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Queen Bees are Stinging Mad: The Development of  
LGBTQ Identity and Community in  
the United States,  
1890-1969

by David Peterson

A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Committee Approval

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the thesis of David Peterson find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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## Dedication

To Robert for his encouragement and support,  
Amy for her compassion and friendship,  
Stephanie for the most amazing late-night conversations,  
Dr. Kuhlman for her considerable patience,  
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Dr. Stover for never giving up on me.

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**Queen Bees are Stinging Mad: The Development of LGBTQ Identity and Community  
in the United States, 1890-1969**

**Thesis Abstract - Idaho state university (2020)**

The narrative that the modern LGBTQ rights movement began in the summer of 1969 after a routine police raid on a gay bar in Lower Manhattan has been entrenched in popular memory. This perception can be partially attributed to the Pride parades that are held annually around the world in commemoration of this event. While it serves as a rallying banner for LGBTQ and minority rights, the narrative that gay liberation began at Stonewall is fundamentally ahistorical. The history that culminated in the Stonewall Uprising is illustrated by the stories of those that sought equality and dignity decades before the Morals Squad of the NYPD raided the Stonewall Inn.

**Key Words:** LGBTQ, Stonewall Inn, queer history, queer psychology, queer labor, queer politics, gender identity, sexual identity, sexual inversion, collective violence, social protest, Mattachine Society, Lavender Scare, McCarthyism, gay liberation, romantic friendship

## Chapter 1: Social Protest and the Common Narrative

### Introduction

History of the modern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) movement is admittedly difficult to describe. How society has viewed same-sex behavior and the people that are associated with that behavior has experienced several dramatic shifts since the end of the nineteenth century. The movement is generally accepted by both academics and popular culture to have started with the Stonewall Uprising of 1969, where gay men and transgender women stood up to police harassment at the Stonewall Inn, an allegedly mob-run bar in the Greenwich Village neighborhood of Lower Manhattan.

The 2016 documentary *How We Got Gay*, directed by Marc de Guerre, depicts American gay culture before the Stonewall riots as something hidden behind closed doors. Before Stonewall, people lived their lives “passing,” living a normal heterosexual life while secretly meeting up in public spaces to find intimate contact with other men.<sup>1</sup> This narrative oversimplifies gay culture in the United States before 1969 and comes from a particularly middle-class and heteronormative perspective. The decades preceding the Stonewall riots saw gay men and women form communities and develop a definitive gay identity – an identity that would be critical for the development and success of the LGBTQ rights movement. The events at Stonewall were not unique. It was not the first time gay and gender non-conforming individuals stood up for themselves, and it is not well represented by narratives as simple as “before, no one was out” and “after, everyone was out.”

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<sup>1</sup> *How We Got Gay*, Directed by Marc de Guerre, 2016.

## Conservative Aspirations Give Way to Radical Challenges

While *How We Got Gay* does give credit to the gay liberation movement that came out of the Stonewall Uprising for laying the foundation for the modern LGBTQ rights movement, it states that the movement was not fully activated until the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. This is demonstrable by the number of organizations and instances of direct action that came about in the late 1980s and early '90s. It was from this political action that the fight for equal rights under the law, and eventually marriage equality, would emerge. This is a distinctive difference from values that early homophile organizations fought for, which revolved around phrases such as "Gay is Good." It was a message of self-acceptance, used for years by activist Frank Kameny<sup>2</sup>, that was finally closing the gap between the middle class, white, dominant culture and those who were publicly disparaged and did not have the privilege of "the mask."

The conservative anxiety of passing gay men in the 1950s and '60s is underscored by the story of Dr. Howard Brown, who author David Carter describes as a middle-aged man that typified successful gay men of his generation. Dr. Brown was a spectator of the events at the Stonewall Inn.

... the demonstrators were like the homosexuals I had seen in the Tombs – most of them obviously poor, most of them the sort of limp-wristed, shabby, or gaudy gays that send a shiver of dread down the spines of homosexuals who hope to pass as straight. I could not have felt more remote from them. And yet at the same time, the

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<sup>2</sup> Frank Kameny, "We Throw Down the Gauntlet," August 19, 1969, The Kameny Papers, <http://www.kamenypapers.org/gauntlet.htm>

scene brought to mind every civil rights struggle I had ever witnessed or participated in.<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Brown, a well-known city official and the first Health Services Administrator of New York City, came out in 1973, which was headlined in the New York Times.<sup>4</sup> He was a founder of the National Gay Task Force, and Howard Brown Health, an LGBTQ medical organization, was posthumously named after him in 1976. Dr. Brown was one of the first high profile men to come out after Stonewall and helped bring a normative discussion to LGBTQ health issues, arguing that “there was no evidence conclusively establishing homosexuality as a disease that can be treated.”<sup>5</sup> It is apparent that the events at the Stonewall Inn had a great impact on Dr. Brown’s own perspective on what it meant to be a gay man in the United States. The Stonewall Uprising allowed him to come out and dedicate his remaining years to improve the lives of other LGBTQ people.

It is important to note that Dr. Brown did not participate in the Stonewall riots but was merely an observer. While he lived in Greenwich Village, he had distanced himself mentally and emotionally from the street people that typified the participants of the riots. He was white, educated, and a leader in his field. It was not until four years after the event that he was able to muster the courage to come out, and by then the Gay Liberation Front and other militant activist groups had already brought the plight of LGBTQ Americans into the public discourse.

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<sup>3</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 188.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Kaiser, “Broadside: It Makes No Difference,” *Entertainment West*, 1979. <http://charleskaiser.com/stonewall.html>

<sup>5</sup> “Dr. Howard J. Brown, 50, Dies; First City Health Services Chief,” *The New York Times*, Feb. 3, 1975, 24.

There were more radical elements of late 1960s queer culture that were determined to move away from Kameny and the Mattachine Society's incrementalist approach. In her article "LGBTQ Radicalism as a Framework Beyond Rights," Emily K. Hobson described this schism between the relatively conservative Mattachine and the more extremist views of the Gay Liberation Front and other radical social protest groups in the late 1960s and '70s. According to Hobson, these groups did not seek the same kind of acceptance that Frank Kameny or Dr. Howard Brown sought. They did not want acceptance into the military, but instead protested US involvement in foreign nations, especially in South and Central America.<sup>6</sup> They demanded acceptance without the requirement to conform to societal expectations of gender expression and behavior, which would help define LGBTQ rights throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

After Stonewall, men were more comfortable being public about their homosexuality. The collective action that took place after Stonewall created a broad public acknowledgement of the existence of gay people, which, in turn, created public space for both middle- and working-class gay people. But even ten years after the riots, there was continued discrimination against LGBTQ people in many facets of society. Charles Kaiser wrote in 1979, on the tenth anniversary of the riots, that "homophobia – the hatred of homosexuals – remains the most respectable prejudice in America."<sup>7</sup> This ongoing oppression experienced by LGBTQ people helped to build solidarity that continues to fuel the movement today.

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<sup>6</sup> Emily K. Hobson, "LGBTQ Radicalism as a Framework Beyond Rights," *The American Historian*, May 2019, 26.

<sup>7</sup> Kaiser, *Broadside*.

## **The Mechanics of Activation**

The events of June 29, 1969 were explosive and provided momentum for young activists to create real change in the world around them. While much of the common narrative now focuses more on the street people and gender-nonconformists that revolted against the police, it is ahistorical to say that they did not utilize an apparatus of social protest that had already been established. In order to reconcile discrepancies between the popular narratives surrounding Stonewall and the historical record it is important to understand how collective action grows into movements that foment change in the dominant culture.

