sup>111</sup> Radicals chose the word "gay" because it was how homosexuals referred to each other; the word symbolized self-definition and, as such, was a recognition of internal power.

Gay liberation also fundamentally restructured the definition of "coming out" in order to build and strengthen a mass movement. Whereas the phrase had previously referred to an individual acknowledgment of homosexuality to oneself, gay liberationists transformed it into an extremely public and political act. Coming out symbolized a total rejection of the negative definitions which society inflicted on the homosexual and substituted both acceptance and pride in one's gayness. Coming out was the ultimate means to conflate the personal and political. Coming out was no longer perceived as a simple one-time act, but as the adoption of an affirmative identity.<sup>112</sup> Furthermore, by acknowledging one's gayness, a person exposed himself or herself to social injustice ranging from verbal discrimination to physical violence. Hence, individuals who did come out had a personal tie to the success of a gay liberation movement.<sup>113</sup> Through the process of coming out, the victim status was discarded; homosexuality was transformed from a

stigma to be hidden to a source of pride to be celebrated. *Indeed, by coming out, the homosexual became gay.* Coming out was the necessary psychological break to do what the homophile movement could never accomplish – attract a large following.

The ideology of the GLF was that critical element that had been missing from the earlier attempts to mobilize gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals. Even if individuals did not actively participate in the political movement, notions of prideful identity trickled into the subculture. Yet, despite their importance in promoting mobilization and insurgency, the GLF, like Mattachine before it, was soon wracked with internal division. The disagreement centered on the extent to which the GLF should foster the aims of other New Left organizations as opposed to focusing on gay oppression as a single issue. Numerous activists such as Jim Owles and Marty Robinson contended that the GLF was spreading its energy too thin, and its avoidance of hierarchical structure (assumed to be part of the evil innate in American capitalism) led to a fundamentally disorganized group.<sup>114</sup> Recognizing the benefits of the liberationist philosophy, i.e., the emphasis on consciousness-raising and coming out, and also understanding that MSNY was regressive in its approach, these activists established an organization in December of 1969 that lay between these two extremes: the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA). The GAA stressed working *within* the system to promote improvement in the everyday concerns of gay men and women by sponsoring candidates, holding rallies, converting its firehouse headquarters into a fund-raising massive gay disco on the weekends, and utilizing chaotic mixes of street theater and politics called zaps to attain media attention. Indeed, its first act, the promotion of a gay rights bill prohibiting employment discrimination against gays and lesbians, could not have more starkly marked the different guiding principles of the GLF and GAA.<sup>115</sup>

As the 1970s progressed and the ideological rift between a single-issue and multi-issue perspective widened, the movement experienced further gender-based schisms. The dual oppression of lesbians as both homosexuals and women strained their allegiance to both the women's movement and the gay liberation movement. In the late 1960s, Betty Friedan denounced lesbianism as a "lavender menace" that threatened the integrity and credibility of feminism. Yet, in 1971, following the Second Congress to Unite Women in New York, NOW reversed its stance declaring that the oppression of lesbians was a legitimate feminist issue. With the women's movement's relative acceptance of lesbians, women began to abandon the gay movement in increasing numbers between 1971 and 1973.<sup>116</sup> The GLF and GAA, which were overwhelmingly male from their beginnings, tended to ignore the structural oppression

which lesbians faced as women. As activist Marie Robertson claimed, “Gay liberation, when we get right down to it, is the struggle for gay men to achieve approval for the only thing that separates them from the ‘Man’ – their sexual preference.”<sup>117</sup> Gay organizations responded to the female exodus too late and often viewed these lesbians with confusion and/or resentment as they established an autonomous feminist–lesbian subculture throughout the decade.

The 1970s ushered in an entirely new stage of gay and lesbian rights. Whereas the GLF collapsed by 1973 and the GAA did the same in 1974, the cognitive liberation produced by a redefinition of “coming out” and homosexuality itself profoundly affected gays throughout the nation. While the revolution for which liberationist theorists hoped never occurred, the movement witnessed incredible growth. In 1969, before the Stonewall riot, fifty homophile organizations existed in the United States; by 1973, there were over eight hundred gay and lesbian groups, and by the end of the decade they numbered into the thousands. One such organization, the National Gay Task Force established in 1973 and renamed the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in 1986, would become one of the leading LGBT rights organizations in the United States. Gay bars continued to proliferate, but now gay-friendly and gay-owned health clinics, book stores, cafes, law offices, travel agencies, and churches and synagogues (most notably Troy Perry’s Metropolitan Community Church) also sprung up. In 1974, the American Psychiatric Association de-listed homosexuality from its register of mental illnesses. In 1975, the ban on gays in the Civil Service was lifted.<sup>118</sup> The gay press expanded producing magazines and newspapers such as the *Advocate*, *Washington Blade*, *Gay Community News*, *Philadelphia Gay News*, and the *Windy City Times*.<sup>119</sup> Before the end of the decade, Detroit, Boston, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, and Washington, DC, incorporated sexual preference into their civil rights codes. Openly gay and lesbian officials were elected to office including Elaine Noble to the Massachusetts State Assembly, Karen Clark and Allen Spear to the Minnesota State Assembly, and Harvey Milk to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. In 1980, the Democratic Party adopted a gay and lesbian rights plank at the national convention and an African–American gay man, Mel Boozer, was nominated to be the Democratic Vice Presidential candidate.<sup>120</sup> Before the end of the decade, a national gay and lesbian civil rights bill had been introduced in both the House and Senate.<sup>121</sup> As historian Dennis Altman notes, the 1970s produced a gay male who was “non-apologetic about his sexuality, self-assertive, highly consumerist and not at all revolutionary, though prepared to demonstrate for gay rights.”<sup>122</sup> Perhaps the most

stunning example of the effect that cognitive liberation had on the growth of the movement is that the 4 July 1969 gay rights march at Independence Hall in Philadelphia attracted seventy-five participants whereas the first National March for Lesbian and Gay Rights on 14 October 1979 – a mere decade later – attracted between 100,000 and 200,000 participants.<sup>123</sup>

Despite these strides, by the end of the decade a new political conservatism swept across the United States, and the gay and lesbian movement encountered an active New Right countermovement. Anita Bryant spearheaded “Save Our Children” and rallied for the repeal of a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida in 1977. Following Bryant’s precedent, recently passed gay rights ordinances were repealed in Wichita, Kansas, Eugene, Oregon, and St. Paul, Minnesota.<sup>124</sup> These defeats fostered a massive initiative by gays and lesbians to prevent passage of the Proposition 6 (the Briggs Initiative) in California. This bill, which advocated the removal of homosexual teachers from public schools, was defeated fifty-eight to forty-two percent after then-governor Ronald Reagan came out against it.<sup>125</sup>

