

THE POLITICS OF
BEING DIFFERENT

Ideological Themes and Variations
Counterpointed in Three Phases
of the Homosexual Rights Movement

by

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ABSTRACT

Title: THE POLITICS OF BEING DIFFERENT

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In this thesis I present an analysis of ideological themes distilled from homosexual right movement publications. I focus on three phases of the movement: the early German phase (1860-1933), the early American phase (1950-1969), and the contemporary American phase (1969-1976). For each phase I determine the major ideological themes, with special emphasis on the movement's ultimate goals, its interpretation of the nature and origin of a homosexual orientation, and its analysis of the sources of discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals.

These themes are then interpreted as manifestations of movement strategies. A movement has to make strategic decisions designed to maximize the attainment of its emancipatory goals. In the case of the homosexual rights movement, a strategic choice has to be made between two alternatives: forging an alliance with other social or political movements, often of an antiestablishmentarian nature, or "going it alone," which tends to involve a proestablishment, "respectable" appeal to the enlightened selfinterest of society. Each such strategy involves, in part, the selection of appropriate ideological themes. The first alternative tends to result in the articulation of a fullfledged antiestablishmentarian ideology, while the second alternative tends to lead to a reformist program, which accepts the dominant outlooks and creeds of society but is opposed to one specific aspect, in this case the oppression of homosexuals.

I finally argue that the relative success of the early German and contemporary American movements can be attributed to their successful forging of beneficial alliances with other sociopolitical movements and their resulting ability

to subsume their demands under the heading of a larger ideology. The complete failure of the early American movement is attributable to its inability to forge a successful alliance and its reliance on a reformist program appealing to such politically ineffective virtues as charity and empathy.

Thesis Supervisor: Langdon Winner

DEDICATION

This thesis is affectionately dedicated to my
dearest friend STEVEN ABBOTT whose help, support
and love have been invaluable and unforgettable.

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Chapter I: Themes of Ideology and Reform as Manifestations
of Strategy Decisions

To the officer in charge, the planned police raid on the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village, New York City, seemed almost boringly routine. But on that evening of June 27, 1969, something was about to happen that was truly unprecedented. Police in N. Y. C., and, in fact, all over the nation, had been raiding and closing down bars where homosexuals were reputed to have hung out for many, many years. Owners, employees, and often even the patrons would be arrested. Never had there been any protest, let alone active resistance. That evening, however, the first night of the full moon in June 1969, the patrons of the Stonewall Inn fought back. Stones, rocks and bottles were hurled at the arresting officers. Throughout the West Village, New York's largest gay ghetto, the word spread like wildfire. Soon a full-fledged riot was under way in Sheridan Square, a riot in which different segments of the homosexual community, especially dragqueens and lesbians, angrily and proudly battled the Tactical Police Force Units for most of the night. Riots continued on and off in Sheridan Square throughout that sunny weekend in the early summer of 1969.

"The Stonewall Uprising," as it later came to be called somewhat hyperbolically, marked the turning point in the

homosexual rights movement in the United States. Organiza-⁷
tions dedicated to the advancement of the rights of homosex-
uals had existed in the United States for almost twenty years,
most notably the various Mattachine Societies. These were
reformist-type organizations, made up of middle- and upper-
middle class professionals who were dedicated to working
quietly and respectably behind the scenes in their attempts
to change the discrimination and prejudice that homosexuals
faced throughout the country. But two decades of their
efforts had not accomplished any appreciable results. Homo-
sexuals were still almost universally despised, routinely
fired from jobs whenever they were "found out," refused
security clearance, dishonorably dismissed from the armed
forces, barred from obtaining visas to enter the country,
harassed by police and vigilante groups alike wherever they
chose to congregate, and in general doomed to lead a life
away from the spotlight, in the shadows of parks at night,
public lavatories, and exploitative, Mafia-run watering holes.
In the wake of the Stonewall riots, the Mattachine Society of
New York (M.S.N.Y.) attempted, in vain, to channel this newly
unleashed energy into "constructive" channels. ¹ For this
purpose, they formed a Mattachine Society Action Committee.
The people who had made the Stonewall riots possible, however,
could not have been more different from the "respectable"
Mattachine Society member. They were young, often unemployed
or students, in general not middle class and many had been

active participants in the student, antiwar, and black liberation movements of the 1960s. A clash was inevitable, and, hardly a week after its inception, the original Mattachine Society Action Committee met its demise:

Dick Leitsch, in a staid brown suit, strides to the front . . . With professional aplomb, he reopens the meeting. Police brutality and heterosexual indifference must be protested, he asserts; at the same time, the gay world must retain the favor of the Establishment, especially those who make and change the laws. Homosexual acceptance will come slowly, by educating the straight community, with grace and good humor and . . .

A tense boy with leonine hair is suddenly on his feet. "We don't want acceptance, goddamn it! We want respect! Demand it! We're through hiding in dark bars behind Mafia doormen. We're going to go where straights go and do anything with each other they do and if they don't like it, well, fuck them! . . . Straights don't have to be ashamed of anything sexy they happen to feel like doing in public, and neither do we! We're through cringing and begging like a lot of nervous old nannies at Cherry Grove!" . . .

"We're going to protest in front of St. Patrick's," another boy calls. "The Catholics have put us down long enough!"

"If every homosexual in New York boycotted Bloomingdale's, they'd be out of business in two weeks!"

"Well, now I think," says Mrs. Cervantes (Mattachine assistant), "that what we ought to have is a gay vigil, in a park. Carry candles, perhaps. . . . I think we should be firm, but just as amicable and sweet as . . ."

"Sweet!" The new speaker resembles Billy the Kid. He is James Fouratt, New Left celebrity, seminarian mangué, the radical who burned real money on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange as a war protest.

"Sweet! Bullshit! There's the stereotype homo again, man! . . . Bullshit! That's the role society has been forcing these queens to play, and they just sit and accept it. We have got to radicalize, man! Why? Because as long as we accept getting fired from jobs because we are gay, or not being hired at all, or being treated

"like second-class citizens, we're going to remain neurotic and screwed up. No matter what you do in bed, if you're not a man out of it, you're going to be screwed up. Be proud of what you are, man! And if it takes riots or even guns to show them what we are, well, that's the only language that the pigs understand!"

Wild Applause

Dick Leitsch tries to reply, but Fouratt shouts him down.

"All the oppressed have to unite! The system keeps us all weak by keeping us separate We've got to work together with all the New Left."

A dozen impassioned boys are on their feet, cheering

Again and again, Dick Leitsch tugs . . . at his clean white tie, shouting for the floor, screaming for order. He is firmly ignored.²

On July 31, 1969, during an organizational meeting at Alternative University, N. Y. C., the Gay Liberation Front (G.L.F.) was born. It was named after the Vietnamese people's movement for freedom and self-determination. Radical activist, antiestablishmentarian Gay Liberation Fronts sprang up like mushrooms all over the country. A second wave, most notably the Gay Activist Alliance (G.A.A.) of New York, and Radicalesbians, an offspring of the establishmentarian lesbian organization Daughter of Bilitis followed a few months later. Radical gay student organizations were founded at most of the major universities. And, finally, a number of influential gay liberation newspapers began to be published along the East and West coasts, most notably Come Out! and Gay of N. Y. C., Fag Rag of Boston, and Gay Sunshine of San Francisco. For several years now, under the slogan of "Out

of the closets, into the street," annual Gay Pride Marches are held in most major American cities on June 28, in commemoration of the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969.

Most current gay activists trace the beginning of the gay liberation movement to the Stonewall Rebellion of 1969, with an occasional footnote reserved for the earlier Mattachine Societies. On a worldwide scale, however, this view is quite incorrect. An active homosexual rights movement flourished in Germany from the 1890s to the 1930s. In the early 1900s various efforts were made in Britain to achieve equal rights for homosexuals. In Holland, where homosexual relations between consenting adults had been legal since the introduction of the Napoleonic code in 1806, a highly successful organization, the "Committee voor Ontspanning en Cultuur" (C.O.C.), dedicated to the abolition of any and all discrimination against gay people was founded in November of 1946.³ When, in 1971, it was declared "Royal," the highest honor that can be bestowed upon any Dutch organization, most of its objectives had been achieved, including, even, a vigorously enforced affirmative action program which requires the active recruiting of homosexuals into branches of employment from which they have traditionally been barred.

Only recently have academic researchers even begun to make an effort to come to grips with the wealth of material available on the sociopolitical aspects of homosexuality.

Some historical work has been done, most notably on the early German and contemporary American movements (see Bibliography). Some biographies of pre-movement homosexual leaders and cult-figures have appeared in the gay and the liberal straight press. Some sociological work has been done, most notably on the gay subculture, as represented by the urban gay bar life (see Bibliography). But all in all, the aura of taboo that still surrounds the subject, and the real difficulty in getting access to original sources, combined with the reluctance of many researchers to get involved in something with which they have no firsthand experience, may account for the sad fact that most of this material remains unexplored in any serious academic way.

In this paper I attempt an approach which, to the best of my knowledge, has not been tried before. I draw on ideological and polemical writings of three distinctly different phases of the homosexual rights movement: the early German phase (1860-1930), the pre-Stonewall United States phase (mostly Mattachine Society writings) and the contemporary United States phase (mostly Gay Liberation Front, Gay Activist Alliance, and gay activist press publications). Throughout these three different phases, or movements, as I shall henceforth call them, the ultimate goal remained the same: to obtain the right to live openly and equally as homosexuals. The movements differ, however, on two main points:

1. Their analysis of what it means to be homosexual. Is it, for example, simply a matter of "who one sleeps with," having no intrinsic bearing on other aspects of one's personality, or on one's public or private behavior? Or is it, rather, a condition that pervades one's whole being, that is relevant intrinsically to one's basic self-definition as a human being, and a condition, moreover, that irrevocably differentiates one from his or her heterosexual brothers and sisters (in many nonsexual aspects as well)?
2. Their analysis of the sources of and reasons for the oppression, discrimination, and prejudice that homosexuals face. Is the main source of oppression, for example, merely a "simple oversight" on the part of the heterosexual community, or, at worst, an anachronistic relic of the Dark Ages, easily rectifiable through educational efforts and enlightened legislation? Or is, on the contrary, the main source of oppression intrinsic in the organization of straight society per se, necessary for the perpetuation of the (oppressive and exploitative) status quo?

As we shall see, these different analyses do not exist in a vacuum. In this paper, these polemical and rhetorical themes will be analyzed within the context of the strategic decisions which any minority movement with emancipatory goals has to make. A minority, so deeply despised and so

often even considered "unmentionable," is under pressure to tailor both its perception of itself and its perception of the major sources of its oppression, so as to fit the strategy which will maximize the chances of achieving its ultimate objective.

In this paper I will explore ideological and protoideological themes. My objective is not to assess the relative merits (in other words, the "truth") of one claim against another. For example, I will not try to decide whether homosexuality is truly "congenital and innate," as the German movement held, or whether, instead, it is a matter of "free personal preference," as many contemporary American gay activists maintain. This is not to suggest that, being an interested party myself, I do not have strong personal views on these matters. Rather, I will focus on the content of liberation writings and rhetoric as a manifestation of the political strategy chosen by the movement. The choice of optimal strategy, in turn, depends on the sociopolitical state of society at large, in particular the existence of other social movements which might potentially be interested in forming alliances. Specifically, it follows that a similarity of ideological themes does not necessarily imply a corresponding similarity of strategy. I will contend later on that the very same themes that account for the success of the German movement may also account for the very lack of success of the early American movement. Conversely,

ideological themes may be opposite in content and yet fulfill the same strategic function in achieving movement objectives, as seems to be the case when one compares the bourgeois ideology of the German movement with the distinctly anti-bourgeois ideology of the contemporary American movement. The very same strategic function which the bourgeois themes served in the German movement, namely to ally oneself with powerful (non-homosexual) social movements on the ascendancy, is served by antibourgeois themes in the current American movement.