Charles Tilly first explored the concept of crowds and collective violence in 1973 at the University of Michigan. In his thesis “Revolutions and Collective Violence” Tilly explains that “although collective violence occurs every day, revolutions are rare events. They don’t lend themselves to the sorts of statistical procedures which help us make sense of births, or traffic patterns or shifts in everyday speech. Their occurrence almost certainly depends on the convergence of different conditions, rather than one sure-fire cause.”<sup>8</sup>

In a discussion on the social implications of the Stonewall riots, it is important to understand the inner workings of these social protest movements. Certainly, there was collective violence, but were the riots impetus for revolution? It must also take into consideration who it was that was rioting. At Stonewall, some people involved were homeless, others were young gay men looking for a place to belong, and some were gender non-conformists who may have identified as transgender today. The group was

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<sup>8</sup> Charles Tilly, “Revolution and Collective Violence.” (University of Michigan, 1973), 5-6.

heterogenous, with people various backgrounds that were eventually absorbed into the narrative. This is an important component of the Stonewall riots because protest movements are often the result of a perceived oppression of a group or groups of people that are empowered by collective action. Robert Benford, in his review of Sidney Tarrow's book *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*, explains that "ordinary people, relatively powerless folk, have exercised a powerful influence on politics and society by acting collectively."<sup>9</sup> Stonewall empowered the movement and united diverse groups of LGBTQ people on a national level in a way that activist groups had not yet been able to accomplish.

In *Power in Movement*, Tarrow puts forth the concept of political opportunity structures, which include "increasing access to power, unstable political alignments, influential allies, and divisions among elites."<sup>10</sup> Some of these can easily be applied to the Stonewall riots. With the rise of the New Left and identity politics, people in what would have been fringe social groups were gaining a voice and increasing their access to political power. The alleged blackmailing of wealthy patrons of the Stonewall Inn points towards a division among elites, and the various underground media outlets that had been building their networks over the previous few years were poised to be an influential part of the LGBTQ uprising.

Tarrow further defines a basic formula around which social protest movements form. He explains that social movements are "better defined as collective challenges, based

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<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Benford" Review: *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*," *American Journal of Sociology*, 101 (1995), 227.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

on common solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents, and authorities,” rather than by their more violent aspects.<sup>11</sup> Tarrow breaks up this definition into four categories: collective challenge, common purpose, social solidarity, and sustained interaction.<sup>12</sup> The question then is at what point did the LGBTQ movement meet Tarrow’s requirements?

The first, collective challenges, is remarkably absent among early homophile groups. The Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis were benign and outwardly ineffectual throughout most of the 1950s. Religious and medical leaders that supported better treatment for homosexuals were similarly unwilling to make waves even as they broke with their colleagues to advocate societal acceptance for LGBTQ people. Collective challenges are essentially disruptive, and early homophile activism was far from it. Attempting to focus on the perceived similarities gay and lesbian people shared with heterosexual Americans, their goal was to remain unthreatening. The Mattachine Society of New York posted a sign after the first night of protests at the Stonewall Inn pleading with the people of the Village to remain peaceful.<sup>13</sup> This sentiment was shared with more conservative gay men, such as Dr. Howard Brown, who were concerned by the attention brought to the issue.

The 1960s saw a shift toward more direct action. Riding the momentum of the Civil Rights movement, the homophile organizations became more publicly active due in large

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<sup>11</sup> Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Kindle edition, loc. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Tarrow, 153.

<sup>13</sup> Figure 1,

part to Frank Kameny and the Mattachine Society of New York. But as gay Americans became more visible, they also felt more pressure to conform. Raids on gay bars and known meeting places occurred frequently, and riots in response were not uncommon. These instances, and the events at Stonewall itself, do meet Tarrow's description of collective challenge. Collective challenges are described as disruptive behavior, and adoption or appropriation of symbols and behavior that help to unify a group and rally a cause. Tarrow explains that contentious challenges are often the most characteristic actions of a movement precisely because "they lack the stable resources – money, organization, access to the state – that groups and parties' control."<sup>14</sup>

The Stonewall Uprising was exactly an attempt at disruption, but according to Charles Tilly, there is more order to these events than is first noticed. Tarrow, who references Tilly throughout his writings, included the following in the footnotes of his discussion on collective challenges:

Authorities and thoughtless historians commonly describe popular contention as disorderly.... But the more closely we look at the same contention, the more we discover order. We discover order created by the rooting of collective action in the routines and organization of every day social life, and by its involvement in a continuous process of signaling, negotiation, and struggle with other parties whose interests the collective action touches.<sup>15</sup>

It seems that while collective challenges are committed by those disenfranchised from power structures, an organized effort is still required for them to be effective in creating a movement. For the Stonewall Uprising, the participants reacted to oppression in

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<sup>14</sup> Tarrow, 10.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 9.

the only way they had power, but there must also have been an already organized social apparatus, a national community of LGBTQ people, ready to capitalize on the momentum created there. One of the most striking effects of collective challenges is their ability to be the impetus of change. A large enough disruption against political and economic power structures must at least be acknowledged, which in turn encourages more action from others that identify with the movement.

Tarrow's next component of a social protest movement is common purpose. Without common purpose, Tarrow explains, there would be less people willing to take the risk of participating in such a disruptive manner. Simply put, the reward, gratification, or validation must outweigh whatever retaliation the members of the community may face due to the actions of the group. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the Mattachine Society chose such a benign front, as well as the Daughters of Bilitis when their group seemed to be at odds with the growing women's movement in the last half of the 1960s.<sup>16</sup> Still, the early homophile groups brought gay men and women together under a common goal. The risk was great, but the reward of community building must surely have been worthwhile, or such a widespread, national network of LGBTQ people may not have formed in time to capitalize on the events at Stonewall.

Third, Tarrow describes a need for social solidarity for a movement to survive. This explanation is at odds with the narrative and collective memory of the events at Stonewall. For many, Stonewall was the movement. According to Tarrow, however, individual or isolated events cannot stand on their own and still be called a movement. There must

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<sup>16</sup> Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1995), 352.

already have been a well-defined “gay identity” and sense of community to account for the success found there.<sup>17</sup> This was echoed by Mary Bernstein in the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1997. Building on both Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, Bernstein states that identity is requisite for group mobilization to occur.<sup>18</sup> Without these social structures already in place, the movement may not have seen the success it did. This issue of solidarity would inhibit growth of the movement when the needs and goals of different subgroups conflicted with one another.

Finally, Tarrow requires that contention caused by collective action must have a sustaining element. He explains that “it is only by sustaining collective action against antagonists that a contentious episode becomes a social movement.”<sup>19</sup> This is evident in the memorialization of the Stonewall Uprising. Using appropriated behaviors and symbols, such as the slogans “gay power” and “gay liberation,” Stonewall was retroactively used as the key incident in the fight for LGBTQ rights, not only in the United States, but around the world. This is perhaps the primary reason why Stonewall can be considered the beginning of the movement, regardless of the historicity of the claim, because it is the definitive sustaining element required for the movement to exist.