In another blow to the gay and lesbian community, San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk was assassinated on 11 November 1978 by Dan White, an ex-Supervisor; White was convicted of manslaughter and received an eight-year and seven-month sentence. Shock at the lenient sentencing on 21 May 1979 led to massive riots at San Francisco’s city hall. By the end of the 1970s, opportunity for movement expansion dissipated. Gay liberation as a tenable ideology had died, the movement was weakened by diverse aims among gay men and lesbians, and political conservatism bolstered by a growing radical Christian right began to tear away at the inroads that movement organizations had made earlier in the decade. In short, the 1970s ushered into existence and concretized a highly visible gay male and, to a lesser extent, lesbian culture. By the end of the decade, gay politics appeared to be subsumed by an ever-expanding gay cultural lifestyle; however, the increased media attention given to that subculture by both mainstream media and a backlashing countermovement testify to the political impact of that cultural visibility. By the early 1980s, gay and lesbian rights was being actively debated at all levels of government despite or because gay cultural institutions were coming out of the closet. Yet, the nature and content of these debates on civil rights and privacy would dramatically shift after the discovery of a microscopic retrovirus that would come to be known as the Human Immuno-deficiency Virus.

### A new crisis: the double-edged impact of AIDS

The only way we'll have real pride is when we demand recognition of a culture that isn't just sexual. It's all there – all through history we've been there; but we have to claim it, and identify who was in it, and articulate what's in our minds and hearts and all our creative contributions to this earth. And until we do that, and until we organize ourselves block by neighborhood by city by state into a united visible community that fights back, we're doomed. That's how I want to be defined: as one of the men who fought the war. Being defined by our cocks is literally killing us. Must we all be reduced to becoming our own murderers? ("Ned" in Larry Kramer's play, *The Normal Heart*)

AIDS IS A GAY DISEASE! . . . AIDS is a gay disease because a lot of gay men get AIDS . . . More important, most of what has been noble about America's response to AIDS has been the direct result of the lesbian and gay community. (Michael Callen, *PWA Coalition Newslime*)

In 1981, *The New York Times* reported that five gay men had acquired a curious cancer; in the seventeen years between 1981 and 1998, over 300,000 Americans have died from that disease now identified as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), approximately 210,000 of whom were gay men.<sup>126</sup> If only measured in terms of its massively destructive impact, AIDS has fundamentally altered the gay and lesbian movement. Yet, to measure the disease's influence only by citing the death rate within a specific community dramatically and dangerously oversimplifies how AIDS has affected the movement. In numerous ways, the AIDS crisis produced a variety of positive externalities; on the other hand, not only did AIDS provide further anti-gay fodder for the New Right, it also spawned a related but distinct movement increasingly at odds with the equal rights agenda of the gay and lesbian movement. The AIDS movement had distinct aims from the gay and lesbian movement, but, perhaps more importantly, it achieved those aims through strategies never conceived as possible by gay rights activists in the 1970s. AIDS, therefore, dramatically shifted the tactics of sexual minority movement organizations throughout the 1980s and 1990s.

The most immediate impact of AIDS is the incredible rapidity with which it spread throughout the 1980s. By the end of 1981, 225 cases were reported nationwide. In the spring of 1983, this increased to 1,400; only two years later, AIDS cases rose by over 900 percent to 15,000. In 1987, this figure increased to 40,000 cases reported.<sup>127</sup> The disease's seemingly unstoppable nature coupled with the government and mainstream media's silence and lack of concern regarding both the virus itself and its most prominent class of victims in the United States,

i.e., gay men, forced the gay community to mobilize itself. Hundreds of community-based organizations including Shanti, Coming Home Hospice, Project Open Hand of San Francisco, and, most notably, Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), developed to provide services to individuals coping with the virus.<sup>128</sup> With a staff of over two hundred individuals and an annual budget of twenty million dollars, GMHC has become the largest AIDS service organization in the world. The sexual minorities community also shaped the early response by supporting more open and frank discussions of sexuality in the media and by spearheading campaigns for "safer sex."<sup>129</sup>

The onset of the AIDS crisis also fostered a dramatic increase in the amount of people who were willing to come out. The lack of an adequate response – or any response at all – from the Reagan or Bush administrations forced gay men and women to realize that they were being abandoned by their government. Men who would not publicly express their homosexuality in the pre-AIDS era were becoming involved. Early executive director of GMHC, Robert McFarlane, asserted that "for a white man with a graduate degree and a good job who can pass, [discrimination was] not an issue. Never was. Until [AIDS] really got down to it and you realized they want you to die. If you want to be the way you are and not play their way, you're dead meat. You are literally left to die."<sup>130</sup> GMHC itself was started by men who were relatively uninvolved in gay and lesbian politics during the 1970s including Larry Kramer, Nathan Fair, Paul Popham, Paul Rapoport, Dr. Larry Mass, and Edmund White. Many of these individuals brought money, contacts, and business experience that pre-AIDS organizations never could have mustered.<sup>131</sup>

AIDS also forced a variety of celebrities including film stars, fashion designers, and government officials out of the closet, the most notable of whom was Rock Hudson in 1986.<sup>132</sup> Furthermore, with the realization that the virus was not contained within the gay male population but that anyone – gay, straight, male, or female – was susceptible, media visibility of the gay and lesbian community dramatically increased. Books such as *And the Band Played On* by Randy Shilts, published in 1987, and films including *Philadelphia*, released in 1993, demonstrated the greater willingness of heterosexuals to come to terms with both the AIDS epidemic and a politically active gay and lesbian minority.<sup>133</sup> Urvashi Vaid notes that "perversely put, we won visibility for gay and lesbian lives because we died in record numbers."<sup>134</sup> Gay visibility also increased as a result of many pre-AIDS organizations becoming nationally oriented in order to lobby the government more effectively for support. While gay liberation was predominantly a grassroots and local political movement, the

AIDS movement functioned at a national level. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) moved its headquarters from New York City to Washington, DC, and the ACLU hired a lobbyist specifically to cover AIDS issues for its Washington office.<sup>135</sup> Hence, AIDS enabled gay and lesbian politics to be heard in national public policy debates and electoral politics. Whereas most movement interest groups had acted with local and state political institutions, they now began to promote agenda implementation through Congress and the President.