At this point the distinction which sociologist Edward Shils draws between ideology and reformist program is useful:

Ideologies arise in conditions of crisis and in sectors of society to whom the hitherto prevailing outlook has become unacceptable. An ideology arises because there are strongly felt needs, which are not satisfied by the prevailing outlook, for an explanation of important experiences, for the firm guidance of conduct, and for a fundamental vindication or legitimation of the value and dignity of the persons who feel these needs. Mere rejection of the existing society and the prevailing outlook of the elites of that society is not sufficient. For an ideology to exist, there must be also an attendant vision of a positive alternative to the existing pattern of society and its culture and an intellectual capacity to articulate that vision as part of the cosmic order

An ideology cannot come into existence without the prior existence of a general pattern of moral and cognitive judgements - an outlook and its subsidiary creeds - against which it is a reaction and of which it is a variant. It requires, in other words, a cultural tradition from which to deviate and from which to draw the elements which it intensifies and raises to centrality

Ideologies passionately oppose the productions of the cultural institutions of the central

institutional system. They claim that these institutions distort the truth about "serious" things and that they do so to maintain a system of injustice in the earthly order. Ideologies insist on the realization of principles in conduct; this is one of their grounds for accusing central value and institutional systems of hypocrisy, the compromise of principles, and corruption by power

Sometimes certain of these elements become a program of aggressive demands and criticism against the central institutional and value systems. Programs, like ideologies, are also emergent from prevailing outlooks and creeds; they "take seriously" some particular element in the outlook and seek to bring it to fulfillment within the existing order. A program accepts much of the prevailing institutional and value systems, although it fervently rejects one sector. Thus, a program stands midway between an ideology and a prevailing outlook or a creed; it can be reached from either direction (and testifies thereby to the affinities between ideologies and outlooks and creeds).

The programmatic forms of ideological orientation are sometimes concentrated on particular and segmented objects - for example, the abolition of slavery or the promotion of the rights of a particular sector of the population, such as an ethnic group or social stratum. They do not expand to the point where they embrace the whole society as the objects of the sought-for transformation. The attachment of such programs to the central institutional or value systems may be so strong that it survives an intense but segmental alienation with respect to particular institutional practices or particular beliefs. This is characteristic of certain modern "reform movements," such as the abolitionist movements in Great Britain in the early eighteenth century and in the United States in the period up to the Civil War. These movements have focused their attention and efforts on specific segments of the central institutional system, demanding the conformity of conduct with moral principles that can neither be yielded nor compromised. 4

We shall see that the strategic choice the homosexual rights movements had to make was between a wholesale

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rejection of the existing societal status quo, thus leading to movement rhetoric which is ideological (in Shils's terms) in nature, on one hand or, on the other hand, a general acceptance of the outlooks and creeds of society, thus leading to themes which together constitute, in Shils's terms, a reformist program.

The decision between reformist program and ideology seems to have depended primarily on the existence of a powerful nonhomosexual ideological, antiestablishmentarian movement abreast in society. Whenever such a movement exists, it is tempting to adjust one's own homosexual rhetoric to the overall ideological rhetoric of the antiestablishmentarian social movement. The homosexual rights organizations, by presenting their particular demands as part of a larger ideological package deal, could thus win for themselves powerful allies and, as it were "ride the crest of the wave." In this way they could indirectly benefit from any advances the larger ideological groups made in their quest for power. When, conversely, there were no powerful allies in sight, and society was in a state of "value-equilibrium" (à la Talcott Parsons), the strategy chosen tended to be the reformist program. This road, in general, has not been successful. The reason for this probably lies in the peculiar nature of the oppression which homosexuals face. Unlike blacks or women, who have no way of hiding their "stigma," homosexuals are peculiarly tempted to "pass for

straight." By "identifying with the oppressor" they become the movement's (and their own) worst enemies. It is commonly believed, both within and outside of psychiatric and sociological circles, that the most extreme exponents of homophobia (in plain English, the "fag-baiters") typically have repressed latent homosexual feelings themselves (in gay slang, they are called "closet cases"). Secondly, again unlike blacks or women, part of the rationalization of homosexual oppression is religious. Homosexuality is considered a "sin" and therefore ultimately a matter of personal responsibility. Consequently, a reformist homosexual movement, like the Mattachine Societies of the 1950s, is without any natural allies and has to battle enemies from both within and without. It has to face determined opposition essentially on its own, and the force of its arguments depends primarily on an appeal to charity and empathy, noble and admirable virtues indeed, but without much political effect.

Finally, this paper does not deal directly with Lesbian Liberation at all. Lesbians have tended to go their separate ways, both politically and socially. Their allegiances have been divided, understandably, between the women's movement and the gay movement. Lesbians discovered very soon that male sexism was not at all confined to straight males. I therefore did not feel that the two branches of the movement (gay male and lesbian) should

be treated as if they were one and the same, especially since that approach more often than not leads to the neglect of the lesbian viewpoint by default whenever the paper is written, as this one is, by a man. I did include, for the interested reader, a selected bibliography of works by and for lesbians.

In writing this paper, I faced two major problems. First of all, many of the original sources are extremely hard to come by, existing, as they most often do, on mimeographed sheets, newsletters, and newspaper issues long ago out of print. Most academic research libraries did not and still do not have subscriptions to them. Most of the original German material was destroyed by the Nazis. Personal connections gave me access to a lot of material that should be difficult to find elsewhere. For the prospective researcher I will provide an extensive bibliography of works that are more easily accessible. The second problem involves the tremendous fragmentation of the American gay liberation movement of the 1970s. Marxists battle anarchists battle effeminists, and precious energy is spent on denouncing one another rather than focusing on the common oppression all face. It was therefore necessary to focus on the main, dominant themes that characterize the mainstream of the gay liberation ideology of the 1970s. Drawing a cartographic parallel, I have tried to stay, as much as possible, on the main, four-lane highways.

Consequently, I reluctantly left many charming country roads and city alleys unexplored. This paper is, in many ways, but a tentative beginning. I hope that very soon someone will be inspired to draw a more detailed map featuring as yet uncharted bridges and regions. The challenge of the subject matter, and its social and political import, just cry out for serious and sympathetic treatment.

Footnotes: Chapter I

1. Donn Teal, The Gay Militants (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), pp. 33-36
2. Ibid., p. 35
3. Laud Humphreys, Out of the Closets (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 50
4. Edward Shils, "The Concept and Function of Ideology" Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 1972, VI, pp. 68-71

Chapter II: The German Case

Homosexual Rights as Bourgeois Ideology

In the second half of the year 1862, a German lawyer, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), wrote a series of letters to his family in which he forthrightly disclosed to them his homosexuality. ¹ Encouraged by their response, he published a treatise on the subject which he called Vindex (Vindicator, 1864). It was a polemical treatise in which he argued that, since homosexuality is always congenital, it is something that can hardly be considered immoral, as it is not open to either change or "cure." He also coined the term "Uranier" or "Urning" (Eng. "Uranian"), based on Plato's Symposium, in which the patron goddess of men who loved other men is identified as "Aphrodite Urania." ² The work ends on a hopeful note: "It was given to the two preceding centuries to do away with the persecution of witchcraft and heresy. It remains for our century, hopefully even our decade, to eliminate the persecution of love between men" ³

A similar brief was written in 1869 by Dr. Karoly Maria Benkert and published as an open letter to the Minister of Justice Leonhardt. In this treatise, basing himself on the Napoleonic code, Benkert argues that it is not the business of the state to interfere in the private lives of ordinary citizens. He also called for "the rational approach to

homosexuality," an approach that would be guided by the standards set up during the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The immediate occasion for this open letter was the bill introduced to the German Reichstag, and passed without debate in 1870, to outlaw all homosexual acts, private and public. Thus came into being the notorious par. 175. It is in Benkert's open letter that we first find the term "homosexual." Until that time, the only acceptable words had been sodomite, pederast, and Knabenschaender (Eng. literally "boy-ravisher").⁴

Neither Ulrichs' nor Benkert's efforts had much of an impact, until in the early 1890s, they were rediscovered by Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, himself a homosexual. In 1897 he founded the Wissenschaftlich-Humanitaere Komitee, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, which for the next thirty years remained the driving force behind the German homosexual rights movement. The Committee published an annual book, the Jahrbuch fur Sexuelle Zwischenstufen, the "Yearbook for Sexual Intermediates." The committee's first and foremost goal was the amendment of par. 175, so that homosexual acts would be punishable only in cases involving coercion, violence, and adult-minor relations.⁵ The second goal, as described in the Jahrbuch, was to enlighten public opinion concerning homosexuality by publishing "serious, authoritative research on this misunderstood subject."⁶ The third goal was to "interest the homosexual himself in the struggle

for his rights." ⁷ A petition was circulated among opinion makers of Wilhelmine Germany - prominent scientists, lawyers, doctors, civil servants, artists, authors, and the like. The committee also sought and won the support of August Bebel, the leader of the Social Democratic Party. ⁸ During the Reichstag debate of 1898, Bebel spoke in favor of the proposed amendment of par. 175, arguing among others that millions of Germans were Uranians, as he called them after Ulrichs, and that Germany would suffer a scandal of unprecedented proportions if the law was consistently applied. ⁹ He ended his speech with the following words: "Gentlemen, you have no idea how many respectable, honorable and brave men, even in the highest positions, are driven to suicide year after year, one from shame, and another from fear of the blackmailer." ¹⁰ Despite the support of the Social Democrats, the motion was overwhelmingly defeated by the Reichstag.

In the early Weimar Republic, the prospects for reform looked more favorable. As it happened, the Minister of Justice was one of the original signers of the 1898 petition. On March 18, 1929, there was a Reichstag debate on the proposed amendment, as a result of which it was referred to committee for further study, with the full expectation that it would be adopted the next year. Because of the outbreak of Germany's economic crisis in 1923, the resolution was forgotten until 1929. On October 16, 1929, the legalization

of homosexual acts between consenting adults in private, was approved by a committee vote of 15 to 13. ¹¹ Formal adoption by the full Reichstag - the goal for which the movement had been working for over 33 years - seemed within grasp when the American stock market crashed. The ensuing crisis strained the Reichstag to the limit, and the bill was tabled, never to be taken up again.

The subsequent Nazi rise to power, culminating in Hitler's appointment as Reichskanzler in 1933, effectively squashed all chances of adoption. ¹² Not long after, the "final solution" designed for the Jews was tried out on Germany's homosexuals first.

The German movement was reformist in the sense that its first priority was the abolition of par. 175. The main argument, as we saw, was as follows. A rational scientific investigation of homosexuality would lead to the inevitable conclusion that the condition is congenital and natural. It is not a matter of preference, and, being unchangeable, is therefore not susceptible to moral condemnation. The idea here is clearly that a person with a homosexual predisposition has not made the choice in this matter, and can therefore not be held responsible, in a moral sense, for his condition. This argument is clearly directed at the traditional church position, which considers homosexuality a sin for which the homosexual is personally responsible. The "naturalness" of homosexuality, the movement claimed, could

be discovered by rational investigation. The justification of the church's position, on the contrary, rested solely on dogma. The second argument, advanced by Benkert, revolved around the issue of privacy. Having lived in France for many years, he had been influenced by Enlightenment thinking.¹³ He took the position that offenses against religion and morality in private did not fall within the jurisdiction of criminal law. He noted also that the Napoleonic code, which had been adopted all over the North-western European continent with the exception of Germany, had for this reason removed homosexual acts in private from criminal jurisdiction.¹⁴ The third argument, advanced by Bebel, held that since such a great number of prominent, honorable men were affected, it was obviously clear, that this private condition in no way affected one's public behavior. The final argument, as we saw, also advanced by Bebel, maintains that it is not in the best interest of the state to subject honorable people in high places to the danger and disgrace of blackmail.