The early homophile movement, however, meets Tarrow’s requirements for a social protest movement in several ways. While they were relatively timid at first, the homophile activists of the 1950s and ‘60s brought public awareness to the plight of LGBTQ people,

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<sup>17</sup> Tarrow, 11.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Bernstein. “Celebration and Suppression: The Strategic Uses of Identity in the Lesbian and Gay Movement.” *American Journal of Sociology* Vol. 103, no. 3 (1997), 532.

<sup>19</sup> Tarrow, 12.

which would be a necessary step when the homophile organizations became more militant as the movement merged with other social protest movements of the 1960s, such as the Civil Rights movement and student lead anti-war movements.

Tilly further explored the concept of collective violence in his book *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Interestingly, he refrains from using the word riot in his examination of collective violence, saying that “authorities and observers label as riots the damage-doing gatherings of which they disapprove, but they use terms like demonstration, protest, resistance, or retaliation for essentially similar events for which they approve.”<sup>20</sup> The Stonewall riots are often referred to as the Stonewall Uprising by homophiles and advocacy groups. However, the concepts put forward in *The Politics of Collective Violence* are still valid when applied to these kinds of events. By shying away from such loaded language, Tilly could continue his narrative of collective violence in a less biased manner. The word riot when referring to the events at the Stonewall Inn, however, has been appropriated by the LGBTQ rights movement. It was a disruption of social norms and a challenge to authority that helped bring visibility and validation to LGBTQ people.

The main element to take away from Tilly’s discussion of collective violence as it pertains to this paper is broken negotiations, which are “nonviolent interactions [that] occupy a significantly higher proportion of the social process. In general, participants in broken negotiations are carrying on a relatively organized nonviolent interchange that produces collective violence as a by-product.”<sup>21</sup> One of the main reasons for the success of

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<sup>20</sup> Charles Tilly, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, The University of Cambridge (Cambridge, UK: 2003), 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

Stonewall in being the impetus for the modern LGBTQ rights movement is how organized the movement became, sparking demonstrations from otherwise loosely connected advocacy groups.

The development of homophile organizations in San Francisco and New York and the direct action taken by these groups for the benefit of gay people in their areas fits the models presented by Tilly and Tarrow. If organizations such as the Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, the Society for Individual Rights, the Council for Religion and Homosexuality, the Dorians in Seattle, the Mattachine Society of Washington D.C. and the Mattachine Society of New York, the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, the Phoenix Society for Individual Freedom in Kansas City, publications such as *ONE*, *The Mattachine Review*, *The Ladder*, *Vector*, *The Los Angeles Advocate*, and others do not constitute organized community structure and identity enough to be called a movement, it is unclear how the Stonewall riots can then be considered the defining event of gay liberation. It would not have had as substantial an impact without the groundwork laid by these groups and publications.

The Stonewall Uprising was the mortar that cemented the different facets of the movement together. It did not occur in a vacuum, spontaneously exploding into the modern Pride movement of today like the Big Bang casting rainbows and butterflies to the far ends of the universe. By the late 1960s, not only had the homophile movement reached a new stage of militant advocacy, but the Feminist and Black Power movements were coming into their prime. Pressure from within caused schisms in the New Left and the virtual implosion of the Students for a Democratic Society created space for the Gay Liberation Front to take up the banner of social change. It should be noted that this is not a new idea. Academics

have recognized and written about the Stonewall riots in their historical context since at least the mid-1980s. However, the perception that Stonewall was the beginning, the watershed moment when LGBTQ people were allowed public space, is pervasive in public discourse regarding LGBTQ history.

### **Solidarity and Intersectionality in Pride Rituals**

The story of gay rights is under a continuously expanding umbrella. Since the 1980s more people have been added on to the acronym. Currently, the full acronym is LGBTTQQAAP, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, queer, questioning, intersex, asexual, ally, and pansexual. The question, then, is what exactly has this movement turned into and how does Stonewall factor into it?

Every year the Stonewall riots are memorialized in Pride celebrations across the United States and around the world. These gatherings are largely fund-raising events that help local support centers serve the LGBTQ community in their area. They also serve as a unifying force, bringing the subsections of the movement together in solidarity, which illustrates how the story of Stonewall is often adapted to fit new narratives of oppression and liberation. Local Pride celebrations have evolved to reflect the struggles of the people from that area. For example, the events held in Salt Lake City in 2016 reflected the tense relationship between the LGBTQ community in Utah and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. So, while the Stonewall riots have been adopted as a founding myth, the Pride movement has transcended the original intent of the social protest movement of the 1960s and '70s.

It is often the case that when an established group makes a stand to confront an issue, that parts of that group become excluded. The dialogue concerning the LGBTQ

community has often been dominated by men: sissy men, men in drag, masculine men, especially white men, but men, nonetheless. Because the gay community is not homogenous, and includes people of diverse race, ethnicity, gender, identity, and perspective, challenges have arisen as to how to approach issues when various parts of the community have diverse needs.

The Stonewall Uprising shook 1960s gay society and allowed white, middle class men to come out of the closet. For many of these men, Stonewall was indeed the beginning of their liberation. For the street people and others that resided in the slums and dives of Lower Manhattan and other urban centers, for the gender non-conformists, for immigrant and working-class gay people, it was just another day of standing up to police harassment. This dissonance between dominant white culture and the people that rioted in 1969 is highlighted in a speech given by activist and transwoman Sylvia Rivera at the Christopher Street Liberation Day Rally in 1973. Rivera's frustration at the "white middle class" is apparent in her speech as she calls for "revolution now" and reminds the crowd that there were many LGBTQ people still suffering in jail and experiencing violence and discrimination while rally-goers were celebrating.<sup>22</sup>

That white men have taken over the narrative of the Stonewall riots has recently come under scrutiny when the 2015 film *Stonewall* cast a white, cis-gender male to play the lead role. Journalist Mark Segal, a founder of the Gay Liberation Front, wrote:

"Stonewall" is uninterested in any history that doesn't revolve around its white, male stereotypical attractive protagonist. It almost entirely leaves out the women who participated in the riots and helped create the Gay Liberation Front, which

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<sup>22</sup> Sylvia Rivera, "Y'all Better Quiet Down" Christopher Street Liberation Day, 1973, 4:08, Posted August 15, 2017, <https://archive.org/details/SylviaRiveraYallBetterQuietDown1973>

included youth, trans people, lesbian separatists and people from all other parts of the spectrum of our community.”<sup>23</sup>

The common narrative is embroidered with many different threads of perspective, and when those perspectives are at odds with each other it causes discord within the movement. Nella van Dyke and Ronda Cress consider this issue in their study “Political Opportunities and Collective Identity in Ohio’s Gay and Lesbian Movement, 1970 to 2000.” While they start out admitting that “a substantial body of literature demonstrates that gender dynamics and collective identities influence and shape the emergence, mobilization, and outcomes of social movements, including the gay and lesbian movement,”<sup>24</sup> they introduce their topic by stating that “little research explores how a changing social context can influence a social movement’s collective identity.”<sup>25</sup> Their research has, however, turned up some interesting concepts concerning multifaceted movements, such as the LGBTQ rights movement, pointing out that “because a movement’s constituencies face multiple systems of oppression, they may have differences in political consciousness and available resources that lead to group conflict. Thus, gay men and lesbians may have difficulty working together when gender differences are especially salient to potential participants.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Mark Segal, “I was at the Stonewall riots. The Movie ‘Stonewall’ gets everything wrong,” PBS, September 23, 2015, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/stonewall-movie>

<sup>24</sup> Nella van Dyke and Ronda Cress. “Political Opportunities and Collective Identity in Ohio’s Gay and Lesbian Movement, 1970 to 2000.” *Sociological Perspectives* Vol. 49, no. 4 (2006), 503.