AIDS reestablished and strengthened ties with both the lesbian and straight communities. Whereas lesbians often wavered in their commitment to the gay movement throughout the 1970s, opting to join the feminist movement instead and fostering an independent subculture of women-only festivals, bookstores, and cafes, AIDS, or rather the Right's exploitation of and the government's ignorance of AIDS, showed many lesbians and bisexual women that homophobia was still deeply ingrained in American culture.<sup>136</sup> Furthermore, the families of people with AIDS (PWAs) became involved in movement politics taking part in marches such as the 1987 March on Washington for National Gay and Lesbian Rights. AIDS and straight allies featured prominently in this demonstration which attracted approximately 650,000 participants. The Names Project AIDS Quilt was displayed on the Washington, DC Mall on 11 October 1987, and the parents of PWAs were invited to lead a candlelight march that evening.<sup>137</sup> Whereas the gay liberation movement of the 1970s attracted predominantly young countercultural white participants, the AIDS movement of the 1980s attracted Caucasians, African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Latinos, women, men, gays, straights, and bisexuals.

Lastly, the intransigence of the Reagan and Bush administrations as well as the relative lack of visibility in the more mainstream press revitalized direct action protest tactics reminiscent of the liberationist zaps of the 1970s. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was created in March 1987 to promote media attention to the AIDS crisis in hopes of raising universal awareness and acquiring political leverage. ACT UP was bolstered by the above-mentioned silence of the Republican-dominated executive branch, experiences at the 1987 march on Washington, increased media coverage, and the inability of more conservative AIDS groups to compete for participants. On 11 October 1987, the day following the march, five thousand individuals staged a National Civil Disobedience protest on the steps of the Supreme Court. The demonstration ignited enthusiasm for such direct activism. ACT UP's rallies, speak-outs, spray-painting, placard-painting, and leaflet-distribution both represented a wide range of

opportunities for participation and were all oriented to attract media coverage. Early ACT UP leaders included media experts such as Ann Northrop, Michaelangelo Signorile, and Bob Rafsky. Protests incorporated political artwork and graphic design by popular artists such as Keith Haring. Placards such as the lime green portrait of Ronald Reagan with the word “AIDSGATE” emblazoned in pink or the “Bush AIDS Flag” which replaced the fifty stars with fifty skulls were designed to relay a highly charged political message as well as catch the eye. Finally, ACT UP’s popularity derived from its ability to acquire media exposure even if only in the short term. ACT UP leaders claimed, and supporters agreed that, the organizations espoused a democratic and participatory culture reminiscent of the GLF; it often belittled more reform-orientated and “political insider” organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign or GMHC for working too slowly and utilizing behind-the-scene tactics that were so-called undemocratic and failed to represent anyone except the middle-class white gay male.<sup>138</sup>

Yet, just as AIDS enabled many of these positive externalities – media visibility, further political organization at the local and national levels, expanded support from both the gay and straight communities, a resurgence of direct action – many of these same benefits carried with them negative impacts on the movement. To mention nothing of the death toll or the vehement attack orchestrated by the New Right, AIDS engendered negative visibility for the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community, fundamentally derailed the movement’s original agenda from equal rights to medical and social service provision, and produced an offshoot movement that increasingly distanced itself from the gay and lesbian movement utilizing different methods and having distinct goals.

The New Right exploited AIDS as a weapon with which to maintain inequality, to overturn the achievements of the 1970s, and to return the nation to an era of more traditional heterosexual values. After fighting for and winning the de-listing of homosexuality as a mental illness, gays and lesbians now confronted conservatives’ exploitation of AIDS to re-link homosexuality with sickness. In 1985, Representative Newt Gingrich stated that “AIDS will do more to direct America back to the cost of violating traditional values and to make Americans aware of the danger of certain behavior than anything we’ve seen. For us, it is a great rallying cry.”<sup>139</sup> Two-time Republican candidate for President, Pat Buchanan, was less subtle in furthering the myth that AIDS was a gay disease: “The poor homosexuals – they have declared war upon nature, and now nature is exacting an awful retribution.”<sup>140</sup> Conservatives discussed quarantining early identified high risk groups, i.e., gay men,



IV drug users, and black and Hispanic men. The United States military imposed mandatory testing. Congress required all immigrants to be tested and forbade entry to anyone who was HIV-positive. Bathhouses and bars, staples of the gay subculture, shut down in record numbers.<sup>141</sup> The ultimate legislative achievement of the New Right was the passage of the Helms Amendment in 1987 which prohibited the use of federal funds to “provide Aids education, information, or prevention materials and activities that promote or encourage, directly or indirectly, homosexual sexual activities.”<sup>142</sup>

Far more damaging than any attack from conservatives was the derailing effect AIDS had on the celebratory concepts of coming out and gayness introduced by gay liberation philosophy. The visibility that AIDS has conferred on gay men and women has been characterized by prominent queer theorist Leo Bersani as “the visibility of imminent death, of promised invisibility. Straight America can rest its gaze on us, let us do our thing over and over in the media, because what our attentive fellow citizens see is the pathos and impotence of a doomed species.”<sup>143</sup> According to this analysis, the heterosexual majority is currently permitting a greater degree of gay and lesbian visibility because AIDS will eventually wipe out the movement anyway. Homophobic reactions in the media are declining because AIDS has essentially usurped the role of the homophobe.

In an effort to attain media coverage and government support in combating the virus, many gay and lesbian organizations attempted to “de-gay” AIDS and de-sexualize homosexuality. Existing institutionalized homophobia meant that AIDS could not be successfully combated if it was continually thought of as a “gay disease.” In promoting the truthful notion that heterosexuals were also susceptible, the gay and lesbian movement abandoned the overarching and long-term aims of equality and fighting institutionalized homophobia for the immediate need of survival. “De-gaying” the disease also inhibited people from coming out since people could donate to AIDS organizations without the stigma of being associated with a gay organization.<sup>144</sup> “De-gaying” has also paradoxically led to a measure of invisibility of a minority which accounts for 70 percent of all AIDS cases. For example, at the 1987 march on Washington, no mention was given to the gay or lesbian community in the program regarding the Names Project AIDS Quilt nor during the five speeches delivered during the candlelight vigil.<sup>145</sup>

While AIDS did attract wider participation from the gay and straight communities, especially among upper middle-class gay men, such participation further steered the movement away from its traditionally leftist orientation. The influx of this group, while bringing immense

resources, also brought political conservatism: “in place of liberation, the AIDS movement substituted nondiscrimination; instead of building a movement, it built agencies and bureaucracies; instead of placing its political faith in training and organizing gay and lesbian people, and our allies, into an electoral coalition, it placed faith in friends in high places.”<sup>146</sup> AIDS brought into question the underlying point of gay liberation: was gay liberation about the right to have sex? Was gay liberation only about sex? In some sense, AIDS helped to bring back to the surface the same questions that impelled a lesbian-separatist movement to form in the 1970s. This time however, the question was dividing gay men on their response to the health crisis.<sup>147</sup> This more conservative tendency also led to a de-sexualization of homosexuality itself disregarding the connection between sexual freedom and gay liberation; since AIDS exposed gay sexuality, gay men and women often responded by de-emphasizing that sexuality and promoting a new image espousing monogamy and safer sex.