These four basic arguments are bourgeois in the original sense of the word. The first one, extolling the virtues of reason and science over those of religious doctrine, can be found throughout the French Enlightenment of the eighteenth century. The same goes for the second argument concerning the right to privacy. The last two arguments are essentially utilitarian, in the sense that a social calculation would

lead to the inevitable conclusion that the negative effects of scandal and personal grief far outweigh any positive effects derived from this type of oppression.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, bourgeois ideas had become firmly entrenched in most of the Western European continent. Ever since the successful bourgeois revolutions of 1848 had established the bourgeoisie as a dominant class, Enlightenment and utilitarian ideas had become the cultural and legislative foundations of those societies. The Napoleonic code had been adopted throughout. The one exception to all this, however, had been Germany. The efforts to peacefully unite the various German Länder (independent German states) had failed in 1848 (during the Frankfurt Congress) and, tragically, twenty years later Bismarck accomplished with "Blut und Eisen" what the professors, guided by bourgeois ideals, had been unable to achieve in Frankfurt in 1848. As Rosenberg points out in his Imperial Germany, the struggle of the French bourgeoisie in the eighteenth century against the Church and French aristocracy was repeated during the German Kaiserreich between the German bourgeoisie and the Prussian landed aristocracy (the Junkers). It was not until the revolution of 1918, and the subsequent formation of the Weimar Republic, that the bourgeoisie, and specifically the coalition between the Social Democrats and the Liberals, rose to power in Germany.

Against this background the remarkable efficacy of the German homosexual rights movement begins to come into clearer focus. By articulating bourgeois themes, the movement managed to ally itself with a larger social movement which was destined to triumph in the end. By at least intellectually identifying their cause with a larger one, namely the overthrow of the Prussian aristocracy and the achievement of general democratic reforms that would diminish the power of the Kaiser and his entourage, they managed to both win the allegiance of the leadership of the ascending bourgeois movement and to obtain exposure in the bourgeois press as well.

A truly remarkable episode should serve to illustrate this point, as well as demonstrate the analytical advantages of the approach taken in this paper. In 1906, the editor of the homosexual magazine Der Eigene published a small brochure entitled Kaplan Dasbach und die Freundesliebe (Chaplain Dasbach and Comrade Love) in which Dasbach, the leader of the Roman Catholic, pro-monarchist Center Party, was exposed as blackmail victim of a male prostitute. ¹⁵ The tactic was a great success, and did not go unnoticed by the bourgeois opposition parties, most notable the Liberals (Deutsche Volkspartei) and Social Democrats (Sozial Demokratische Partei Deutschlands). A few months later, the editor of the highly respected social democratic weekly Die Zukunft accused close advisors and friends of the Kaiser of

being homosexuals. The list of Prussian Junkers thus accused reads like a "Who is Who" in Imperial Germany: Prince Philipp zu Eulenburg, Count Kuno von Moltke, and Prince Bernhard von Bülow, Reichskanzler (Chancellor) of Germany, to name but a few. ¹⁶ In these articles there is a dual emphasis on weakening the Kaiser and abolishing par. 175. Magnus Hirschfeld was not in the least reluctant to provide expert testimony in court as to the sexual orientation of von Moltke. His objective diagnosis: Moltke was definitely homosexual. ¹⁷

James D. Steakley, the author of The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany, calls Hirschfeld's testimony "an amazing tactical blunder." ¹⁸ What emerges from the preceding analysis, on the contrary, is that Hirschfeld's behavior is eminently understandable in the light of the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee's strategy of allying its cause to the larger one of the prodemocratic, anti-church, anti-aristocratic, anti-Monarchist bourgeois movement. Although in the short run the Committee was hurt financially (support from closeted upper class, pro-Monarchist homosexuals decreased; total contributions to the Committee dropped from 17,115 Marks in 1907 to 6038 Marks in 1909), in the long run the Committee secured for itself the help and support of powerful allies totally committed to their cause. August Bebel, the leader of the Social Democratic faction, is only one out of many. And when these allies had finally become

triumphant in the Weimar Republic, their support of Homosexual Rights Legislation secured its rather smooth passage.

The fact that the Committee's efforts failed because of the 1929 stock market crash does not in any way detract from the remarkable success of this early movement. In the next chapter we will see how many of the arguments of the original German movement were duplicated in the 1950s and 1960s by the early homosexual rights movement in America. Whereas the German movement was remarkably successful, and achieved a lot of broad-based support and public exposure, the efforts of the early United States movement were remarkably ineffective and, in fact, were hardly given any American media coverage at all. All this, it should be stressed, despite a remarkable similarity in arguments. The key to this apparent paradox, it seems to me, can be found in the preceding analysis. The bourgeois notions of scientific understanding versus religious dogma, of the right of privacy and of concern for the greatest good for the greatest number were still properly ideological in Shils's terms (see Chapter I, pp. 14 - 15) They did not yet constitute the dominant outlook in German society, still had revolutionary potential, and were subject to constant debate throughout the German mass media. The movement, in its German setting, succeeded in being bourgeois and antiestablishmentarian at the same time. Its rationalizations had not yet become clichés and platitudes. It was part of a vital movement

struggling against what it rightly considered an anachronistic oppression, and, last but not least, it had the fortune to ally itself with what turned out to be the winning side. In contrast, the very same themes seen against the United States background of the 1950s and 1960s, were eminently mainstream and uninteresting. Whereas Germany was a society in which liberty and equality were still controversial and, at times, dangerous ideas to expound. In America, these goals had long ago been achieved or so, at least, the majority of the population was convinced. In Edward Shils's terms, the very same ideas which were ideological in Germany in the late nineteenth century were part of the dominant outlooks and creeds in the America of the fifties and sixties. The homosexual rights movement in America, therefore, presented not so much a contribution to bourgeois ideology, but instead a reformist program. Its appeal, therefore, lacked a broad base, being restricted to the people whose plight it sought to improve, and to others motivated by empathy or charity. Faced with overwhelming prejudice, and unable to break through the "conspiracy of silence," it never even made a dent upon the public consciousness.

Footnotes: Chapter II

1. James D. Steakley, The Homosexual Emancipation Movement in Germany (New York: Arno Press, 1975), p. 3
2. Ibid., p. 8
3. Ibid., p. 4
4. Ibid., pp. 12-13
5. Ibid., p. 30
6. John Lamitsen and David Thorstad, "The Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)" Copyright 1973. Privately circulated draft of forthcoming book), p. 2
7. Ibid., p. 2
8. Steakley, op. cit., pp. 30-31
9. Lamitsen and Thorstad, op. cit., p. 12
10. Ibid.
11. Steakley, op. cit., p. 85
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 35-37
16. Ibid., pp. 37-38
17. Ibid., p. 38
18. Ibid.

Chapter III: The Early American Case

The Failure of the Reformist Program

Edward Sagarin, writing under the pseudonym of Donald Webster Cory (after Andre Gide's Corydon), must be credited with fathering the movement in the United States. Two isolated voices had preceded him. Emma Goldman, in the early twentieth century, had come out in favor of homosexual rights. In her "Mother Earth" publication she wrote:

I regard it as a tragedy that people of a differing sexual orientation find themselves proscribed in a world that has so little understanding for homosexuals and that displays such gross indifference for sexual gradations and variations and the great significance they have for living. It is completely foreign to me to wish to regard such people as less valuable, less moral, or incapable of noble sentiments and behavior. ¹

In 1948, Gore Vidal published his novel The City and the Pillar, the first American novel featuring an explicitly homosexual protagonist. ²

Cory's The Homosexual in America, published in 1951, became the first best-seller to recognize homosexuals as an oppressed minority group. "This book is the result of a quarter of a century of participation in American life as a homosexual," ³ he wrote in the preface. The book, written with great compassion and insight, contains among other

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things an analysis of the sources of homosexual oppression and suggestions for possible courses of remedial action. As such, it directly inspired the formation of the Mattachine Society of Los Angeles (in a closed room with the blinds drawn and lookouts posted at the door) and of ONE, a later group, which in a landmark 1958 Supreme Court decision obtained the right to send its literature through the mail. ⁴ Until the early sixties Cory remained the budding movement's most respected and influential spokesman. ⁵ When Cory, disillusioned with his inability to find true love and support within the homosexual subculture, felt that he had to repudiate his earlier pro-gay views, and subsequently attempted to have himself "cured," his place was taken by Frank Kameny, who in 1960, had founded the Mattachine Society of Washington (M.S.W.). MSW was the first activist, civil libertarian organization in the American movement. Encouraged by the success of the black civil rights movement, Mattachine-type societies sprang up along the East and West coasts. By 1969, about 150 homosexual organizations existed around the country. ⁶ Under the energetic leadership of Craig Rodwell, MSNY became the most influential. ⁷ It was not until the Stonewall riots, however, and the subsequent formation of the antiestablishment Gay Liberation Front, that the movement began to achieve any of its aims.

Let us now examine the views expressed in Cory's The Homosexual in America, and the various Mattachine publications

of the 1960s. Four different, yet interrelated themes emerge from a study of 1950s and 1960s movement rhetoric.

First of all, it is claimed that, far from being a menace to society, homosexuals have contributed more than their share to society's well-being throughout the ages. In this context, reference to the universally admired culture and civilization of ancient Greece proved tempting indeed.

The literature of ancient Greece shows that homosexuality thrived, that it was fully and completely accepted by the people, but that it was seldom the exclusive channel of love for either man or woman. For the Greeks, pederasty was a noble form of love. It was linked with courage, devotion, sacrifice on the battlefield; with athletics and physical prowess. It was a glorification of both strength and tenderness. Plutarch pointed out that love of youths was found in the greatest and most warlike of nations, and among the greatest and most warlike of heroes, and Plato said that an army made up of lovers and their beloveds, fighting at each other's side, could overcome the whole world, even though these lovers be a mere handful.

In Rome, during the most successful days of the Empire, homosexual love was glorified by the great poets. Catullus wrote a love lyric to Juventius, whose "honeysweet lips" he sought to kiss; and Virgil, Horace, and Tibullus sang praises to love of youths. Ovid delved into this pathway of love, and Petronius found it equal to love for women. 8

Not only could it be shown that many famous Greeks and Romans had been homosexuals, throughout the course of Western civilization great contributions had been made by people, both artists and philosophers, who had been homosexual. To point out that so many of our Western cultural heroes had been gay was considered a powerful argument indeed.

It is felt by many leaders of the homosexual cultural movement that if the dominant, heterosexual, group can be convinced that such men as Plato, Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Whitman were invert, then society must either reject the men and their work entirely, which it is loath to do, or must relent in its hostility, by admitting the possibility of "good homosexuals." In fact, the acceptance of the men implies that society agrees that some homosexuals, at least, can be useful to civilization. Yet this admission would be fatal to the entire superstructure of taboo and condemnation. Thus the hero-worship and cult-formation, so evident in homosexual groups, are integral manifestations of the effort to expose the contradictory features of society's present-day attitude. 9

Not only had so many geniuses been homosexual, even the average homosexual was imputed to have, statistically speaking, by far sharper and more inquisitive mental faculties than his average heterosexual brother:

Among many of my gay friends, no precept, no matter how dearly held, is allowed to rest unchallenged. No new thought, no matter how absurd it may seem to be, fails to receive its day in court. Whether one discusses politics or medicine, philosophy or literature, no matter how far removed from the field of sex, the homosexual brings a mind that is unusually questioning and skeptical. 10

The argument here recalls John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, in which he claims that it is through the free interchange of ideas, unrestricted by prejudice, religious or moral dogma, or government interference, higher and higher truths are arrived at. Mill furthermore believed that a society, dedicated to the uncovering of truths through the free inter-

change of ideas, cannot help but be a more interesting and in the final analysis, a more just society than one that imposes artificial restrictions on this freedom. The argument, in its various forms, that homosexuals can and do contribute to the well-being of society implies that the movement, at this stage, is clearly not opposed to either society as a social body, or to its dominant value system. It almost seems that if society could only correct this "minor oversight" of homosexual repression, everyone would live happily and merrily ever after.