<sup>25</sup> Van Dyke and Cress, 504.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 506.

Van Dyke and Cress's research shows that when gendered issues come to the forefront, lesbians and gay men generally go in different directions, which then impedes the growth of a unified community, but when those issues line up there is "increased cooperation between gay men and lesbians and greater gender parity in GLBT organizations." This occurred in the 1980s, when the AIDS crisis aligned women's health issues with those of gay men, and when women faced a drop in political opportunity which led them to work with men more often.<sup>27</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The common narrative of the Stonewall Uprising of 1969 does not reflect the complexity of modern LGBTQ history. The popular depiction of gay men before Stonewall lacking in community structure and afraid to openly accept their sexuality reflects white middle-class experience and pushes aside the experience of working-class people of color, transients, and gender non-conforming individuals. This narrative of the white gay man overshadows other participants in the gay liberation movement and takes away from those who fought for equal rights and dignity decades before the first bricks were thrown at the New York police on the night of the riots.

Without identity and community around which to coalesce, collective action is broken down into discrete events and becomes ineffectual as a movement. For a movement to grow and be impactful it must create momentum and bridge the gaps between class, race, and gender. Reconstructing how LGBTQ identity and community developed in the early twentieth century America helps to place the riots back into their historical context. The next chapter explores how societal views of gender expression and sexuality changed

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<sup>27</sup> Van Dyke and Cress, 507.

at the turn of the twentieth century and how that impacted the development of LGBTQ identity in the United States.

## Chapter 2: Redefining Sexual Identity

### Introduction

Anachronistic views of a gay past emerge partly because LGBTQ history is nebulous and difficult to pin down. It is reasonable to assume that LGBTQ people will look back in history in search of affirmation and validation. Gerard Koskovich, a founding member of the GLBT Historical Society in San Francisco, explains that “LGBTQ people customarily are born into families that have little or no connection with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender life. While growing up, they have not benefited from hearing stories at home that reflect their emerging same-sex desires or their sense of a gender that differs from the one assigned to them at birth.”<sup>28</sup> This exploration into the evolution of LGBTQ identity in the United States seeks to understand how various groups and events, as well as a continually evolving expectation of gender norms, paved the way for gay liberation and the modern LGBTQ rights movement.

Near the end of the nineteenth century there was a shift in how western society viewed sexual identity and expression. Early pioneers of the field of psychology sought to define how human sexuality was expressed and in so doing imprinted ideas of how LGBTQ people looked and behaved onto the minds of the public. It is a common belief that there have always been gay people, but a look at the late nineteenth century reveals that there was a fundamentally different understanding of gender expression and same-sex intimacy. There are three subjects considered here that contributed to the development of LGBTQ

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<sup>28</sup> Gerard Koskovich, “The History of Queer History: One Hundred Years of the Search for Shared Heritage,” *LGBTQ America: A Theme Study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer History*, (The National Park Service, 2016), 04-1

community and identity. The decline of romantic friendships, which had created space for same-sex intimacy in the public sphere; advances in the field of psychology, which gave ordinary people a solidified concept of the self and personal introspection; and changing views of gender expression and identity that fit newly emerging definitions of homosexual behavior.

### **The Veneer of Romantic Friendships**

Because of the fuzzy nature of LGBTQ history, it is necessary to find a nexus around which perceptions of acceptable gender presentation and behavior have changed. The idea of being gay as a political identity is relatively new, forged during the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and '60s and further established in the following decades leading up to the 2015 Supreme Court ruling of *Obergefell vs. Hodges*, legalizing same-sex marriage across the United States. In order to understand how identity developed within the LGBTQ community, it is important to know what it once was. The turn of the twentieth century was marked with an increased intolerance of same-sex intimacy as well as an evolving awareness of the psychology of sexual expression and gender identity.

Defining the development of LGBTQ identity requires anachronistic views of what “being gay” means to be discarded. Thomas A. Foster argues that it is overly simplistic to claim that identity and homosexual relationships have only existed on a physically intimate level, citing romantic friendships – emotionally intimate, but presumably platonic, same-sex relationships – experienced by men and women from at least the sixteenth century to the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> Romantic friendships provided a cover that allowed for

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas A. Foster, ed. *Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*. (New York, NY: New York University, 2007), 10-11.

same-sex intimacy without the stigma that would normally be applied to it. These relationships seem to have been mostly afforded to those socially affluent enough to avoid other social obligations to family and community. Working class and rural men and women would not normally have the time or resources to devote to such proclivities. This is not to say that same-sex relationships did not exist among working class people, but they would not necessarily have been hidden behind the veneer of romantic friendship. The difference in how homosexuality developed among middle and working-class individuals was noted by historian George Chauncey, stating that the behavior of working-class men was “circumscribed by a different pattern of social regulation, which shaped them as firmly as bourgeois propriety shaped their middle-class brethren.”<sup>30</sup>

Romantic friendships can be seen among artists, writers and poets, middle class women who were able to separate themselves from the domestic obligations to their households, as well as aristocrats and politicians. Examples are Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens, Walt Whitman and Peter Doyle, and Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena Hickock.<sup>31</sup> These relationships need not have been physically intimate, but it suffices to illustrate the romantic nature of same-sex coupling during this time period.

### **For Oscar Wilde, Posing Somdomite<sup>32</sup>**

One of the most visible events highlighting changes in public attitude toward same sex coupling is the trial of the British poet, Oscar Wilde. Wilde had sued John Douglas, the

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<sup>30</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 243.

<sup>31</sup> Foster, 68.

<sup>32</sup> Sic. by John Douglas, the Marquess of Queensberry, was addressed to Oscar Wilde at the Albemarle.

Marquess of Queensberry, for libel after a note accusing Wilde of sodomy was left at a club called the Albemarle.<sup>33</sup> Evidence presented in this lawsuit by the Marquess' lawyers verified the accusation and Wilde was forced to pay all of the legal expenses of the suit. He was then charged with crimes against nature and sentenced to two years in prison. Michael S. Foldy explains the significance of the trial, that before this "same-sex sexuality was understood as conduct. The idea that sexuality might correlate with particular types of people...did not surface in England until 1892 when the terms *homosexual* and *heterosexual* were coined."<sup>34</sup> The very public trial of Oscar Wilde helped solidify the idea of "the homosexual" in the minds of the public. American newspapers, having a long history of reporting on the life of the poet<sup>35</sup>, also reported on the outcome of the trial. If it is true that Wilde's ordeal influenced social requirements of gender expression and sexual behavior, this would have had a resounding effect on how gay people were viewed in western society.

During his trial defense, Wilde emphasized repeatedly that while his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas was intimate, it was not inappropriate or even out of the ordinary. This should be understood in the context of who is speaking, as Wilde in his own words did "not pose as being ordinary" and was very fond of the young Lord Alfred.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> "Opening Speech of Sir Edward Clark, April 3, 1895," Transcript of the Libel Trial Prosecuted by Oscar Wilde (April 3-5, 1895), Three Trials of Oscar Wilde, Famous Trials, <https://www.famous-trials.com/wilde/345-clarkspeech>

<sup>34</sup> Michael S. Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality, and Late-Victorian Society*, (Yale University Press, 1997),155.