While the virus may have caused higher rates of involvement in various AIDS-related organizations, such groups rarely maintained the civil rights oriented agendas of earlier social movement groups. Most AIDS organizations did not directly promote sodomy reform or employment non-discrimination based on sexual orientation, and were instead primarily social service groups that focused on goals enabling survival rather than the long-term objective of overcoming homophobia.<sup>148</sup> The immense public health crisis that AIDS had created pushed gay and lesbian rights organizations to focus on national-level politics and concentrate less on grass-roots activism aiming for legislation at the local and state level. In this sense, the gay and lesbian and the AIDS movements are distinct entities. The latter grew out of the former, but the latter also dramatically impacted and altered the strategies of the former: “The spread of the AIDS epidemic also drew more and more gays and lesbians to the view that federal intervention on gay-related issues was essential.”<sup>149</sup> Furthermore, the AIDS movement responded to a fundamentally different opportunity – the onset of a medical crisis – and, as such, it more readily attracted non-gay allies, increasingly distanced itself from the gay and lesbian movement, and became a competitor<sup>150</sup> with that movement for legislative and popular support. As Clendinen and Nagourney note, the creation of an AIDS movement was one instance of the “gay movement turning on its parents.”<sup>151</sup> Just as the Gay Liberation Front encouraged the downfall of its predecessor, the Mattachine Society, now AIDS-related concerns overtook those of gay civil rights. The AIDS movement had an “urgent agenda [that] stood in contrast to the unhurried civil rights agenda that had domi-

nated the gay rights movement for so long . . . The ground was shifting again. Faced with the AIDS epidemic, many homosexuals had originally turned in anger on doctors, the health system, and the government . . . many of them were now turning on the homosexual rights movement itself.”<sup>152</sup> AIDS activists advocated the shut down of bath houses and sex clubs, venues often perceived as integral to the core freedoms connoted by gay liberation. In short, the AIDS movement attracted a different constituency (with some obvious overlap), pursued distinct goals, and adopted different strategies than the gay and lesbian rights movement.

The double-edged nature of AIDS is symbolically embodied in the Helms Amendment. This amendment, which prevented the use of federal funds to “promote” homosexual behavior, appears to have only a wholly negative impact on both the AIDS and the gay and lesbian movements. Yet legal theorist, Carl Stychin, suggests that “the paradox, though, is that in seeking to silence an identity and to deny a right of sexual citizenship, the prohibition on expression creates discursive space for the identity to be excluded. A prohibition must acknowledge the existence of the prohibited and this brings the prohibited practices into the public domain of discourse.”<sup>153</sup> In an argument similar to Foucault’s addressed earlier in this chapter, Stychin contends that while the Amendment harmed the movement, it represents a shift in political attitudes toward homosexuality. Whereas in previous decades the topic would rarely be discussed, now it is the subject of heated public debate. Sexuality has acquired a political connotation; the attempt to prohibit its expression only makes it more visible.

Just as the Helms Amendment represents such dual implications, so do most circumstances engendered by the AIDS crisis. Visibility was gained, but much of it was negative. It acquired national prominence, but AIDS overshadowed gay and lesbian rights at the national level. The movement expanded, but became increasingly mainstreamed into the Washington political power structure at the expense of grassroots participation. Direct action was rejuvenated, but at the expense of both movement solidarity and heterosexual support. These dramatic changes brought about by the AIDS crisis established the gay and lesbian movement as a major minority constituency in mainstream American politics; yet, as the various circumstances of the 1990s illustrate, this achievement, so vigorously fought for since the early 1950s, is now paradoxically threatening to weaken the movement itself.

### Does *Will and Grace* help?: the movement today

Well, yes, “gay” is great . . . But when a lot of lesbians and gay men wake up in the morning we feel angry and disgusted, not gay. So we’ve chosen to call ourselves queer. Using “queer” is a way of reminding us how we are perceived by the rest of the world. It’s a way of telling ourselves we don’t have to be witty or charming people who keep our lives discreet and marginalized in the straight world . . . Yeah, QUEER can be a rough word but it is also a sly and ironic weapon we can steal from the homophobe’s hands and use against him. (Anonymous, “Queers Read This; I Hate Straights”)

Is everybody gay?! (Emily Montgomery (Joan Cusack), *In & Out*)

The American gay and lesbian movement, or rather gayness in general, has become increasingly visible in politics and popular culture throughout the 1990s. Enormous volumes of both pro- and anti-gay legislation have been debated, passed, and rejected mostly at the state level, but also at the national level, and the movement has continued to fight against an increasingly powerful Christian right. Yet, such visibility, while further enabling the promotion of the civil rights-based agenda of the movement, has revealed the multiple factions that currently exist in the movement – most importantly, the exclusion of people of color – as well as threatened the viability of earlier liberationist aims to end institutionalized heterosexism. While gays and lesbians may have received new prominence in national electoral politics – revealed by the 1992 presidential election – the movement also demonstrated its political weakness and lack of cultural acceptance at the national level by its inability to achieve a full lifting of the ban on homosexuals in the military, its failure to secure passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) in 1996, and its failure to prevent passage of the anti-gay Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA).

Throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, the gay and lesbian movement has been viewed as a primarily white male movement. The concerns of women and people of color were never foremost on the gay agenda. The essential “whiteness” of the movement becomes startlingly visible as gay African-Americans, Asians, and Latinos established separate sexual minority rights and AIDS organizations to help members of those particular minorities cope with the illness. The establishment of the Latino/a Lesbian and Gay Organization (LLEGO), the Native American AIDS Task Force, the National Gay Asian and Pacific Islander Network, and the National Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum revealed that mainstream gay and AIDS organizations failed to recognize internalized elements of racism and sexism.<sup>154</sup>

Queer Nation attempted to overcome internal division within the

movement and set forth a new seemingly post-identity-based agenda in which all elements of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community could come together under a single unifying banner. Queer Nation developed in the summer of 1990 and drew upon the direct action tactics of ACT UP. Unlike ACT UP, which sought to attain media visibility and subsequent political response for the AIDS crisis, Queer Nation aimed to bring to the forefront the fundamental issues that AIDS had subsumed and sidetracked, namely combating institutionalized homophobia and achieving full gay equality.<sup>155</sup> In doing so, Queer Nation sought to move away from the racial and gender divisions that plagued the movement by asserting a new unitary identity of “queer”:

Being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit margins, patriotism, patriarchy or being assimilated. It's not about executive director, privilege and elitism. It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night. Being queer is “grass roots” because we know that everyone of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility.<sup>156</sup>

Queer Nation attempted to create a unified group of all individuals considered sexually marginalized: gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, transvestites, etc. Furthermore, by uniting under the label, “queer,” these activists take a once derogatory term and transform it into a statement of pride, power, and militancy. Assuming the label of “queer” is, in this sense, a second form of cognitive liberation that many activists experienced. The Stonewall generation, through coming out and proclaiming their gayness overcame the self and societally inflicted victimization of being homosexual. These “queer nationals,” by asserting their queerness, counter the psychological damage incurred by the AIDS crisis and the resurgence of the far Right. The queer manifesto, “Queers Read This” states that “fear is the most powerful motivator. No one will give us what we deserve. Rights are not given, they are taken, by force if necessary.”<sup>157</sup> This militancy reveals an ultimate expression of agential power that flows from the mental and emotional liberation of the post-AIDS movement.

Defining oneself as queer, as the Stonewall generation defined themselves as gay, is as much an expression of individuality as it is one of collective identity. In some sense, being queer is not so much identifying as something as it is identifying as what someone is not. Such negative and reflexive identification enables such a disparate group of individuals to come under one banner; yet, it paradoxically prevents that group

from taking unitary action. By attempting to stand as a representative for all disempowered individuals, Queer Nation affirms a unity built out of difference. By blaming heterosexual society for constructing this difference, it denies the existence of any essential distinctive identity ultimately suppressing the internal differences which it seeks to represent.<sup>158</sup> Hence, instead of working through the gender and racial rifts that have damaged the movement, queer nationalism subsumed and belittled them in order to preserve cohesion. Film maker, Marlon T. Riggs found the centrality of white middle-class concerns of Queer Nation profoundly alienating: “the New [Queer] Nationalists, on the rare occasion they acknowledged my existence at all, spoke of me with utter contempt, spat and twisted my name like the vilest obscenity.”<sup>159</sup> Queer Nation did not, as its advocates contended, become the ultimate unifier, but rather an expression of the internal factions – assimilationism versus militancy, age, gender, race, and class – that the movement has confronted since its emergence in the immediate post-war period.

Similar to ACT UP, the prevalence of Queer Nation chapters and other queer groups such as Lesbian Avengers and Women’s Action Coalition and the occurrence of direct action tactics have declined steadily throughout the 1990s. Some activists became tired of the protests that were extremely energy-intensive. Some members of the gay and lesbian community could not relate to the “in-your-face” brand of activism and were disinclined to contribute. Queer Nation was heavily identified as a youth movement to which many in the sexual minorities community could not subscribe. In its attempts to avoid labels and promote an ideology of fluid sexuality, Queer Nation struggled to find an organizational premise, and thus succumbed to a similar problem which afflicted the Gay Liberation Front. Many of the original supporters succumbed to AIDS. Urvashi Vaid has astutely and eloquently summarized the paradoxical and shaky foundation of Queer Nation:

Queer Nation should more aptly have been called Queer Anti-Nation. The group consisted of people united more by what they stood against than what they stood for. Defined by style, individualism, and an opposition to the idea of normality, the group resisted any definition by substantive politics, political practice, or old notions of community. Queer activists may have been ideologically diverse, but they quickly established a new and fairly orthodox tribal language. QN had a dress code (leather, shaved heads, Doc Martens, and T-shirts with big lettering), an anti-establishment stand (the target mattered little: it simply needed to be more “fixed,” and therefore regarded as more “mainstream” than the Queer Nationalist), and an attitude that spoke to the nineties (postmodern, in their faces, militant). The flourishing underground ’zines published by defiant queers ranted against the assimilation stance of those

who used the words *gay* and *lesbian* to identify themselves. Queer became the vanguard; everything else was retro.<sup>160</sup>

Queer Nation may have been a short-lived organizational network, but its long-term legacy lies in cultural transformations ranging from the advent of queer theory to the positive connotation of “queer” to the fashion craze of body piercing which queer identity popularized. Yet Queer Nation not only succumbed to internal disorganization and disunity, but failed because the in-your-face politics which it espoused no longer appeared as relevant or appropriate given the political climate taking shape by 1992. Both the political and popular environment became increasingly willing to promote gay visibility to the extent that Andrew Kopkind wrote in *The Nation* in 1993, “Gay invisibility, the social enforcement of the sexual closet, is hardly the problem anymore. Overexposure is becoming the problem.”<sup>161</sup> By then, especially in the presidential election of 1992, it seemed that gay issues had become mainstreamed and up for discussion, and suddenly the gay and lesbian community was no longer to be shunned, but to be courted. That is, at least, by the Democratic Party.

The 1992 election found the incumbent Republican President Bush battling an economic recession, a gay minority and its straight supporters increasingly disillusioned with the Republican response to AIDS, and an increasingly powerful Christian right which aimed to reinstate “traditional” family values. AIDS and the Right’s negative response towards the disease brought gay issues to the forefront of the election forcing each Democratic contender to take a stance on gay rights. The position they took contrasted starkly to their Republican opponents. Every major Democratic candidate promised to increase AIDS funding and to lift the ban on gays in the military. Jerry Brown was supportive of gay rights and endorsed gay marriage. Paul Tsongas demonstrated early support when he introduced a federal non-discrimination bill to protect gays and lesbians during his first term as senator in 1979. However, the gay community was not courted merely on principle; gay rights had been a topic on which the Democratic Party had wavered since as early as the 1972 election,<sup>162</sup> and which party leadership had chosen to downplay after the disastrous loss of Walter Mondale to Ronald Reagan in 1984. However, the appeal of the gay constituency was money and votes. Indeed Bill Clinton’s emergence as the candidate to receive the overall endorsement of the gay community had less to do with his stance on gay rights – a law criminalizing same-sex sodomy was passed while he was attorney general of Arkansas – and more to do with the fact that he actively sought the gay vote in direct contrast to anti-gay Republican sentiment couched in traditional family values rhetoric.<sup>163</sup> Nor did the

help of an openly gay political consultant, David Mixner, harm Clinton's campaign. Mixner advised Clinton to tailor his speeches to stress the inclusion of gays and lesbians in his cabinet as well as a sincere desire to use federal resources to stem the AIDS crisis. An estimated 75 percent of the gay vote helped Clinton secure the presidency.<sup>164</sup>