The second argument states, in plain terms, that the homosexual is basically as respectable, middle-class, and "all-American" as anyone else. Notwithstanding straight society's stereotypical generalizations, there is no way to distinguish the average homosexual from the average heterosexual outside of the area of his obvious sexual orientation. Witness this description of a Mattachine picket of the White House:

The pickets (10 men, 3 women) were well-groomed and neatly dressed (suits, white shirts, ties for the men; dresses for the women), carried carefully lettered signs, and, in general, made a good appearance which was noted. 11

The Mattachine Society of New York (MSNY) described itself in the following terms:

The Mattachine Soc. Inc., of New York, a non-profit, volunteer organization, is

entirely dedicated to the complete understanding and full acceptance of homosexuality as a way of life - and love.¹²

Note the use of the word "love" here instead of the word "sex." The same emphasis on respectability can be found in the use of the term "homophile" as opposed to the term "homosexual."¹³ Clearly then, the implication is that the homosexual is "just like" everyone else, except that his "love object" happens to be of the same sex. His relationships with his partners, it is maintained, are long-lasting and monogamous, at least as much so as between husbands and wives.¹⁴ This eagerness to be considered part of mainstream middle-class America was apparent not only in the Mattachine Societies' publications, but also in their composition. MSNY seemed to be a group of middle socio-economic status. The group had not attracted drifters, school dropouts, or job-changers in search of an anchor. Nor did it count in its ranks the homosexual stereotypes: the hairdresser and the male nurse. It had few manual workers, skilled or unskilled, but it did have musicians, artists, actors, and some (but not many) interior decorators. In sum, MSNY was a small, educated, middle class group.¹⁵

Cory quite rightly pointed out that whenever homosexuals blatantly violate the dominant norms and values, it is not so much because of their sexual orientation per se, but because of the stigma and stereotypical labeling to which they are

constantly subjected. Not even to mention the legal and social harassment that is entailed by that:

If homosexuals are arrested under rather sordid circumstances, seeking sexual partners in places forbidden by public law, shall society not stop to ask whether the cause of this action is the banishment of their pursuits from so many of the accepted pathways of life? 16

Again, just as in the first argument, the movement clearly accepted the establishment, middle-class values.

Third, homosexual activity per se is both harmless and enjoyable. The Mattachine Newsletter wrote with an undercurrent of anger

Heaven help Dr. Bieber, the editors of the New York Times, and all abusers of behavioral science who use the prestige of their professions to perpetuate a sexual orthodoxy which has for centuries made large numbers of people abjectly miserable, if these people should fail to adequately suppress the fact that large numbers of homosexuals not only enjoy their proclivities, but function as well as anyone can be expected to under the circumstances in which homosexuals must now live. Let these people devote their energies toward making all forms of harmless eroticism acceptable. 17

The fourth argument maintained that homosexuality is neither a sickness nor a pathology and is therefore just as natural as heterosexuality:

In the absence of valid evidence to the contrary, the Mattachine Society of New York maintains that homosexuality is not a sickness, disturbance, or other pathology in any sense, but is merely a preference, orientation, or propensity. 18

The logical next step was that, since homosexuality was not a sickness, perfectly natural, it was not subject to cure. As we saw in the last chapter, the leaders of the movement believed that, if public opinion believed homosexuals to be unchangeable, it would be more likely that social hostility would be alleviated. If, on the other hand, the public accepted that the possibility of change was a real one, then it would continue to hold homosexuals personally responsible for continuing on their deviant path.¹⁹

The aims of the movement were twofold: abolition of repressive laws and the right to free sexual expression:

The homosexual, first and foremost, wants recognition of the fact he is doing no one any harm. He wants to live and let live, and to go about the ordinary and everyday pursuits of life, unhindered either by law or by unwritten law.²⁰

What the homosexual wants is freedom - not only freedom of expression, but also sexual freedom. By sexual freedom is meant the right of any person to gratify his urges when and how he sees fit, without fear of social consequences, so long as he does not use the force of either violence, threat, or superior age; so long as he does not inflict bodily harm or disease upon another person; so long as the other person is of sound mind and agrees to the activity. This means that both on the statute books and in the realm of public opinion proper homosexual acts should be considered unobjectionable, so long as they are entered into voluntarily by the parties involved, said parties are perfectly same and above a reasonable age of consent, free of communicable disease, and no duress or misrepresentation is employed.²¹

It is interesting to note the great similarity both in aims and in arguments between the American movement and the earlier German movement discussed in the previous chapter. Both were reformist in the sense that their rallying principle was the change of oppressive laws. Both considered the homosexual orientation per se harmless, natural and not susceptible to cure. Both emphasized that homosexuals can and do contribute a great deal to society. Remember Bebel's comments on "honorable men in the highest positions." Finally, both felt that homosexuality was a private matter which did not allow for generalizations about one's public behavior. The American movement was more sophisticated in this matter by realizing that a certain amount of public deviance was attributable to the very fact of stigmatization and stereotypical labeling.

Where the two movements diverged, however, was on strategy. As we saw, the German movement could easily attach itself to a growing national social bourgeois movement which in the course of a few decades became dominant. It therefore could present its specific demands as being merely a subset of a much larger package deal. The very values which were revolutionary in Germany were eminently mainstream in the United States. Consequently, there were no natural allies for the movement, and its very respectability prevented it, at least until the Stonewall riots, from identifying itself with budding 1960s antiestablishmentarian movements. The

American movement answered the dilemma of how to remain respectable on one hand and how to achieve its aims on the other hand as follows:

It is an answer that I contend can be found and one which happens, by the most fortunate of coincidences, to be identical with the needs of society at large and with the historic task of the democratic forces of our generation. The answer is to be found in the liberalization of our newspapers, radio, and theatre, so that homosexuality can be discussed as freely as any other type of discussion. Already a beginning has been made in the very large interest shown in the subject by novelists, and in the occasional portrayal of homosexuality on the stage. A few popular magazines in the U. S. have at least mentioned it. In the larger cities serious articles have appeared even in the newspapers, and in one case an entire series of articles, written in a penetrating and not unsympathetic way and without any evasion of terms, appeared in a New York newspaper.

This discussion may prove to be an opening wedge. There will be more articles, books, and further utilization of other means of thought communication, and out of this will come the interchange of opinion, the conflict and the controversy, which alone can establish truth.

And all of this is good for society, good particularly in this era, when no greater threat to the democratic way of life and everything that has evolved in modern civilization, both Western and Eastern, appears than the suppression of all differences of opinion, the repression of all controversy. At this moment in history, when the forces of totalitarianism seek to extend the conspiracy of silence and the distortions of truth to all phases of life - to science and politics and human relations - the homosexual (including even those few who are mistakenly in the camp of totalitarianism) are seeking to extend freedom of the individual, of speech, press, and thought to an entirely new realm. While others seek to narrow the confines of allowable differences of opinion and permissible discussion, the homosexual seeks to broaden them. 22

This statement by Cory, moving in its naive idealism, so reminiscent of John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, exemplifies the tragedy of the early American movement. Beautiful in its ideals, noble in its aims, courageous in its "respectable" picket line, Cory's statement nevertheless failed to realize that its appeal was basically to the motivations of charity and empathy. It also was eminently ahistorical, in a peculiarly American way, in failing to realize that no nation had ever moved to action by the kind of enlightened selfinterest that Cory so eloquently appeals to.

Unfortunately, the movement never took seriously the following paragraph from Cory's 1951 book:

The anti-sexual nature of modern civilization is apparent wherever one turns. In the description of the virgin birth, the term "immaculate conception" is used, and thus an inference is made that all conceptions that take place by means of sexual intercourse are not immaculate and are therefore unclean. Any humor pertaining to sex is called a "dirty joke." It is "lewd" to fail to conceal the sexual organs, and the strongest epithets in the English language - and in many other languages - are synonymous with having sexual intercourse. Even the more progressive educators teach the children about birds and flowers and something about the physiology of sex, but skirt the fact that the higher animals, and particularly man, indulge in sex for the pure joy of the thing. In modern anti-sexual society, the heterosexual is tolerated only because he is necessary for the propagation of the species, but the virgin and the chaste are glorified as pristine purity. If we homosexuals lived in a predominantly heterosexual and not an anti-sexual society - as witness some American Indians and the South Sea islanders - we would not be in constant conflict with our fellowmen nor with ourselves. 23

Here we find the forebodings of a theme that would become dominant in the movement of the 1970s: the notion that it is not only gay people who suffer oppression but straight people as well. The idea that homosexual oppression is just one token of a larger type of sexual oppression suffered by all, especially women, and beyond that, the idea that sexual oppression (even in its general form) is just one symptom of the oppression that is written in capital letters all over America and the "American Way of Life" became the cornerstone of the ideology developed by the movement after the Stonewall riots. This represented a complete transformation of earlier ways. The themes that emerged from this radical transformation of the movement will be explored in the next chapter.

Footnotes: Chapter III

1. John Lamitsen and David Thorstad, "The Homosexual Rights Movement (1864-1935)" (Copyright 1973. Privately circulated draft of forthcoming book), p. 8
2. Gore Vidal, The City and the Pillar (New York: Dutton, 1948)
3. Donald Webster Cory, The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach (New York: Greenberg, 1951), p. 10
4. Steven Abbott and John Kyper, "The Betrayal of Donald Webster Cory," FAGRAG/GAY SUNSHINE, Summer 1974, p. 23
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Cory, op. cit., pp. 27-28
9. Ibid., p. 152
10. Ibid., pp. 148-149
11. Eastern Mattachine Magazine, July 1965, p. 23
12. Edward Sagarin, "Homosexuals: The Many Masks of Mattachine," Odd Man In (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 100
13. Ibid., p. 99
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 97
16. Cory, op. cit., p. 35
17. The Mattachine Newsletter, October 1964, p. 15
18. Sagarin, op. cit., p. 102
19. Ibid., p. 105

20. Cory, op. cit., pp. 208-209
21. Ibid., p. 213
22. Ibid., pp. 210-211
23. Ibid., p. 214

Chapter IV: The American Scene After Stonewall

"Out of the Closets, into the Streets!"

THE FLAMING FAGGOTS

(for a confrontation with the Venceremos Brigade)

"So you're for the revolution,"
 somebody always seems to say,
 rubbing his white male thick-wristed hands.
 "Well, then, it's time to get serious, you know.
 It had to come to this -
 it's going on all over the globe,"
 --as if I didn't know
 the whole third world is going up in flames
 and unless they win, the species is in danger,
 imperialism the ecocidal enemy, in fact,
 of all life everywhere.

OK, if that's what you mean, right on, et cetera,
 I say,
 but what's the catch?

"Nothing, except that, of course,
 to be on our side, on the side of the people,
 you'll certainly be willing to give up
 certain little quirks
 that hinder all of us getting down
 to maximum work
 in the minimum of time left to us."

Quirks?

"Well, like your homosexuality, like wearing
 your hair too long, like acting -- well, just
 generally being effeminate, unmanly;
 that gets the people uptight as much as
 women wanting to be engineers or something.
 We don't have time for games."

Sorry to report this typically tiresome stereotype

of a thousand conversations
 but it's exactly here that I say
 Absolutely not!
 and he says, "Utopian faker,
 faggot, fairy, fuck off,"
 and I do.

Because my revolution is to the left of his
 because his would preserve the old Prison of Gender
 which brutalizes
 millions of people, its inmates, daily,
 because he would actually jail me for being queer
 as soon as he was in power;
 and therefore it had better not be him who wins,
 my comrades, it had better be all of us
 who refuse to settle for
 enslavement as the price of freedom,
 who will fight and die -- and win --
 for exactly what we are and want
 and have a right to
 and nothing less:
 a revolution total and permanent and never-ending. . . .

Mine catches glimpses of what we could be
 when there is no more religion or family or
 male domination
 or money or property or mine or yours or
 forced obedience.
 when women are free
 not only to shape their own lives
 but to realize a vision of liberation
 that will shape the lives of all of us
 when men are able
 to hug and kiss babies not for show,
 but able to care for them in every sense
 and for each other
 when I'm no longer called queer
 for wishing my father had held me
 with a love like that,
 for loving still any rare stray
 glimmer of tenderness in a man,
 for wanting to touch that transmutation
 in the flesh, but only to share,
 not to hoard, such a miracle . . .