<sup>35</sup> "Oscar Wilde: Author and Aesthete." *Library of Congress: Topics in Chronicling America*. (Library of Congress, 2017) Accessed June 8, 2018, <https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/oscar.html>.

<sup>36</sup> "Testimony of Oscar Wilde on Cross Examination (April 3, 1895) (Literary Part), Three Trials of Oscar Wilde (1895), Famous Trials, <https://www.famous-trials.com/wilde/346-literarypart>.

Further, when asked about his relationship with a Mr. Edward Shelley who worked for Wilde's publishers, Wilde confirmed that he felt that Mr. Shelley was "a proper or natural companion."<sup>37</sup> If the purpose of the trial was to prove libel against the Marquess, it is reasonable to assume that Wilde did not view these admissions as self-incriminating. He was relying on the social construct of romantic friendships to shield his behavior from what would have otherwise been considered improper.

If the privately circulated account of his ordeal "The Trials of Oscar Wilde" is to be believed, the most unforgivable behavior was not Wilde's perceived dalliance with young men, but rather a violation of gender norms. Any accusation that Wilde would have participated in or had been aware of gender non-conforming behavior or inverted physical intimacy was emphatically denied.<sup>38</sup> The relationship between Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas was rarely called into question, and the cross examiner emphasized that the line of questioning was not a personal attack on Wilde himself but rather his inappropriate relationships with, and behavior toward, young men that were far below his own social class.

There are two main takeaways from the trials that are relevant to this discussion. The first is that Oscar Wilde took for granted the idea of romantic friendships. He assumed that he would be able to hide his vices with something that otherwise would not have been publicly palatable. The masculine sphere still had room for same-sex intimacy to a point, as illustrated by how easily Wilde was able to deflect some of the accusations and the

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<sup>37</sup> "Testimony of Oscar Wilde on Cross Examination (April 3, 1895) (Factual Part), Three Trials of Oscar Wilde (1895), Famous Trials, <https://www.famous-trials.com/wilde/344-factualpart>.

<sup>38</sup> Foldy, 36.

apparent legitimacy of his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas, which was the impetus of the entire debacle. The trials reveal, however, that inappropriate behavior was viewed clearly through the lens of social status and gender expectations. Grolleau accentuates this in his consternation at Wilde's defense:

He, apparently, saw nothing indecorous in facts which must shock any other than the most depraved. He saw nothing disgusting in friendships of a kind to which only one construction could be put. He gave expensive dinners to ex-barmen and the like: ignorant, brutish young fools – because they amused him! He presented youths of questionable moral character with silver cigarette-cases because their society was pleasant! He took young men to share his bedroom at hotels and saw nothing remarkable about such proceedings. He gave sums of thirty pounds to ill-bred youths – accomplished blackmailers – because they were hard-up and he felt they did not deserve poverty!<sup>39</sup>

Grolleau's description of the witness Fred Atkins further reveals societal contempt for gender non-conforming individuals. Atkins is stated to have worn make up and women's under garments and acted effeminately. He was, "of all the creatures associated with Wilde in these affairs...the lowest and most contemptible."<sup>40</sup>

The other point, and perhaps even more important, is that at the time of the trials, same-sex interactions were still considered a vice. It was not Wilde's person that was being put on trial, but his degenerate behavior. And while Wilde certainly identified as a writer and a poet, and perhaps somewhat bohemian, he did not consider his love for young men to be out of the ordinary. As has been mentioned, the impropriety revolved around the

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Grolleau, *The Shame of Oscar Wilde: From the Shorthand Reports*, (Paris, 1906), 12.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

breaking of social and gender norms. Still, Oscar Wilde has remained an iconic figure in LGBTQ history and his trials mark a significant shift in public perception of homosexual behavior.

This shift becomes more apparent when contrasted with the experience of another famous poet, the American Walt Whitman, who met a young man by the name of Harry Stafford in 1876. According to Jonathan Ned Katz, Whitman and Stafford had a very intimate relationship that was known of by Stafford's parents. He notes that "they approved their teenage son's close relationship with the older man."<sup>41</sup> Here the institution of romantic friendship helped to hide the allegedly physically intimate nature of Whitman and Stafford's relationship. A little less than two decades later, in the case of Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas, it did not. Wilde's plea of love in self-defense was rejected, and he was ordered to cover all legal fees of the Marquess of Queensberry and sentenced to two years in prison. After his release, he lived modestly in France until his death in 1900.<sup>42</sup>

While it is difficult to say that Wilde's trial was a definitive cause of change for LGBTQ people in the later nineteenth century, it clearly marks a transition in public perception. Romantic friendships, especially between men, became noticeably less acceptable. Same-sex coupling was pushed out of the clearly defined margins of Victorian masculinity, and same-sex intimacy became less a morally depraved behavior and more an innate part of an individual's nature. This change in societal perceptions of sexuality was stimulated by the growing field of psychology.

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<sup>41</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *Love Stories: Sex Between Men before Homosexuality*, (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 221-222.

<sup>42</sup> Lord Alfred Douglas, "His Last Book and His Last Years in Paris," *The Shame of Oscar Wilde*, (Paris, 1906), 116.

## **Influence of the Therapeutic Community**

Advances in the field of psychology informed the transition of sexuality from reprobate behavior to a natural characteristic of one's self. As early as the 1850s, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German physician, advocated for the social acceptance of what he referred to as Uranians, who he viewed as neither male nor female, but belonging to a third sex. He argued that homosexual tendencies were an inborn trait and advocated for the repeal of legislation that targeted men and women for homosexual behavior.<sup>43</sup>

In 1896, John Addington Symonds explored the topic of sexual inversion, strongly advocating for social acceptance in his treatise *A Problem of Modern Ethics – being an inquiry into the phenomenon of sexual inversion*. Symonds, like Ulrichs, believed that inverts (homosexuals) “come into the world, or issue from the cradle, clearly marked.”<sup>44</sup> Symonds also delineates the differing experiences of his subjects based on class, and in the process exposes his own bias against lower class individuals. The core of his complaint is that if the matter of sexual inversion were “abominable” then society must treat all inverts the same. That a “depraved debauchee who abuses boys receives the same treatment as the young man who loves a comrade. The male prostitute who earns his money by extortion is scarcely more condemned than a man of birth and breeding who has been seen walking with soldiers.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Miller, 14-15.

<sup>44</sup> John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Modern Ethics* (1896), 19.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

Symonds' argument shows a complex relationship between homosexual behaviors and identity but does not conflate the two. In his view, it was not the behavior, but the intent and social identity exceeded behavioral traits of an individual. It is important to note that Symonds published this work the year after Oscar Wilde was condemned, arguing that a relationship like that between Oscar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas should not be censured or debased but rather sanctioned under the model of romantic friendship. This argument is admittedly complicated by Symonds' description of debased behavior, which Wilde also clearly exhibited as he pursued much younger men who were well below his social station.

There is some ambiguity in how modern readers interpret the definition of a sexual invert. Sexual inversion was not a linear synonym for homosexual as used by physicians and psychologists. In most instances, it is not referring to all acts of physical same-sex interaction or romantic companionship, but rather the inversion of gender roles – especially that in a physically intimate encounter. This means that men who played the active role in a male-male relationship would not necessarily be labeled “homosexual.” This carries on into the beginning of the twentieth century, where it is seen that otherwise heterosexual men would engage in same-sex behavior without considering themselves out of the ordinary. This behavior would certainly have been considered a “moral failing,” and often grounds for arrest, but also expected in certain circumstances such as prison or the military.<sup>46</sup> The differentiation between a heterosexual man that happened to engage in same-sex physical intimacy and an invert or “fairy” shows that while descriptions of

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<sup>46</sup> Chauncey, 95.

homosexuality were becoming more precise, the identity of heterosexual men experienced a more gradual development.