The unprecedented visibility of gays and lesbians at the 1992 Democratic Convention and the prevalence of the "gay issue" in the election, especially in relation to the military ban, brought the movement into the realm of mainstream politics. Gay visibility increased in popular cultural arenas as well; however, such visibility had both positive and negative consequences. This visibility promotes and reflects greater tolerance of homosexuality; homosexuality is considered a legitimate topic of exploration, as demonstrated by the proliferation of gay and lesbian studies at the university level as well as the increased portrayal of gays on the small and large screen. Popular musicians such as Melissa Etheridge, Ani DiFranco, and k.d. lang, and actors including Ellen DeGeneres, Anne Heche, Rupert Everett, and Nathan Lane are all open about their homosexuality or bisexuality. The musical *Rent*, which discusses AIDS and gay sexuality, won the 1996 Tony Award for best musical. Tony Kushner's gay-themed play *Angels in America* won a Pulitzer Prize. Films such as *Philadelphia* (1993) – for which Tom Hanks won an Academy Award for best actor and which was also nominated as best picture of the year – confronted the impact of AIDS on gay men. Popular films that have reached a mainstream audience and that have explored gay themes or had gay characters include *My Own Private Idaho* (1991), *Threesome* (1994), *Reality Bites* (1994), *Clueless* (1995), *The Birdcage* (1996), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997), *In and Out* (1997), *As Good as it Gets* (1997), *High Art* (1997), *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *The Object of My Affection* (1998), *Wild Things* (1998), *Gods and Monsters* (1998), *Go* (1999), *Cruel Intentions* (1999), *Big Daddy* (1999), *Trick* (1999), the Academy Award-winning *American Beauty* (2000), *The Next Best Thing* (2000), and *Groove* (2000). Gay and lesbian characters abound on television. MTV's *The Real World* is always careful to select a gay, lesbian, or bisexual individual as one of its seven housemates on the popular docu-drama (now in its ninth season). Other mainstream prime-time shows that have had recurring gay characters or have had episodes exploring gay themes include: *L.A. Law*, *Thirtysomething*, *The Golden Girls*, *Friends*, *Mad About You*, *Frasier*, *Roseanne*, *Melrose Place*, *Beverly Hills 90210*, *Party of Five*, *My So-Called Life*, *Veronica's Closet*, *South Park*, *E.R.*, *Chicago Hope*, *Spin City*, *NYPD Blue*, *Oz*, *Sex and the City*, *Ally McBeal*, *That Seventies Show*, *Felicity*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Popular*, *The West Wing*, *Popular*, *Grosse Pointe*, *Boston*



*Public, Normal, Ohio*, and Showtime's Americanized version of *Queer as Folk*. A huge amount of media attention was focused on openly lesbian comedian Ellen Degeneres when her character, Ellen Morgan, came out of the closet on the sitcom *Ellen*, aired on 30 April 1997. The show earned the highest ratings the American Broadcasting Company (ABC) had all season, and DeGeneres became the first and only gay leading role in a television show.<sup>165</sup> In 1998, the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) premiered its now-popular sitcom, *Will and Grace*, which features two gay men – Will Truman and Jack McFarland – as lead characters. This television show has become so popular it is slated to begin the Fall 2000 season as part of the coveted Thursday evening “Must-See-TV” line-up. In 1999, the Warner Brothers (WB) Network introduced Jack McFee, a gay high school student, as a lead character to its immensely popular teen drama, *Dawson's Creek*, which explores the lives and personal trials of six immensely articulate and emotionally savvy adolescents. While such visibility suggests a high degree of mainstream cultural acceptance for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, the inherent danger in this visibility is that it legitimates only particular elements of the movement. The gay image that mainstream culture has appropriated tends to be that of the middle-class white gay male.

The cultural appropriation of gay images is reminiscent of a form of mainstream backlash against the feminist movement detailed by Susan Faludi in her book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women*. According to her model, heterosexist society utilizes popular culture as one means to undermine the gains of the feminist movement by contending that it is “equality” which makes women unhappy. By appropriating feminist terminology, institutional sexism can be masked to appear pro-feminist while simultaneously impeding the aims of feminism.<sup>166</sup> This theory can be applied to the gay and lesbian movement. Gay imagery has, to some extent, become chic, especially in the fashion industry. Aspects of gay life are addressed in such mainstream male magazines as *Details*, *Esquire*, and *GQ*; *Esquire Gentlemen* has asserted that “just about everyone dresses a little gay.”<sup>167</sup> The inherent danger in this statement is that if the dominant heterosexist institutions appropriate and legitimate particular elements of the movement, for example, the middle-class white male element, it undermines the potency of that movement; it diffuses the queer threat to heteronormativity.

Indeed, the graver danger is that movement organizations, viewing that certain representations of the gay subject are acceptable to the heterosexual majority, will privilege that identity at the expense of silencing non-conforming members of its own community. This has been the experience of gay and lesbians of color who throughout the

1980s and 1990s led a backlash against “mainstream” gay culture. Theorist Barbara Smith claims that the creation of a separatist lesbian–feminist subculture “seems much like a narrow kind of politics and . . . it seems to be only viably practiced by women who have certain kinds of privilege: white-skinned privilege, class privilege.”<sup>168</sup> Joseph Beam isolated the inherent racism in the gay and lesbian movement:

It is possible to read thoroughly two or three consecutive issues of the *Advocate* [a national gay and lesbian news magazine] . . . and never encounter, in the words or images, Black gay men . . . It is possible to leaf through any of the major men’s porno magazines . . . and never lay eyes on a Black Adonis . . . We ain’t family. Very clearly, gay male means: white, middle-class, youthful, Nautilized, and probably butch, there is no room for Black gay men within the confines of this gay pentagon.<sup>169</sup>

The gay and lesbian movement demonstrates the major obstacle of invisibility of certain individuals despite similar identities. This invisibility is reinforced in commodity culture, one of the vehicles by which queer visibility is spread, which has appropriated this image of the bourgeois gay white male and has given it universal status. Many of the mainstream films and television shows mentioned above have gay characters that conform to this white middle-class stereotype; this kind of visibility both promotes and reflects greater tolerance of homosexuality thereby signaling the potential erosion of patriarchal norms and institutions. Yet, in doing so, it exploits a narrow, but presently widely accepted and innocuous image of the homosexual.<sup>170</sup>