Listen! No matter how powerless we are as yet,
 both our pain and our demands
 give us every right to face any

roundtrip U.S. cane-cutter who tells us
 we don't know what it's like
 to be oppressed. He's really talking about
 his own white butch self, marking himself
 as a collaborator in our oppression, signer
 of the current Gender Nonaggression Pact
 with the likes of David Rockefeller.
 Machismo is fascism, as the women
 of the Young Lords Party have said

When witches were burned in the middle ages,
 the Inquisitors ordered the good burghers
 (all of them men, of course)
 to scour the dungeons for jailed queers,
 drag them out and tie them together in bundles,
 mix them in with the bundles of wood
 at the feet of the woman,
 and set them on fire
 to kindle a flame
 foul enough for a witch to burn in.

The sticks of wood in bundles like that
 were called faggots
 and that's what they called the queers, too,
 and call us still,
 meaning our extinction, or complete extermination,
 androcide and gynocide their one response to
 any heretical blasphemy against
 a god-given manliness.

Isn't it time we said yes,
 yes to faggot,
 proud to reclaim our martyrs
 -- who else will have them, or feel their pain
 but we brother-lovers, we flaming faggots who
 embrace the coal of final rebellion,
 women already ablaze,
 we catching fire from them this time,
 a whole planet groaning with relief
 as the bonds of
 an expiring masculinity
 glow like wicks, then break,
 slipping from our backs.

In that holocaust, I will risk my whole self
 and body
 even should I perish

My melting flesh --

My screams are only
the death of everything they stand for.
My pain short-circuits so quickly
I can't believe it.
My hand is a trellis of fire.
I can do it. It's easier than I thought.
The crisp odor has stopped.
It's they who are fading away,
perishing, our liberation their execution.
My screams are bullets,
blood stuttering through their skin.
I can't hear my own words anymore
except that I think we must all
still be chanting, demanding, welcoming

freedom freedom freedom

Stonewall - the Gay Gettysburg - was the galvanizing moment that transformed the Homosexual Rights Movement into the Gay Liberation Movement (as described in chapter I). Within the first year, the New York Mattachine Society lost most of its influence and quietly withered away. Its momentum had been usurped by the budding gay liberation movement and campus gay student organizations that proliferated everywhere. The most influential of those, especially in their writings, were the Gay Liberation Front (GLF), the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA), the student homophile leagues from the University of New Hampshire to the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and the newspapers GAY (N.Y.), COME OUT (N.Y.), SCREW (N.Y.), FAG RAG (Boston), GAY SUNSHINE (San Francisco), THE BODY POLITIC (Toronto), THE GAY ALTERNATIVE (Philadelphia) and THE GAY LIBERATOR (Detroit).

Out of the wealth of new questions that were being asked I will isolate those themes that can truly be said to be representative of the broadest range of 1970s movement ideology. This becomes quite complex because of the tremendous factionalization of groups and the subsequent infighting between them. What this chapter will focus on is not an analysis of the intricate differences between various branches of the movement, but rather on universal themes picked up by all, which clearly makes the movement, even in its splintered fashion, a coherent ideological whole whose major themes, content-wise, are worlds apart from what we

saw in the previous chapters.

The earlier movements, both the German and the Mattachine, were essentially reformist in their writings. They both accepted the concept of the "law-abiding citizen" who would change his deeply rooted prejudices if only the law ceased to legitimate them. In other words, social change was regarded as a result of legal change. Therefore, the change of oppressive laws became their principle raison d' être. In contrast, the 1970s movement did not focus its major energies in that direction. It believed, rather, that legal change would come as a consequence of social change. And the first prerequisite of social change was to instill pride and self-awareness within the gay community itself.

The movement clearly intended to follow the example set by the Black Liberation Movement. This movement had found that neither the 1954 Supreme Court decision nor the voting act of 1964 had changed de facto discrimination and prejudice. Thus, Black Pride led, historically speaking, to Gay Pride. In Carl Whittman's Gay Manifesto, probably the movement's most important document, this debt is specifically acknowledged. Gays "were inspired by black people in their freedom movement." 1

A Western gay militant complained, in In the Streets for the Revolution:

Nothing is so pathetic as a Black who denies his culture and tries to pass for white, becoming more Mr. Charlie than Mr. Charlie in the process,

unless it's one of our gay brothers who denies his gayness to get along in the straight plastic culture. Both have become less than men and have sunk to the level of imitations. Luckily for the souls of Black folk they have awakened to their beauty and cultural integrity in time. Luckily, also, for the Blacks, racial differences make passing difficult. Unluckily for us, passing is the easiest thing in the world. ²

This refusal to be content with second class status became the hallmark of 1970s gay liberation. In other words, the prime goal of the 1970s movement - as opposed to the earlier ones - was not the changing of laws, but the development of gay pride and gay identity, the refusal to be discriminated against, and a willingness to strike back:

Look out, straights. Here comes the Gay Liberation Front, springing up like warts all over the bland face of America, causing shudders of indigestion in the delicately balanced bowels of the movement. Here come the gays, marching with six-foot banners to Washington and embarrassing the liberals, taking over Mayor Alioto's office, staining the good names of War Resistor's League and Women's Liberation by refusing to pass for straight anymore. ³

Because of its emphasis on the cultivation of "gay pride" the movement strongly advocated "coming out," which roughly translates into "declaring oneself publicly as being homosexual." All this is in great contrast to the earlier Mattachine Society which was quite content, in general, to stay safely "locked inside its closet." The benefits of coming out were felt to be twofold: personal and political.

On a personal level, coming out relieves the debili-

tating psychological tension of having to hide an important part of oneself from others. Walt Whitman, in a poem called "In Paths Untrodden" (from Leaves of Grass) alludes to this need:

to tell the secrets of my nights and days
to celebrate the need of comrades. ⁴

It was felt to be a necessary prerequisite for the attainment of self-respect:

Coming Out is not asking for trouble, it sets a cornerstone for a fuller self-respect . . . No sanity can be found until the homosexual rebels against society's ways. No homosexual can find full self-understanding until he or she begins to perceive the relationship of gays to the dominant heterosexual society. The "cure" for homosexuality is rebellion. ⁵

To come out meant to finally be able to accept one's homosexuality and to derive pride and comfort from that realization:

It is standing up for one's beliefs; it is saying, 'Yes, I love other men (or women) and I don't give a damn what you think of it.' It is refusing to hide by pretending to be that which you are not; it is demanding to be recognized as a powerful minority with just rights which have not been acknowledged; it is an insistence that homosexuality has made its own unique contribution to the building of our civilization and will continue to do so; and it is the realization that homosexuality, while morally and psychologically on a par with heterosexuality, does, nevertheless, have unique aspects which demand their own standards of evaluation and their own subculture. ⁶

With the awareness of the personal benefits of coming out came a realization of the psychological price for "staying in the closet." To stay in the closet meant, above all, to continue to internalize the labels straight society had imposed on gay people. To stay in the closet was seen as a condition cursed with self-loathing and shame:

From the beginning, from the minute you are born, your indoctrination begins. You are immediately classified as a male or female and are expected thereafter to fulfill the role which established society prescribes for you: blue for boys and pink for girls. Girls learn to help in the kitchen while boys are trained to do men's work. You know how the rest of that goes. But then comes the day of sexual awakening. It is a period in which experimental relations occur, many of which are homosexual. Remember those days? I'll even bet there wasn't too much guilt over it either, except for the indoctrination which you had already had drilled into you that sex, in general, was dirty. But after a while you learned to direct your sexual activity exclusively toward the opposite sex (if you were allowed to believe that sex was beautiful at all), for that is, after all, the arrangement society recognizes. And he whom the same indoctrination does not reach, who continues on the most natural form of sexual expression he has ever known, is harrassed and labeled sick and perverted until he retreats into his own dirty, dark little room and shuts the closet door behind. "We, ever since we became aware of being Gay, have each day been forced to internalize the labels: 'I am a pervert, a dyke, a fag.' And the days pass, until we look out at the Straight world from our homosexual bodies, bodies that have become synonymous with homosexuality, bodies that are no longer bodies but labels." 7

Coming out was believed to have a political side as well. On a personal level it lead to gay pride, on a political level it lead to gay power:

Gay people when they first realize that they're gay, have a process of "coming out," that is, coming out sexually. We've extended that to the political field. We feel that we have to come out politically, as a community which is aware that it is oppressed and which is a political power bloc feared by the government. Until the government is afraid of us -- afraid of our power -- we will never have our rights. The Federal Government is based on a power structure: it doesn't matter what the laws say. The Constitution gives us our rights already. If that were enough we'd be a free people today. Until we have power we'll never be free. ⁸

In the notion of gay power we find another crucial difference with the earlier American movement. As we saw, the Mattachine Societies carried high the banner of respectability. They attempted to change the laws by "respectably" lobbying and educating legislators. The 1970s movement, in contrast, realized that gay rights would not be assured by what they considered "begging." Respectability was considered anathema since it implied acceptance of prevailing societal norms and values. A large sign at a gay rally proudly proclaimed: "We are the people our parents warned us against!" This idea of gays not being "just like" everyone else, of being gay and proud, rather than being respectable and in the closet, was apparent both in movement writings and in movement tactics.

Originally movement placards had read:

Two, four, six, eight . . . gay is just as good
as straight. Three, five, seven, nine . . .
Lesbians are mighty fine.

This had tied in neatly with the old idea of homosexuals being "just as good" or "just like" anyone else. But now, straight society was rejected more and more as a hotbed of frustration, sexual inadequacies, stifling role conditioning, and one-dimensionality:

The myth of hetero heaven is being questioned not only by lesbians and homosexuals who value their own experience, but also by political analysts who view the patriarchal nuclear family as the primary unit in which we learn distorted self-images, get shoved into confining sex roles, and are rendered impotent, bureaucratized puppets who follow blindly even the most absurd dictates of patriarchal parental figures, because we have been exhorted from birth to "Mind you Father!" For this reason many gay activists see themselves as a vanguard in breaking through mythical and institutional molds which keep most people rigid, stratified, sexually starved and emotionally stunted. Gays turn the tables and ask: "Is Heterosexual love possible?"⁹

The message is clear: straight women are oppressed and frustrated, having been taught to behave like slaves. Straight men have been cemented into a competitive arena where any expression of human emotion is ruthlessly stifled. Society is seen as consisting of human robots who have been reduced to pale shadows of their full human potential selves. The implication here is that a liberated gay person is, in a social sense, actually less oppressed than the average straight, but, since straight society does provide certain (often economic) rewards and privileges, it was considered about high time that they were extended to gays as well:

While heterosexuals are, in many ways, equally oppressed along with gays, the rewards that they receive and the special privileges they take for granted are universally denied to gays. Consequently gays not only internalize feelings of guilt, fear, shame, and inadequacy, they also have to devise substitutes for the rights of citizenship not available to them - employment, social services, community development, housing, relating to children, and many more. 10

But begging was out of the question. Gays were going to demand what they considered to be rightfully theirs.

Moreover, the change of rhetoric was accompanied by a change of tactics. Respectable lobbying was replaced by a subversive "zap." A zap is part picket line, part sit-in, part take-over, in general carried out with lots of raised voices, and, in the case of the gay liberation movement, lots of good cheer as well. Its purpose was to "embarrass publicly, defeat, cause a disturbance, such as by boycotting" and derives from "hip slang, onomatopoeic comicbookese," as the Queen's Vernacular¹¹ is pleased to inform us. New York's Gay Activist Alliance became a veritable master in the art of "zapping." An impromptu gay "wedding" reception in support of homosexual marriages was held in the offices of the New York City Clerk. Activists appeared with cake and coffee and offered them to flabbergasted employees. When police arrived, the activists left quickly and quietly. When the New York City Board of Examiners incurred GAA's wrath for pronouncing homosexuals unfit for teaching, they became a prime target. The Village Voice was zapped because of its

refusal to allow the word "gay" to be used in the "classified advertisements" section. Mayor Lindsay was a frequent target in order to put pressure on him to come out in favor of gay rights legislation.