In 1927 Havelock Ellis published a series of observations and stories collected from various subjects who claimed homosexual tendencies. In it he makes some observations that give insight into the development of gay identity, at least for men. In what he labeled as “History XI”, Ellis describes the story of a twenty-year-old man referred to only as T. D. In it he notes that T. D. “possessed a confirmed homosexual outlook on life.”<sup>47</sup> This was important enough to Ellis that he interjected this comment in the middle of T. D.’s narrative and shows that in Europe in the 1920s, development of homosexual identity was novel enough to be remarkable. T. D. then describes his moral contention with homosexual behavior and his hopes that being married to a woman would help to ease the urges that he felt as a younger man. T. D.’s educational background clearly influenced his opinion of his sexual past. He does not, however, specifically cite a religious objection to the behavior. This is a stark contrast to mid-twentieth century interpretations of homosexual behavior, especially by religious groups in the United States.

Physicians who advocated for the acceptance of homosexuals in society held remarkably negative views of lesbians and same-sex intimacy between women. In Symonds’ case studies, he makes little if any reference to female sexuality outside of a woman’s use for sexual pleasure by men. This perhaps can be partly attributed to the patriarchal constructs that dominated Victorian understanding of women’s role in society.

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<sup>47</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*. (High Quality Paperback, 1927), 96-97.

Like much of history, women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries experienced systemic repression of sexual autonomy.

Symonds, arguing for the repeal of anti-sodomy laws in England made very clear that his interest fell more toward the rights of men, arguing that physical intimacy between a small minority of men does not harm society and therefore does not warrant censure, but rather should be embraced. He even goes so far as to degrade couplings between men and women comparing them to what he saw as the more elevated love between fellows.<sup>48</sup> In 1927, Havelock Ellis at least was open to exploring inverted behavior in women, though his bias against them is as apparent as that of Symonds. He wrote that lesbianism was a vice that was promoted by feminism and emboldened in homogenous, all-women settings, though failed to differentiate how that was different from male inverts.<sup>49</sup> The fact that he did not afford women the same benefit as he did men, when he did mention them at all, is unsurprising coming from a markedly patriarchal perspective.

Ellis' explanation of female inversion in part rests on the attractiveness of the woman to men. They are bland, though not always, and uninteresting and do not generally attract the gaze of men so they become more open to the idea of same-sex relationships. His descriptions are sprinkled with caveats and disclaimers that of course not all women inverts are this way, but it is a general aspect of female inversion.<sup>50</sup> Regardless of the waffling of Ellis or the lengthy ruminations of Symonds, these stereotypes became intrinsically attached to what it meant to be homosexual by the early 1900s and were used

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<sup>48</sup> Symonds, 54-55.

<sup>49</sup> Miller, 62.

<sup>50</sup> Ellis, 174.

to target gender non-conforming individuals in a variety of settings, especially regarding race and class.

The famed founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, did not seem to have a set theory regarding inversion. His opinions were influenced by the writings of Havelock Ellis as he cites Ellis in his various essays and letters regarding the topic. Freud's theory of inversion falls back to generic Freudian psychology stating that it most likely has to do with early childhood trauma that may or may not be remembered by the subject. He does, however, specifically reject the idea of psychological hermaphroditism, or that male inverts have a "female brain" and vice versa for female inverts.<sup>51</sup>

Freud also states that inversion is not a form of degeneracy, citing the following reasons. That there is often no other deviant behavior in inverted individuals. Inversion is often found in individuals "distinguished by especially high intellectual development and culture. That inversion manifested in ancient cultures (referring to the Greeks, which were seemingly above reproach) and among "savages and primitive races" which he states cannot be degenerate because the term is "generally limited to higher civilization."<sup>52</sup>

Freud's understanding of inversion was limited by the perspective of many of the writers and thinkers of the time. While he generally accepted that inversion grew from a universal bisexuality among humans, he seems to have been unwilling to pin down a solid definition. He was most curious that male inverts were often still attracted to feminine characteristics, explaining that this was the reason male prostitutes often presented

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<sup>51</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Sexual Aberrations," *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (New York and Washington, 1920), 13-16. <https://www.globalgreybooks.com/content/books/ebooks/three-essays-on-the-theory-of-sexuality.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

themselves as men dressed as women. From a modern understanding of LGBTQ people, this basic analysis comes across as reductive. While Freud was willing to explore the topic, he did not seem concerned with unlocking the secrets of inverted individuals, leaving that to other contemporaries to whom he often referred people.

In the United States there was no law identifying homosexual individuals until at least the 1930s. Before that individuals were targeted using more generic laws. James R. Edwards describes the use of the public charge doctrine which is a core feature of the United States immigration system dating back to colonial Massachusetts in 1645.<sup>53</sup> George Chauncey explains that in New York, gay men were arrested as “male prostitutes” or for degeneracy “as part of the general revision of the disorderly-conduct statute.”<sup>54</sup> Chauncey also makes a point that these regulations were only used against the men soliciting other men, not the men responding to the solicitations, “just as prostitutes were charged just as their customers’ behavior remained uncensored.”<sup>55</sup> This is an important distinction, because again it is behavior that falls outside of defined masculine roles that is being censured, not same-sex activity in of itself. It would not be until after World War II that the identity of the heterosexual man became separate from same-sex behavior, and gay men were pushed completely out of the masculine sphere.

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<sup>53</sup> James R. Edwards, “Public Charge Doctrine: A Fundamental Principle of American Immigration Policy,” (2001), <https://cis.org/Public-Charge-Doctrine-Fundamental-Principle-American-Immigration-Policy>.

<sup>54</sup> Chauncey, 185.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

## Comingling with Christian Narratives

In the United States there was a strong religious component to how LGBTQ identity developed. In the early twentieth century, therapeutic terminology regarding same-sex behavior was absorbed into the common vernacular. With a label and no social constructs to validate their relationships, gay men and women were easily marked as the other. Religious leaders began to adopt messaging from the professional medical community and apply it to everyday life. Some pastors held a relatively progressive view on how these therapeutic ideas could help people overcome sexual abnormality by addressing the problematic view the Christian world had on sexual behavior.<sup>56</sup>

Heather R. White states that “it was in the 1920s that an organized group of liberal Protestants interested in mental health began to systematically engage [Freud’s] ideas.” They did not specifically begin to address homosexuality until later, instead focusing on the idea of “healthy sexuality,” which was to avoid all kinds of sexual deviancy.<sup>57</sup> It is important to remember that while romantic friendships were fading out of acceptable masculine behavior during this time, same-sex behavior still did not equate to being a homosexual if one did not display the physical and personality characteristics attributed to LGBTQ people, especially gender non-conforming individuals, during this time.

Other evidence shows that gay identity, even by the early 1900s, had not yet solidified in the mind of the public. As mentioned previously, law enforcement officials would use generic laws to target homosexuals and by and large this had more to do with

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<sup>56</sup> Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights*, (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 22.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

perceptions of masculinity and physical appearance than any tendency toward same-sex behavior.<sup>58</sup> This may have been a consequence of how the early therapeutic community first advocated for sexual inverts; sexual inversion was defined by characteristics of the opposite sex, that an individual's sexual behavior and gender expression were inverted. Thus, effeminacy in men and masculinity in women became a stereotypical part of what it meant to be homosexual early in the conversation. These stereotypes were reinforced by the public's interaction with visible LGBTQ people – the very effeminate men and masculine women who had a much more difficult time conforming to gender expectations.