Even more problematic is that many of the organizations which have gained national prominence in the late 1980s and early 1990s such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Human Rights Campaign, or the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, do not necessarily have staffs or constituents which represent the diversity inherent in the sexual minorities communities. Demographically speaking, individuals involved in political lobbying efforts have tended to be highly educated, middle- and upper-class, and white. Tickets to HRC’s major fund raising tool, black tie dinners, held in over twenty cities around the country cost between \$150 to \$175, and participation is therefore cost-prohibitive. Furthermore, given that the Victory Fund’s existence is reliant on donations to sponsor gay-identified candidates, their constituents, that is, those people able to give monetary support and therefore on the higher end of the class structure, will necessarily not be wholly representative of the gay and lesbian community. Thus, the national voice(s) of the gay and lesbian community, or at least those that mainstream media venues will hear, tend to reinforce this atypical image of the community along class,

gender, and racial lines. However, these organizations have taken strides to diversify their staffs and expand their reach to new constituencies.<sup>171</sup>

The constrained image of the gay subject as white and middle-class also enables the heterosexual community to ignore those individuals who do not fit this stereotype. Visibility is gained at the exclusion of potential members of the movement. Representations of gay individuals who do not conform to the class, gender, and race stereotypes of the gay male are relatively rare. Political theorist, Rosemary Hennessy, notes the potentially devastating consequences that this limited visibility can produce:

Redressing gay invisibility by promoting images of a seamlessly middle class gay consumer or by inviting us to see queer identities only in terms of style, textuality, or performative play helps produce imaginary gay/queer subjects that keep invisible the divisions of wealth and labor that these images and knowledges depend on. The commodified perspectives blot from view lesbians, gays, queers who are manual workers, sex workers, unemployed, and imprisoned.<sup>172</sup>

The queer visibility that currently predominates in media and consumer culture is exclusive. This limited visibility inherently undermines the movement's ability to achieve radical change. The image of the middle-class white gay male is that precise level of visibility which the heteronormative patriarchy can accept without becoming threatened. It represents those aspects of queer lifestyles that are "hip" and that the straight culture can adopt without fear of any great degree of destabilization. By appropriating these images, heteronormativity is slowly making the gay and lesbian movement invisible. The accepted images of queerness are appropriated while marginalized images are ignored.

The consequences of this limited visibility which the movement currently enjoys are most clearly expressed in the outcome of the military ban debate resulting in the "don't ask, don't tell" compromise. The policy suggests heterosexual culture's unwillingness to cope with the possibility of homosexual soldiers. Furthermore, no longer is the homosexual act or homosexual identity grounds for discharge, but rather the mere verbal expression of that act or identity. Coercing soldiers to keep their sexual orientation secret illustrates an awareness of the potential threat of queer politics to the maintenance of patriarchal institutions. The enforced silence further bolsters or at least avoids the destabilization of heteronormativity.<sup>173</sup>

The gay and lesbian movement's inability to pressure for a successful lifting of the ban also indicates how politically weak the American movement was at the national level during the early 1990s. The military ban was not at the forefront of the gay and lesbian agenda when the movement started to organize at a national level; AIDS was.

Furthermore, the leftist ideological bias of the post-Stonewall generation included a heavy anti-militarist bent.<sup>174</sup> Thus, despite the creation of the Military Freedom Project (MFP) in 1988 which aimed to repeal the ban, the ban itself did not receive much media attention until Pete Williams, the Department of Defense's chief spokesperson – who gained national prominence during the Gulf War – was outed as gay in the *Advocate*, a national gay and lesbian news magazine. This event forced Dick Cheney, the Secretary of Defense, to assert that the military ban was outdated and that its repeal should be considered. Yet, despite increasing media attention on gays in the military and high-level support for change, the vast majority of activists were concerned that the military ban replaced AIDS as the prominent gay-themed issue of the election.<sup>175</sup>

Once Clinton was elected, national movement organizations such as the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) and the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) were unaware of how to interact with the first gay-friendly administration. Instead of coordinating with each other, different organizations lobbied on their respective issues. They organized independent demonstrations and failed to put together a coherent agenda that could be presented to the Clinton administration.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, movement organizations and the Clinton administration underestimated the conservative culture of Washington as well as the increasing power of the religious right. While NGLTF and HRC pushed for an executive order to lift the military ban, i.e., a fundamentally top-down approach, the Christian Coalition was conducting a more successful grassroots campaign to ensure that the ban remained intact. Organizations such as MFP (which now included HRC, NGLTF, ACLU, and NOW), the Ad Hoc Military Group, the Joint Chiefs, the Gay and Lesbian and Bisexual Veterans, and the respective staffs of Representative Gerry Studds, Representative Barney Frank, Senator Bob Dole, and Senator Sam Nunn failed to coordinate their efforts and often engaged in outright conflict despite working on the same issue.<sup>177</sup> Furthermore, despite amassing vast resources relative to both their past history and to any other movement around the world, the American gay and lesbian movement organizations could in no way compete with the resources of an ever growing Christian right countermovement that fought for fiercely for the maintenance of the ban.<sup>178</sup> In short, the movement ignored signals that the administration was deeply divided on the issue, failed to muster a grassroots campaign to counter that of the right, and President Clinton, lacking military credibility for being an alleged “draft-dodger,” latched onto Representative Barney Frank’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” compromise as political cover.<sup>179</sup>

The failure to lift the ban and the implementation of a far more homophobic standard – the institutionalization of the closet in the armed forces – demonstrates that the American gay and lesbian movement is at a dramatic crossroads at the turn of the new millennium. First, movement organizations are much more successful at attaining legislation at the state than at the national level.<sup>180</sup> Second, and more importantly, gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and all others who do not conform to the heterosexual norm, have achieved a potentially dangerous kind of pseudo-equality, what Urvashi Vaid terms “virtual equality.”<sup>181</sup> The movement has secured a large degree of civil rights legislation at the state level. It has achieved positive Supreme Court litigation outcomes such as *Romers v. Evans* (1996), which deemed unconstitutional laws that forbade barring discrimination based on sexual orientation. The 1990 Hate Crimes Bill included sexual orientation. The ban on gay immigrants was lifted in 1991. AIDS funding has increased significantly under the Clinton administration. Despite its failure in 1996, the Employment Non-Discrimination Act missed passage by only one vote – a remarkable achievement given that most politicians considered the bill untenable only three years prior.<sup>182</sup> These successes do not include the gay and lesbian community’s unprecedented degree of mainstream cultural visibility attained over the last decade. Yet such achievements threaten to destroy the movement since they inadvertently misrepresent the movement’s level of success, providing a false sense of security for the sexual minorities community. The movement is still far from achieving its most fundamental aim: the destruction of institutionalized homophobia. The maintenance and indeed strengthening of the military ban as well as the power and popular resonance of Christian right anti-gay rhetoric vividly reflects this failure. In order to counter successfully the mobilization of the far right, the movement must create a dual agenda focusing on civil rights legislation at all government levels on the one hand and liberation and cultural reform on the other. It must combine a grassroots with a top-down approach to ensure that its constituents are both mobilized and their voices heard.