Now that the movement had given up on the illusion that gays would ever be loved, or even accepted, by straight society, or that it was even desirable to work toward that goal, they became quite willing to be feared instead. The zaps were but one tactic out of several. The movement began to put pressure on elected officials and those running for office to take a public stand on the issue of gay rights legislation. Questionnaires were sent out to the candidates. The result of these questionnaires was subsequently widely publicized within the gay community. The movement realized that the homosexual population, estimated at five percent, constituted a potentially powerful voting bloc. In fact, in many urban centers the proportion is considered to be significantly higher than that. The idea was, again, that a politician might at least fear the gay vote. As a result, the movement succeeded where the Mattachine Societies had failed. Direct pressure by gay liberation organizations, both in and out of the voting booths, resulted in the passage of gay rights ordinances in such cities as Lansing and Ann Arbor, Michigan; San Francisco; Berkeley; Toronto, Ontario; Austin, Texas; Chapel Hill, North Carolina, etc. Along a totally different line, the motto of "don't love us,

fear us," lead to the formation of the Lavender Panthers (in California), who roamed the streets to protect gay people from harrassment by straights. ¹² All this political energy, in turn, did wonders for one's psyche. A banner was spotted during a New York City zap that stated "One good zap is worth six months on a psychiatrist's couch!" ¹³ Or, as Carl Whittman wrote in his Gay Manifesto:

Where once there was frustration, alienation, and cynicism, there are new characteristics among us. We are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the initial flourish of a movement. ¹⁴

So far I have contrasted the gay liberation movement to the earlier Mattachine Societies in such areas as "change society versus change the law," coming out versus staying in the closet, gay pride versus homophile respectability, and the notion of "fear us if you can't love us" versus the idea of the homosexual as being essentially harmless. A further difference involved the origins of homosexuality. The German movement has regarded the homosexual orientation as innate, congenital. It addressed itself to the religious argument of homosexuality as a "sin," arguing that, since the condition was innate, homosexuals could not be held responsible. Similarly, the early American movement emphasized the naturalness of homosexuality. It essentially espoused a

"we-cannot-help-it" attitude. It was willing to grant, albeit reluctantly at times, that it might be preferable to be straight, if there only were a choice in the matter. This attitude was beautifully articulated in all its ambivalence by Merle Miller in On Being Different, based on his self-revelatory New York Times Magazine article:

Gay is good. Gay is proud. Well, yes, I suppose. If I had been given a choice (but who is?), I would prefer to have been straight. But then, would I rather not have been me? Oh, I think not, not this morning anyway. It is a very clear day in late December, and the sun is shining on the pine trees outside my studio. The air is extraordinarily clear, and the sky is the color it gets only at this time of year, dark, almost navy-blue. On such a day I would not choose to be anyone else or any place else. 15

The 1970s gay liberation movement, in contrast, coined the term "sexual preference." As Bruce Voeller, active in GAA's speakers bureau, said (to a 'straight' high school audience in 1973):

"All we're talking about here is, uh, our preference in plumbing." 16

The voluntary preference idea was circulated in two different versions. For public consumption was the notion that a person consciously chose to be gay as a reaction against the restrictive strait jacket of heterosexuality. Many of the quotes rejecting the societal status quo (quoted earlier in this chapter) clearly carried this implication. This did not work very well for private consumption, since

every homosexual had for so long been painfully aware of his guilt-ridden adolescent fantasies about being attracted, totally involuntarily, to member of his own sex. Thus, for internal consumption, the argument was rephrased. It can be summed up as "given the dead end street of compulsory heterosexuality, any person in their right mind would freely choose to be gay, if such matters were amenable to free individual choice."

Closely connected to this is the 1970s movement position on "cure." Both the 1970s gay liberation movement and the earlier Mattachine movement agreed that cures are impossible. But whereas, as we saw, the earlier movement was reluctant to take this stand, and, at times, almost seemed sorry that a cure was not available (as we saw, for example, in the case of Donald Webster Cory, alias Edward Sagarin), the gay liberationists, instead, almost rejoiced in this fact. The early movement, essentially, felt that homosexuals should not be considered "sick" because, in every other respect, they were as "normal" as anyone else. The 1970s movement turned the table around. To the extent that sickness entered the picture at all, it was heterosexual straight society that was sick. To the extent that gay people deviated from the straight norm, and were called sick as a result, this was to be treated almost as a compliment. One is reminded of a popular song doing the rounds in the gay disco circuit nowadays: "If loving you is wrong, I don't

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want to be right." The clear implication: "If loving you is sick, I don't want to be healthy." Since homosexuality is considered a preference, gays can be sick by straight standards, and yet not be susceptible to "cure." After all, homosexuality came to be regarded by the movement as far superior to the straight heterosexual norm.

Straight society disagreed. The progressive secularization of society resulted in a shift in the normative framework available for considering homosexuality: the rhetoric of sin was replaced by the rhetoric of mental health.¹⁷ Throughout the nineteenth century the Church had been the moving force behind homosexual repression. By the middle of the twentieth century certain members of the psychiatric profession (particularly an odd alliance of Freudian psychoanalysts and Skinnerian behaviorist) had become its self-styled high priests.¹⁸ Homosexuality, no longer a sin, was a mental disease caused by dominating, castrating mothers and/or weak or absent fathers. A homosexual who "had the sincere desire to change his ways" could be led back into the fold of healthy normality through a behavior-modification therapy called "aversion-conditioning."¹⁹

It is not surprising, therefore, that the dubious honor of being labeled the "most despicable of all heterosexual pigs" was reserved for Dr. Irving Bieber, Professor of Psychiatry at New York Medical College. He is the major proponent of behavior modification techniques that purport

to be able to modify a person's sexual orientation from homosexual to heterosexual (incidentally, never the other way around). The Berkeley Tribe gloatingly describes the following confrontation between gay liberationists and Dr. Bieber. It speaks for itself:

One of the worst pigs is Dr. Irving Bieber, Professor of Psychiatry at New York Medical College. Listen to Dr. Bieber: "A (male) homosexual adaptation is a result of hidden and incapacitating fears of the opposite sex, frequent fear of disease or injury to the genitals, frequently includes attempts to solve problems without the father. The combination of sexual overstimulation and intense guilt and anxiety about heterosexual behavior promote precocious and compulsive activity. (Irving Bieber, Homosexuality: A Psychoanalytic Study of Male Homosexuals). When we heard that Bieber and company were coming to the A. P. A. convention, we knew that we had to be there. And we were -- on the convention floor microphone: "We've listened to you long enough; you listen to us. We're fed up with being told we're sick. You're the ones who are sick. We're gay and we're proud." "We've listened to you, now you listen to us," we shout. "we've waited 5,000 years." The Chairman responds, "Can't you just wait a half hour longer?" "We've waited long enough, we've waited long enough," comes our chant. "We've known 4,000 years of violence, don't fight us, fuck us; don't shoot us, suck us." Finally we found Dr. Bieber on a panel. "You are the pigs who make it possible for the cops to beat homosexuals: they call us queer; you - so politely - call us sick. But it's the same thing. You make possible the beatings and rapes in prisons, you are implicated in the torturous cures perpetrated on desperate homosexuals. I've read your book, Dr. Bieber, and if that book talked about black people the way it talks about homosexuals, you'd be drawn and quartered and you'd deserve it." Bieber answers; "I never said homosexuals were sick, what I said was that they have displaced sexual adjustment." Much laughter from us; "That's the same thing motherfucker." He tries again, "I don't want to oppress homosexuals; I want to liberate

them from that which is paining them - their homosexuality." That used to be called genocide. 20

A final, and somewhat subtle difference, revolves around the idea of homosexuals contributing more than their share to society. We are reminded of August Bebel's reference to "honorable men in the highest positions." Cory's ode to the achievements of homophile Ancient Greece comes to mind as well. The earlier movement had regarded "gay heroes" as providing the cultural foundation upon which society rests and prospers. The 1970s movement was very aware of the need for "gay heroes." But whereas the earlier movement had considered gay artists the cornerstones of society, the 1970s movement makes them crop up as revolutionary visionaries and iconoclasts. To the extent that they contributed, they contributed to the universal humanity shared by all, and in a social and political context, they were regarded as visionary crusaders battling the evil forces of oppression and injustice. Paul Rosenfels' book Homosexuality: The Psychology of the Creative Process provided a new beginning in the area of the creative aspects of homosexuality. The new movement sensitivity is argued eloquently:

"The essence of the creative process," Rosenfels points out, "lies in the ability of the individual to separate himself from his psychic investment in adaptive matters, utilizing his surplus capacities for the pursuit of truth and right for their own sake." /Since/ "Homosexuality equips human beings to challenge the artificiality of conventional patterns of conventional heterosexual

feeling and behavior, it is the homosexual above all others who is in a position to search for an inner identity in the civilized world. Since his partner is of the same gender, he is a living testimony to the fact that romantic capacity is not necessarily tied to automatic heterosexual patterns which society cultivates and guides." 21

In the same vein, Michelangelo's mastery of and infatuation with the male anatomy becomes a rebellion against stifling church dogma. Plato's Symposium is seen as a courageous effort to extoll the virtues of a homosexuality that is not at all accepted by overall straight Athenian society. 22

So far I have tried to demonstrate how, on an ideological level, themes espoused by the gay liberation movement of the 1970s differed profoundly from those articulated by the earlier American movement and the early German homosexual rights movement. When considered in a larger social and political context, however, certain similarities begin to emerge between the early German and contemporary American movements. The German movement, withing the context of the prebourgeois German monarchy and its elite of Prussian landed aristocracy, was antiestablishmentarian in its bourgeois ideology and its alliance with revolutionary bourgeois forces. Although the kind of society the gay liberationists of the 1970s rebelled against is different in nature from the one the German movement was opposed to (in fact, the 1970s movement is against the very kind of bourgeois society the earlier German movement helped bring

into being), their position vis-à-vis the establishment is entirely similar. Not surprisingly, therefore, just as the German movement tried to ally itself with other antiestablishmentarian forces, both in ideology and in strategy, so similar pressures were brought to bear on the budding gay liberation movement as well. Its rejection of straight society and its antiestablishmentarian rhetoric paved the way.

Historically, in the situation that existed in the late sixties and early seventies, there were two clear ways by which the movement could latch on to existing ideologies and create allies for itself. The first alternative was to link forces with the radical left that had emerged from the black liberation movement and the student antiwar movement. The second alternative was to link the fight for gay liberation to the sexual revolution that was sweeping the country, by creating allies not so much through political ideology, but through one that emphasized social and life style issues. Specifically, an alliance with the women's movement, and its feminist ideology, seemed eminently feasible. Both approaches were rapidly institutionalized in the gay movement. The original Gay Liberation Front spent most of its energies establishing ties to the radical left Third World coalition. The GLF, therefore, can be regarded in retrospect as a prototype of the Marxist route. Exactly because of this flirting with the New Left, the Gay Activist Alliance split off from the New York Gay Liberation Front in November 1969, in order

to advance the cause of human liberation in general and gay liberation in particular, along sexual, rather than class/economic lines.

The efforts to forge an alliance with the radical left, especially through GLF, looked promising at first. Huey Newton of the Black Panther Party, extended, somewhat reluctantly, a welcome of sorts to the new gay liberation groups:

And what made them homosexual? Perhaps it's a whole phenomenon that I don't understand entirely. Some people say that it's the decadence of capitalism. I don't know whether this is the case; I rather doubt it. But whatever the case is, we know that homosexuality is a fact that exists, and we must understand it in its purest form: That is, a person should have the freedom to use his body in whatever way he wants to. That's not endorsing things in homosexuality that we wouldn't view as revolutionary. And maybe I'm just now injecting some of my prejudice by saying that "even a homosexual can be a revolutionary." Quite on the contrary, maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary. 23

The euphoria this statement produced was short lived. Soon insurmountable problems arose. There was, first of all, the problem that the larger concerns of the radical left were not generally shared by most gay people. The gay movement had to be concerned with appealing to its own group. And since this group was so diverse, there was a real difficulty here. Any issue which did not directly fit into the actual oppression homosexuals face was bound to stir up controversy. Especially because gay people were painfully

aware of the oppression homosexuals face in the Socialist countries of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and even Cuba, countries the radical left was reluctant to criticize. Consider this letter from a Cuban gay to his American friend:

If in a consumer society, capitalistic and oligarchic like the one in which you live, the life of the homosexual is discriminated against and suffers limitations, in our society - called marxist and revolutionary - it is much more so. From the beginning of the Cuban revolutionary movement, the homosexual has been persecuted. First it was in a veiled form without scruples or justification; then by other methods from crude forms of physical aggression to attempts at psychic and moral disintegration of those individuals. . . 24

In fact, the radical left was eminently unrepresentative of the largest cross-section of homosexuals, with the exception of students, who had both the intellectual tools to think ideologically in the Marxist sense and had the experience through their involvement in the student protest movement. A gay businessman might be roused to raise his fist for gay pride, but to raise it for the Third World, or to have blacks move into his comfortable neighborhood, proved unrealistic.