### **Queer Politics**

There is evidence illustrating the growing public awareness of homosexual individuals as early as the 1890s, and, according to Jonathan Ned Katz, even then the group was used as a tool against political enemies of the Republican party. He explains that in the 1890s there were several campaigns by the *New York Press* that used homosexual meeting places to smear political enemies, especially politicians associated with Tammany Hall.<sup>59</sup> According to Katz, the “appeal was part of a larger Republican crusade to expose Tammany corruption, to embarrass Tammany politicians and police, and to defeat Tammany at the polls.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, Princeton University Press, (Princeton, NJ: 2007), 35.

<sup>59</sup> “Tammany Hall was the name given to the Democratic political machine that dominated New York City politics from the mayoral victory of Fernando Wood in 1854 through the election of Fiorello LaGuardia in 1934.” “Tammany Hall,” Teaching Eleanor Roosevelt Glossary, *The Eleanor Roosevelt Papers Project*, (Washington, D.C., George Washington University), Accessed July 25, 2018, <https://www2.gwu.edu/~erpapers/teaching/glossary/tammany-hall.cfm>

<sup>60</sup> Katz, 289.

It is unclear whether the men actually behaved as described by the *New York Press* reporters or if it was a work of propaganda, but the descriptions of the men who frequented the dives of New York City focused on their effeminate nature, and failed to describe “the men with whom the effeminates committed unnatural behavior.”<sup>61</sup> The point of more interest in this discussion is that gender non-conforming individuals were the first to be identified publicly as homosexuals, and that label seems to have been crafted in the public consciousness by contemporary writers, psychologists, and print media. Homosexual identity was formed as much from popular opinion as it was from a personal self-awareness.

New York City’s dive bars provide more insight into how people viewed sexual nonconformity in the 1890s. Particularly an establishment called the Slide, which was described by the *New York Herald* as a “dragon of vice in whose maw souls as well as dollars have been lost forever.”<sup>62</sup> The vice does not only refer to same sex interactions, but degenerate behavior and gender nonconforming individuals. According to Chauncey, it is at the Slide that the term fairy became a popularized description of effeminate men.<sup>63</sup> Similar to the case of Oscar Wilde, it was the breaking of expected gender expression that drew the most ire from witnesses and slum tourists. This was not limited to the swishy young men that were looking for their next mark, but also opposite sex interactions that were considered vulgar at the time. Katz notes that the degenerate label was only applied to the effeminate men and not to the men they were entertaining. Many of the descriptions of the

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<sup>61</sup> Katz, 289.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 291.

fairies and queens at the slide were seen at the trial of Oscar Wilde three years later. Men given to unnatural practices, men with unnatural desires and depraved tastes, and men of unnatural habits, effectively describing any non-procreative sex act to be immoral and debased.<sup>64</sup>

Katz is not the only academic that has described early New Yorkers' ambivalent attitude toward "average but perhaps slightly immoral" men that happened to spend time with the fairies found in urban subcultures. George Chauncey also described this scene, differentiating the "fairies" and "queers" from the otherwise heterosexual men that enjoyed their company; fairies being the more obviously homosexual men, while queer was reserved for the men that could present as heterosexual.<sup>65</sup> Chauncey reiterates that the act of using another person for sexual gratification was well within the boundaries of masculine behavior in the early 1900s, and therefore was not subject to the same censure as the passive participant, illustrating how bachelor subculture was indiscriminate in their choice of sexual partner whether it be a prostitute, a fairy, or young boy.<sup>66</sup>

Interestingly, the narrative that same-sex predispositions could be identified by outward behavior and physical traits was sharply rebuked by John Addington Symonds. He wrote that it is "a gross mistake to suppose that all the tribe betray these attributes. The majority differ in no detail of their outward appearance, their physique, or their dress from normal men. They are athletic, masculine in habits, frank in manner, passing through

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<sup>64</sup> Katz, 295.

<sup>65</sup> Chauncey, 67.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

society year after year without arousing a suspicion of their inner temperament.”<sup>67</sup> While Symonds is defending sexual inversion, he does not seem to be defending the gender non-conformity that was often perceived to come with it. This further reinforces the idea that gender non-conformity was a more serious offense at the turn of the twentieth century than same-sex interactions in of themselves.

## **Conclusion**

In just a few decades homosexuality developed from a defined behavior of sexual inversion, widely applied only to those that did not conform to requisite gender roles, to an introspective identity where an otherwise masculine man would identify as gay. Institutions that served to hide same-sex intimacy fell out of favor, pushing LGBTQ people out of acceptable gender spheres and into the proverbial closet. This development of identity is crucial to understanding how the homophile movement of the 1950s and the gay liberation movement in the 1960s and ‘70s was able to form, as Tilley, Tarrow, and Bernstein have posited; identity and community must already be established for collective action and movement to be successful. The transition from individual self-acceptance to community activation as a recognized minority group, however, would be stifled under McCarthy’s crusade against subversives and reignited by the social disruption caused by the fight for civil rights in the 1960s.

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<sup>67</sup> Symonds, 13.

## **Chapter 3: Industrialization, War, and the Politics of Labor**

### **Introduction**

The 1930s brought more flexibility to views on proper behavior and gender expression than in previous decades. Individual gay identity was starting to be viewed as an innate characteristic rather than simply a vice or immoral behavior and gay meeting places were becoming more common in larger urban areas. Labor movements during the 1930s activated queer men to fight for individual rights regardless of race and class, and World War II pulled nascent gay men and women out of their domestic home lives and placed them in a more sexually homogenized setting. This chapter focuses on how changing economics and politics during wartime helped shape American views of LGBTQ people.

### **Changing Social Geographies**

Changes in urbanization and industrialization helped create room for individual gay identity to develop in American society. In his essay *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, John D'Emilio argues that the spread of capitalism in the 1800s separated individuals from the necessity of pairing into heterosexual partnerships. World War II took this to the next level by removing “millions of young men and women, whose sexual identities were just forming, out of their homes, out of towns and small cities, out of the heterosexual environment of the family, and dropped them into sex-segregated situations. The war freed

millions of men and women from a setting where heterosexuality was normally imposed.”<sup>68</sup>

Historian Peter Boag echoes D’Emilio’s argument, pointing to the trans-continental railroad and the advent of World War II as major influences in the growth of gay identity and communities in port cities on the west coast. He also argues that a shift from entrepreneurship to corporatist capitalism in the mid-1800s helped to foster gay identity among middle class men.<sup>69</sup> For these men, their profession became a less important part of their identity, which further made room for them to focus on aspects of social life unavailable to previous generations. In addition, at the beginning of the twentieth century, millions of military personnel and civilians, many of them single men and women, were uprooted and made their way to coastal cities to work for the defense industry.<sup>70</sup> This allowed women to enter the work force in industries where women laborers had previously been proscribed.

These changes also provided work opportunity for men that were not able to deploy. Boag articulates that “cities that hosted war industries, served as embarkation points for military personnel, or were near army and navy bases witnessed incredible growth in their permanent and transient populations.”<sup>71</sup> Included in these workers unable

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<sup>68</sup> John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, 100–111, (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 107

<sup>69</sup> Peter Boag, *Same Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001), Kindle ed., loc. 1252-1271.