### Conclusion

In a certain sense, the modern American gay and lesbian movement *did* commence at 1:20 a.m. on Saturday, 28 June 1969. At that exact moment, the cognitive liberation necessary to spark a movement took shape. The organizations and the opportunity were there, but until a shift from victim to empowered agent occurred, there was no modern

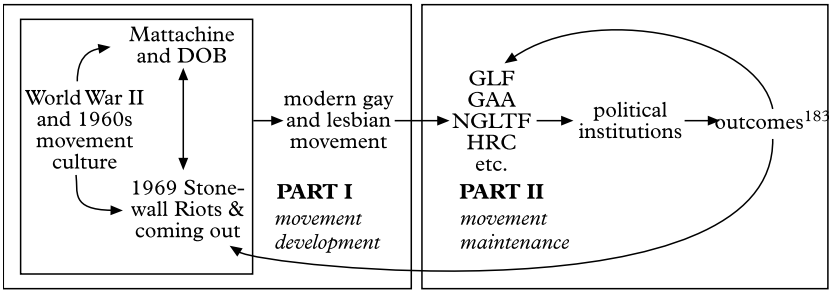


Figure 2.1 *Political process model applied to the American gay and lesbian movement*

movement. The changing opportunity structure provided by the Second World War and the development of a social movement culture throughout the 1960s coupled with homophile organizations such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis which exploited these opportunities testify that proto-movement developments existed before the Stonewall riots. Yet, the riots themselves were the symbolic critical moment for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals all over the country (indeed, across the world) that provided that crucial cognitive liberation without which no cohesive social movement could occur. The riots, fostered in part by the lack of response by local, state, or national governments, inspired gay men and women to shed the victim status that heteronormative society imposed upon them and that they had internalized. Coming out was transformed into a profoundly political act that helped accomplish what the homophile organizations could not: attract a large number of participants.

Figure 2.1 graphically applies the political process model illustrated in Figure 1.2 to the American case study. Changing opportunity was fostered by the Second World War, the publication of the Kinsey reports in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and the expansion and legitimization of a movement culture throughout the 1960s. Black power and radical feminism especially provided the model which would inspire gay liberation of the 1970s. Pre-existing organizations such as the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis exploited these opportunities to some degree and did conduct protests for law reform; however, they were unable to establish a mass movement because their assimilationist tendencies failed to provide the basis for an affirmative and prideful collective identity. Such an identity emerged after the Stonewall riots in the shape of gay liberation.

Once the movement started to accomplish its aims within the realm of

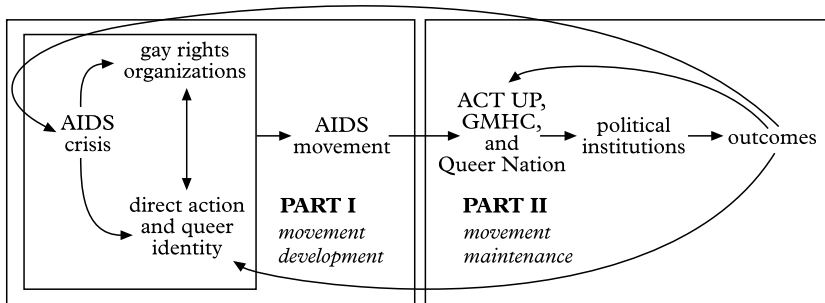


Figure 2.2 *Political process model applied to the American AIDS movement*

civil rights legislation at the local, state, and national level, it was confronted with a countermovement orchestrated by a backslashing religious right and, far more devastatingly, by AIDS. AIDS, perceived as a crisis, is also an inherent opportunity; it fostered the development of more movement organizations, helped to mobilize non-gay allies, provided another policy angle by which to achieve gay visibility and legislation, reoriented the strategies of gays and lesbians toward national-level politics, further broke down the closet door, and vastly increased the number of movement participants. AIDS created an offshoot movement with its own organizations, such as GMHC and ACT UP. As Figure 2.2 demonstrates, the AIDS crisis acted as the changing opportunity that interacted with the pre-existing gay rights organizations and affirmative collective gay identity to produce the AIDS movement with its own interest groups already named above. Queer identity or queer nationalism, while not directly linked to the AIDS movement, was inspired by ACT UP and provided another element of cognitive liberation to overcome the victimized status that gays and lesbians confronted as a result of the dramatic destructive capability of the disease. The “outcome,” defined as the inadequate response to the AIDS crisis by the conservative Reagan government (and to a less extent by the Bush government), also provided an opportunity which helped to foster this new form of cognitive liberation expressed as queer identity. Hence, Figure 2.2 depicts a feedback arrow connecting outcomes with direct action and queer identity.

Presenting the gay and lesbian movement and the AIDS movement as separate, while illustrating that the latter came out of a fundamentally different opportunity and demonstrating the dramatic ways in which the crisis derailed the original civil rights goals of the gay and lesbian

movement, is somewhat contrived. The separation does illustrate the different aims and strategies, but perhaps a more realistic conception would suggest that the AIDS movement should be seen as a component part of the gay and lesbian movement pushing the latter towards national and mainstream politics while reintroducing direct action and developing the notion of queer identity.

The gay and lesbian movement aims to achieve the long-term end of dismantling institutionalized homophobia whether through legislative reform or cultural transformation (more often the first method, though the second is perhaps an extraordinarily positive consequence which reinforces and enables the reformist strategy). To accomplish this goal, the movement and its organizations, which developed in accordance with Part I of the applied political process model detailed above, act through the political institutions – the executive-legislative structure, the judicial branch, the federal system, and the party structure. How the movement organizations' tactics are determined by the composition of the American political system will be further discussed in chapter 4. In other words, this future chapter seeks further to explore the dynamics of the second part of the political process model. Yet, as a comparative analysis will facilitate an illustration of the political structure's influence on movement tactics, we must first understand how the British counterpart of the American gay and lesbian movement emerged in the post-war period.