It also became clear very soon that when the gay liberation movement came into bloom, most of the steam had already gone out of the radical left movement. The war was rapidly dwindling down, and, more importantly, the draft had been abolished. When these major incentives for joining the

radical left had disappeared, it found itself with only a small hard core of ideologues left. A lot of homosexuals consequently came to fear that the radical left may be a dying cause, not worthy of the expenditure of so much (often painful) energy.

The main problem, however, lay in the nature of the effort itself. The problems the Gay Liberation Fronts and the New Left faced in relating to one another as equals quickly proved to be insurmountable. It is to illustrate this point that I introduced this chapter with the Kenneth Pitchford poem "Flaming Faggots." It was addressed to the Venceremos Brigade, a group of Marxist, pro-Cuban radicals who periodically went to Cuba to further the cause of the people's revolution by harvesting sugar cane. In this poem, Pitchford says: "my revolution is to the left of his." The New left's view of oppression was class-based and concerned with the economic relationships. Gay oppression, to the extent that the left was willing to deal with it at all, was considered part of the final death gasps of late capitalist society. Pitchford, and many gay radicals with him, could not help but wonder about the late capitalist tendencies of those Germanic tribes, described in Tacitus' Germania, who buried their homosexual lovers alive, after tying them together face to face. Or about the "flaming faggots" of the Middle Ages, hardly a clear case of late capitalist exploitation. In effect, the gay leftists were asked to pay

the price of abandoning the idea that there was something important, something crucial and unique, about gay oppression per se. As if this was not difficult enough, the Left made it painfully obvious to its potential gay allies that their presence would at best be tolerated. Their oppression was, after all, only one token (and a low priority one at that) in the larger type of capitalist oppression, prime examples of which could be found in the suffering of Third World people. In contrast, many gay radicals could not help but feel that sexual oppression was, in the final analysis, more deeply rooted than class oppression. David Darby put it charitably:

I feel that it is also a serious mistake to suppose that all phenomena which we term alienation can be accounted for by Marx's model. The analysis provided by Marx is an accurate analysis of work alienation in a capitalist society. This is clearly a source of alienation for most gays since most gays work. However, even the broad interpretation of alienation from others, given by some writers on work alienation, comes up quite lacking as an analysis of much of our alienated experience as gays. 25

Gays found it harder and harder to believe that, with the advent of the socialist Utopia, homophobia would disappear as by magic.

The final problem, and the most insurmountable one, turned out to be the actual experiences of those gay people who joined the radical left. When, in the summer of 1969, a GLF contingent went down to Washington to join in the antiwar

protest, they got a foreboding of things to come, when a woman addressing herself to the issue of women's liberation and feminism was shouted down by the old-time 1960s radicals who screamed: "Don't listen to her, fuck her!" The radical left felt embarrassed by the support of gay contingents equipped with lavender banners, and gay people were routinely relegated to the far sides of picket lines and marches, and were pressured not to display their banners "blatantly." Consequently, far too much effort had to be spent on educating the radical left. These efforts turned out to be infinitely frustrating. The walls of indifference, hostility, and above all, machismo proved too hard to break down, or even to dent. The following letter, published in the first issue of Lavender Vision, may be a fitting epitaph to the movement's ill-fated efforts to build bridges to the radical left. In all its crudeness, it pinpoints the issues with passion as well as precision. Addressed to the straight men in the movement, it reads:

As I look back at my five years being involved in liberal, progressing to radical politics, I have to stop and wonder if we've all been fighting the same revolution. I've known I was gay for three years now, and yet, except for rare exceptions have I let anyone I was involved with politically know I was gay. When I did eventually come out into the open about my gayness, an immediate, yet subtle form of segregation occurred. I was immediately left out of decision making of any great importance and usually found myself doing shit work with the women. And I actually accepted this because I now wore the stigma of being a faggot . . .

The tone changes:

. . . Well you're damn right we're faggots, and proud of it. We faggots have been running next to you for a long time, too. At SNCC Summer, Vietnam Summer, in Birmingham, at the Pentagon, in the Days of the Rage, in Chicago during the convention, at Berkeley, in Cambridge, Madison and Kent State too. But now as our gay consciousness grows, our sense of oppression grows and we realize that maybe you're not our brothers. If you want to replace the old power system with a new power system that is just as oppressive to women and gays. NO, we're not fighting the same revolution . . .

We love the Vietnamese people, the Tupamaros and just the entire third world. We love them and feel solidarity with them and their struggle out of a mutual sense of oppression and not out of guilt as we see the vast majority of straight white men in the movement. We've been oppressed since birth with our blue nightgowns and trucks and baseball bats and footballs and "fucking chicks" every weekend. And even now we're struggling with our masculinity which is the origin of our oppression, that of women and oppression in its entirety. Masculinity - equals - power, and that power has been keeping us oppressed for thousands of years. It has caused the murder, either through assassination or suicide, of thousands upon thousands of our gay brothers. Well we aren't taking it from the ruling class and we won't take any more shit from you either. . . .

We, as gay boys, are just beginning to realize that some of those qualities generally attributed to women are intrinsically part of every person and through thousands of years of psychological indoctrination have we arrived at this fucked-up situation we are in. To be gentle and kiss and hug and make love to another boy is a basic part of smashing masculinity (i.e., power).

You, straight men, are an oppressor to us and our sisters. We don't want to be called men anymore because of all it implies. Because we don't want to be like you. We have our own community, and it's growing stronger. Too long have our brothers been shoved into Mafia bars or run into mental institutions or early graves.

The letter finished with:

And no more ego trips for you either. Thinking we want to suck your cock. BULLSHIT!! We'll bite it off! For all we care you can shove it into a wall. Until you can come to us, openly, gently and warmly, and make love with us, we don't want any part of your masculine cocks. This letter is not an invitation to an orgy. It is a warning. You had better get your shit together and become a person instead of a man because after you've fired your last shot and the power is in your hands, we'll still be shooting, at you!! 26

Of radical gay liberation little remained by 1972 - a name, some meeting places, a few dedicated individuals, slogans, and little impact on the cause that had moved on without them. 27

Thus, the gay liberation movement majority decided within two years, that gay oppression is not a derivative of class oppression, that, specifically, the gay businessman, no matter how successful, is oppressed, as much if not more so, than the gay proletarian. The movement granted that the gay proletarian is oppressed. But his oppression as a proletarian is separate from his oppression as a homosexual. This view of the separateness of oppression left open the possibility of tactical cooperation, but only in the vein of "if you scratch my back, then I'll scratch yours." But, spearheaded by the Gay Activist Alliance, the movement went its own way ideologically. The analysis of machismo, the main problem the movement had had to face in its dealings with the radical left, and the analysis of sexual oppression became the cornerstone of the emerging gay ideology. Along

these two lines, bridges were built to the women's movement on one hand, and the sexual freedom movement on the other hand.

The women's movement, and its ideology of feminism, had much in common with the gay liberation movement. Sue March wrote:

On a deeper level, we are experiencing a massive shift of consciousness and values concerning homosexuality, the kind of shift feminist Gloria Steinem dubs "a sea-change" in referring to the parallel surge of feminist consciousness among women. On a more personal level, homosexuals are getting together, dropping our defenses and learning to celebrate ourselves. 28

The feminist analysis of women's oppression dealt with the nature of patriarchy, the destructiveness of sexual role-playing, and the threat assertive women are to the machismo of straight men. This kind of analysis naturally begged and clamored for an extension to the oppression of homosexuals. Gore Vidal, hardly straight himself, makes this parallel implicitly in the following review:

The response to Sexual Politics, Feminine Mystique, et. al. has been as interesting as anything that has happened in our time, with the possible exception of Richard Nixon's political career. The hatred these girls have inspired is to me convincing proof that their central argument is valid. Men do hate women (or as Germaine Greer puts it: "Women have very little idea of how much men hate them") and dream of torture, murder, fight . . . There has been from Henry Miller to Norman Mailer to Charles Manson a logical progression. The Miller-Mailer-Manson man (or M3 for short) has been conditioned to think of women as, at best,

breeders of sons; at worst, objects to be poked, humiliated, killed. Needless to say M3's reaction to Women's Liberation has been one of panic. He believes that if women are allowed parity with men they will treat men the way men have treated women and that, even M3 will agree, has not been very well or, as Cato the Censor observed, if woman be made man's equal she will swiftly become his master . . .

. . . Women are not going to make it until M3 is reformed, and that is going to take a long time. Meanwhile the current phase of the battle is intense and illuminating. M3 is on the defensive, shouting names; he thinks that to scream "dyke" is enough to make the girls burst into tears, but so far they have played it cool. Some have even admitted to a bit of dyking now and then along with warm mature heterosexual relationships of the deeply meaningful fruitful kind that bring much needed children into the world ("Good fucks make good babies" - Norman Mailer). I love you Marion and I love you too Marvin. The women are responding with a series of books and position papers that range from shrill to literature. 29

The parallel to gay liberation is obvious. Just as women are threatening to the macho ideal, so this is even more true of the homosexual. In a society which demands a fixed, oppressive division of roles, a woman is oppressed simply for being a woman. The same kind of role playing is expected of homosexuals, who, as we well know, at best make nice actors, hairdressers and - for the upper class - interior decorators. Both feminists and gay liberationists also agreed on what constitutes the most fundamental oppression in society: that everyone regardless of their class/economic position is oppressed simply by the dichotomy of male versus female, gay versus straight. Feminism had also been quick to point out that, ultimately, straight men would benefit

from women's liberation as much as women. It would allow them to be human, to not always have to play the role of aggressor, and to get in touch with their emotions, which have been repressed by years of sexist conditioning. The gay liberation movement took the same approach by stressing the benefits straight men could derive from gay liberation. Just as feminism had the potential to liberate straight men in their relationships with women, so gay liberation could liberate straight men in their relationships to one another. "In the past," said Dr. Margaret Mead, "society was very destructive to any male friendship. It was always expressed by that terrible bang on the back." ³⁰ The gay movement skillfully pointed out the suffering of straight men who find themselves unable to relate to one another with more than a punch in the ribs and the shared experience of watching a football game:

The suffering of the gay community has been only the tip of an iceberg of human suffering. Beneath the surface of relationships between males the homosexual taboo has grown cold and seemingly impregnable, souring and distorting male friendships, making them less expressive, limited, apprehensive, casual, cool and full of competitive, dominating tendencies. Seldom is one friend enamored of another, appreciating him for the greater beauty of his character, his manner, his way with others, his self-esteem and his compassion. If one is enamored, he must contain his admiration. He must keep it in check. He must stifle his impulses. Above all, he must not touch too affectionately. Rough touching is OK. A slap on the back? Yeah. A poke in the ribs? All right. He must not, however, court friendships as too important, too worthy of emotional investment. He can say to himself: "I won't let myself feel too

strongly. I shouldn't express what I feel, or my friend will think I'm corny. If I said I loved him, he'd think that terrible thing. I'd better stop these thoughts, or I'll find myself getting queer or something."

Thus, the movement, in its most sophisticated form, attempted to appeal to the price that everyone pays, though only gay people may have been aware of it for centuries. Straights need to be enlightened to realize that, by not being allowed to be fully human, everyone pays the price for the discrimination of homosexuals. And, most insidiously, straights suffer in darkness, because they do not have the support of ghettos to come out as full human beings.

This approach proved very successful. Witness this excerpt from Nichols' Men's Liberation:

Respect is due from people who are not homosexually inclined because many of those who call themselves normal have been too cowardly to come out of their closets and hold each other's hands first - as though there were some shame, some awful sexual thought at the back of a friend's mind, the thought that it might mean he is somewhat . . . that he has tendencies. If homosexually inclined people led the battle to open our way to expressing love to members of our own sex, then heterosexually inclined people must help them finish that battle. Otherwise friendship will never have a chance. 32

On a second front, inroads were made by appealing to the generation gap between parents and children concerning the issues of permissible sexuality. A whole generation had locked horns with its parents on such issues as premarital

sex, restriction of sex to the missionary position in the privacy of one's home, with a marriage certificate on the bedroom chest, and at most once a week for procreation purposes. Here gay liberationists tried to build a bridge with young people everywhere involved in similar struggles with parents, small-town attitudes, etc. As the argument went, parental attitudes about premarital sex were Victorian and "uncool." Their fear and distaste of homosexuality were equally anachronistic. No young person should allow him or herself to be caught on the same side as his parents, as far as sexual issues go. Thus the gay liberation movement presented itself as a logical outgrowth of the sexual revolution as well, in which the oppression of homosexuals was just one token of the repression of sexuality and affection which so often is distorted by the kind of conditioning that was being forced on a whole generation by "uptight" parents. It thus latched onto general, and highly commercialized (Playboy, Oui, Penthouse, Hustler, etc.) dissatisfaction with society's sexual frustration, double standard, and Puritanism. Straight men's groups were founded all over the place. There it became obligatory, if only for the sake of same-sex friendship, to "get in touch with one's homoerotic feelings."

Therefore, the movement got the best of both worlds. It instilled pride in homosexuals by getting them to rally together, to feel good about themselves, and to make them

feel that they were in the vanguard of a highly successful social revolution sweeping the country. It also managed to widen its appeal sufficiently to reach a whole under thirties generation and made significant inroads into women's consciousness as well. It was, in other words, successful for the very same reason the Marxist attempt had failed so miserably. All gay people, regardless of their economic and class background, could easily identify with it. Secondly, in ideological terms, there was a close affinity between sexual oppression in general and women's oppression in particular on one hand and homosexual oppression on the other. Thirdly, gay themes in general found a rather cordial welcome both in the women's movement and with those in the forefront of the "New Morality." A relaxation in sexual mores in general could only benefit gays, just as a greater acceptance of homosexuality was welcome to those whose sexual proclivities were frowned upon by the Puritans for other reasons. And, last but not least, both feminism and the New Morality seemed rapidly to be gaining the upper hand. A vast majority of women and a sizable minority of men were favorably disposed toward feminism. And the "New Morality" had captured the imagination and allegiance of a whole generation.

We have now come full circle. Despite the profound differences in rhetorical content, on a deeper level the similarities with the early German movement stand out

clearly. Just as its bourgeois ideology successfully recruited powerful allies for the German movement, so, similarly, the very different ideology of the 1970s managed to forge a successful bridge to potentially powerful and sympathetic social movements; a bridge, moreover, with which a majority of gay people could feel comfortable.

On the threshold of success, the German movement was set back by circumstances beyond anyone's control. Although history does not always repeat itself, there is no reason for premature euphoria. The current American gay liberation movement should benefit from studying the courageous example set by its German predecessors. At the very least, it will rediscover a group of like-minded individuals, confronted by a situation not unlike its own.

The 1970s movement's concern for the welfare of the gay community in non-political areas, its emphasis on self-acceptance, self-respect and gay pride, its efforts to help older, closeted gays to come out, its unwillingness to compromise its own identity in its dealings with potential allies, immortalized by Pitchford's poem, those and other features are unprecedented and unique to the American movement, which has indeed taken homosexuality "out of the closet and into the streets."

Less than ten years ago, Michael, a homosexual character in Mart Crowley's play The Boys in the Band, could say "Show me a happy homosexual, and I'll show you a gay corpse." 33

To many "new" homosexuals, that statement seems outrageous and dated. Although the gay liberation movement may eventually fail to accomplish all its goals, the fact that to be homosexual and happy no longer seems like a contradiction in terms, should qualify as an accomplishment of the first order.

Footnotes: Chapter IV

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26. Anonymous, "Letter to Straight Men in the Movement," LAVENDER VISION (later became FAGRAG), Volume I, No. 1, 1970.
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Chapter V: Toward the Promised Land

Throughout this paper I have been concerned with the exploration of ideological themes from a very special vantage point. This vantage point could be labeled "Ideology as a tool of political strategy." In the previous chapters the ideological themes have been, so to speak, "dependent variables." Specifically, the themes have been interpreted as manifestations of movement strategies, designed to maximize the attainment of the movement's emancipatory goals. I have described how the rhetoric and writings are adjusted to fit into an overall antiestablishmentarian ideology, whenever the prospects of forging successful alliances with other social and political movements seemed favorable. Conversely, we have seen how, in the absence of such opportunities, the very same themes may become incorporated into a reformist program, which, in general, tends to accept the prevailing outlooks and creeds of society. The major advantage of this approach is that it places isolated themes firmly into a social and political context. It provides an explanation, for example, of the wide discrepancies that exist between the early German analysis of the origins of homosexuality and the contemporary American one. Similarly, the Mattachine Societies' views of the sources of discrimination and prejudice against homosexuals seems, by contemporary stand-

ards, to be extremely charitable. It is far too easy, and somewhat naive, to shrug this off as a "lack of backbone," as some 1970s gay activists have done. Rather, the reformist nature of the early American movement clearly demanded such a charitable, proestablishment approach. It seems quite certain that changes in the social and political configuration of society over the next decades will once again call for new and imaginative strategies. These new strategies will in turn require changes in movement rhetoric and ideology.

Nevertheless, the homosexual rights movement, in all its transformations, has always looked beyond the immediate necessity of securing political rights for the homosexual minority. Throughout, it has been aware that true liberation is as much "in the gut" as it is in newspaper headlines. Even in the most adverse of times, some in the movement dreamed of a "promised land." In 1864, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs dreamed of the day when homosexuals would proudly be identified as "Uranian" brothers and sisters by the "Dionian" (as he called heterosexuals) majority.¹ In the dark ages of American McCarthyism, Cory exhorted his gay readers to create the promised land, so conspicuously lacking in society at large, by "creating a loving and supporting communion with your gay brothers and sisters."² And at this time, the gay liberation movement attempts to achieve this communion by such diverse means as consciousness raising in all

gay encounter groups, establishing gay coffee houses and community centers where gay people can get together in a free, nonoppressive, nonexploitative atmosphere, encouraging everyone to "hold hands today," as it says on gay liberation buttons distributed in gay bars and discos, organizing gay picnics in Central Park, New York, or gay soccer games on the Esplanade in Boston. And, most important of all, the movement has finally realized the need for "coming out." No change of laws in and of itself can remove the curse of self-doubt and self-oppression resulting from growing up gay in a straight, antisexual society. Coming out is never easy. But it is generally agreed that even a negative reaction from one's friends or parents removes the psychologically debilitating burden of fear and secrecy. Rejection tends to be much rarer an occurrence than commonly believed, and hardly ever a permanent one (where parents, friends, or loved ones are involved). In the vast majority of cases, moreover, an unpleasant reality tends to be easier to bear than one's constant fear and anticipation of it.

In fact, the general consensus, both in the literature and in private conversations, is that the worst fears never come true. Often, even the small fears do not materialize. The benefits of successfully coming out are tremendous. To be able to look one's parents in the eye and be accepted by them, however reluctantly at first, as their "gay" son or daughter, to come out to a friend and find that the friend-

ship grows more honest and more open as a result, to kiss one's lover goodbye in public and find that thunder and lightning do not come striking down from the sky, these and similar experiences make it progressively easier to face oneself in the mirror and love and respect the person one sees. Eventually, "gay" may then become less "proud" (after all, can one truly be proud of being left-handed?), "gay" may even be less "angry" (as our parents used to say when hitting us: "it hurts me more than it hurts you"), but it will definitely, in the words of gay folksinger Steven Grossman, "walk in the sunshine, for there's really nothing to hide." 3

In this Bicentennial year of 1976, the movement has suffered various setbacks in the political arena. Gay Rights bills have been defeated in every legislature where they have been introduced. A recent Supreme Court decision upheld the constitutionality of state laws banning homosexual acts, even where they take place behind locked doors and closed curtains between consenting adults. These setbacks result in new movement strategies and new rhetorical themes. But, at the same time, on the social and personal level, tremendous strides are being made. Once, not too long ago, Oscar Wilde could only refer to his orientation as "the love that dare not speak its name." A few months ago, in a letter to Time magazine, a suburban housewife suggested it be renamed "the love that won't shut up." A

moment's reflection makes one realize that this is probably the greatest compliment that can be paid to the gay liberation movement of the seventies. Ten years ago, the Mattachine Society of New York faced great internal opposition to the release of a statement proposing that "in the absence of valid evidence to the contrary . . . homosexuality is not a sickness, disturbance, or other pathology in any sense." 4

A few weeks ago, a Boston newspaper carried a cartoon in which one young man asks another "Hey man, how didja get to be gay?" The answer: "Oh, I dunno, just lucky I guess." 5

A column named "A View from the Closet" has appeared regularly in Boston's prestigious Gay Community News. It is authored by an aging university professor writing under the pseudonym "A. Nolder Gay." In closing, I would like to quote from one of the recent columns, entitled "Return Journey," in which A. Nolder returns to New York City, accompanied by his lover, A. Younger Gay, after an absence of twenty years. It is, I think, a moving tribute to the human element of liberation. This aspect has not been particularly emphasized in this paper, and properly so. In the course of this thesis I have had occasion to refer to such categories as "Movement," "Ideological Themes," "Reformist Program," "Sociopolitical Configurations," "Strategy Decisions," etc. Hidden underneath these categories, however, are real people with their joys and fears and pains, and they have hearts as well as minds:

My two years of life there (in New York City) in the Eisenhower Era were shadowed by intimations of gayness: felt rather than understood; recognized, yet unfaced. Scattered images tease the memory: passing dark figures in Bryant Park upon leaving the Public Library late at night . . . passing the guys on Christopher Street who were looking for a partner for the night. Passing, always passing - especially passing for straight!

I remember furtively purchasing an occasional copy of One magazine at a newsstand near Grand Central Station (having heard about it in a fag-joke context from one of my straight brother officers). I remember looking in the card catalogue of the main Public Library under "Homosexuality" and not daring to call up the books because "they" might think I was one . . .

Now, twenty years later, here I was visiting Manhattan exorcised of (most of) these demons and accompanied by a resident lover. We spent most of our free time exploring the Village, photographing old buildings, combing the Fourth Avenue bookstore . . .

I got something of a jolt when, in response to my calling his attention to the (former) Stonewall Inn, A. Younger replied "What's the Stonewall?" . . .

Two segments of the weekend stand out especially. One was the very fact that gay people are actively planning for the preservation of materials which register a cultural development unprecedented in American history, in order to assert on behalf of gay generations to come a right to a full and free expression of their place in that history. In this Bicentennial Year we remember that we too are a revolutionary generation, and like the signers of the Declaration of Independence our appeal is to posterity as well as to the opinions of our contemporaries, here and abroad.

The other striking experience of the visit was Christopher Street on a balmy Sunday afternoon. The gays were out by the hundreds, many in obvious pairs, some even actualizing Whitman's dream, "curv'd with his arm the shoulder of his friend." All in sight seemed to be enjoying the day, the place, each other, and themselves.

After a while, when I saw some obviously heterosexual couples, I thought "What are you

strange people doing here on our turf?" And I quickly castigated myself as an intolerant minority chauvinist yielding to a ghetto mentality! But in any case it was made clear to me that the unthinkable of 1956 had become the commonplace of 1976.

Liberation is in the gut, not in the newspaper headlines. A. Younger's indifference to movement concerns and even to gay history (much as it pains me at times) is in its own way a sign of strength. He's gay, so where do we go from here as persons?

Maybe "true liberation" is when it works without your having to think about it. I doubt that this state will ever be fully achieved for my generation; probably the last generation of slaves never can take freedom for granted. But it was the Promised Land I saw that Sunday on Christopher Street. And man, it's been a long time a'comin'! 6

Footnotes: Chapter V

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