<sup>70</sup> Peter Boag, “Does Portland Need a Homophile Society?’ Gay Culture and Activism in the Rose City between World War II and Stonewall, *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 105, No. 1 (Oregon Historical Society, 2004), 9.

<sup>71</sup> Boag, “Portland,” 9.

to join the military were those deemed unfit for service because they exhibited perceived homosexual characteristics.

By the 1940s, gay and lesbian communities were cropping up in major cities, and self-aware homosexual men and women became more common. Communities began forming in San Francisco, Philadelphia, New York, and Boston. These communities formed the backbone of a homosexual subculture that became an easy target of McCarthy era policies leading into the 1950s. By the time of the Stonewall riots in 1969, these communities had become politically organized and, according to D'Emilio, "a massive, grassroots liberation movement could form almost overnight precisely because communities of lesbians and gay men existed."<sup>72</sup>

D'Emilio's and Boag's observations of the growth of LGBTQ identity reveal the complicated nature of defining identity and seeking out a causal effect for its development. The reflexive conclusion is that identity developed in those in which society allowed it to do so. Men and women became more open and willing to tie their individual identity to their same sex behavior in situations where it was more acceptable, or expected, to do so. Thus, identity developed among upper- and middle-class educated men and women who were somewhat insulated from the requirements imposed by society on working class individuals, especially immigrants and ethnic minorities. This is reductive of the complexity of LGBTQ identity, which includes a myriad of other identities that do not necessarily relate to sexual orientation or gender expression. A closer look shows that identity manifested in

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<sup>72</sup> D'Emilio, 187.

various ways depending on the societal pressures placed on the individuals at that time and place.

For instance, how lesbian identity and community developed was drastically different than other subgroups within the LGBTQ community, much of which was intertwined with feminist movements. Furthermore, there is noticeably less written regarding lesbians in early twentieth century urban sub-cultures. This may be attributed to the idea that, as Margot Canaday explains, behavior that was easily identified as homosexual between men was considered normal between women.<sup>73</sup> In a society constructed around patriarchy it seems to have been hard to accept same-sex intimacy between women enough to define it, with outward characteristics and overly masculine behavior continuing to be the defining factor in identification throughout the early twentieth century.

LGBTQ identity in the United States developed around socio-economic and political issues, but especially those of race, class and gender. It is not a coincidence that the early gay scene in New York was used to target Tammany Hall politicians, who were known to have a sympathetic ear for ethnic minorities (especially the Irish) and the working poor.<sup>74</sup> According to Canaday, American society associated degeneration and perversion with “primitive races and lower classes, and poor immigrants and nonwhites were believed to

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<sup>73</sup> Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009).

<sup>74</sup> William L. Riordon, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics*, (New York, NY: Signet Classics, 1995) Kindle ed. Loc. 178.

be especially inclined toward perversion.”<sup>75</sup> This view translated into the use of homosexuality and effeminacy as a justification to discriminate against racial minorities and immigrants.

### **World War II and the Social Construction of the Closet**

Allen Bérubé explored military influence on gay identity in his book *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*. By the time the United States had entered World War II, there was a clear homosexual identity with the military having policies regarding gay men and women that served. No longer was it only the outward display of gender non-conformity that defined what a gay man or woman was, and there was enough self-awareness to declare “I am a homosexual.”<sup>76</sup>

Same-sex coupling manifested in the military, as expected in sex-segregated environments. Bérubé warns, however, that this was not always associated with any kind of gay outlook, but rather “for their need in closeness in life-threatening situations than any conscious tolerance for homosexuality.”<sup>77</sup> As with women who found themselves working in more masculine jobs in the absence of men, men filled more nurturing rolls for each other in the absence of women. This “buddy system” served a similar role as the romantic friendships of the previous century, giving a publicly acceptable face to relationships that would otherwise have been censured. Bérubé notes that “under such conditions, gay lovers managed to live, work, and even sleep together without raising suspicions.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Canaday, 29.

<sup>76</sup> Allen Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II*, (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1990), 165.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 188.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

Bérubé's assertion is reflected in the story of Brian Keith and his companion Dave, whose relationship was detailed in a letter written in 1943 and published in *One Magazine* in 1961. In the letter, Keith recalls the time he spent with Dave in Africa during World War II. Dave and Keith's relationship seems to be developed out of a need to escape the harsh reality of their surroundings, though there is no mention of combat or the enemy they were fighting. The end of the letter indicates that Dave did not return home, and the letter overall was a homage to their relationship while they served in North Africa.<sup>79</sup>

In a more recently discovered set of letters between two British men in the military, Gilbert Bradley and Gordon Bowsher (known in the letters simply as G.) express similar sentiment of escapism. They used their intense feelings for each other to make it through the tribulations of war, though, again, they were not reunited after the war as their letters suggested they wanted to.<sup>80</sup> Bradley was allegedly one of the charges levied against Sir Paul Latham, an MP who was "accused of 13 charges of 'disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind,'" and was court martialed in 1941.<sup>81</sup>

While the idea of same-sex coupling between men was a subject kept quiet, the opposite was seen with women who served in the military. Leisa D. Meyer's study on the Women's Army Auxiliary Corp (WAAC) and Women's Army Corp (WAC) explores the influence that these two organizations had on evolving gender expectations for women and

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<sup>79</sup> Brian Keith, "A Letter to a GI," <https://timalderman.com/tag/wwii-gay-love-letter/>

<sup>80</sup> Bethan Bell, "Forbidden love: The WW2 letters between two men," *BBC News*, February 17, 2017. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-38932955>

<sup>81</sup> "Case Against Sir Paul Latham," *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 6, 1941, 14. <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/17757504>

the concern that was created by the perceived defeminization of women in the military.<sup>82</sup> This cultural anxiety reflected an ongoing conflict between men and women concerning women's sexual autonomy. Men, while sometimes discharged for same-sex conduct, experienced less rigid gender requirements. Men were not just afforded sexual autonomy, but an independent sexuality was considered inherently masculine, and a woman exhibiting these traits were thought prone to the worst vices of masculinity, including "aggression,...promiscuity, and drunkenness."<sup>83</sup> The military was, and continues to be, a male space, and allowing a female presence was perceived to diminish that.

Meyer argues that in order to curb societal concerns about women enlisting in the WAAC/WAC, the military projected an image of respectability for its female enlistment. It is notable that in order to preserve femininity, women in the military were desexualized, portrayed as "chaste, asexual, and essentially middle class." To further sell the image, WAAC/WAC was represented as the acting guardian of these women that were removed from the protection that their domestic home life had provided them.<sup>84</sup>

Regardless of the attempts to curb same-sex physical intimacy in the military, World War II served as a catalyst for a burgeoning lesbian and gay identity. However, this new-found sexual freedom, as limited as it was, did not last long. After the war, gender spheres quickly contracted, pushing LGBTQ people back into their respective social requirements of gender expression and behavior. This hyper-masculine culture coming out of World War II was the final nail in the proverbial closet. After the war, men would have to check

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<sup>82</sup> Leisa D. Meyer, "Creating G.I. Jane," *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Feminist Studies, Inc, 1992), 583.

<sup>83</sup> Meyer, 584.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 585.

themselves to not appear overly effeminate as any kind of lapse in masculine façade may have raised suspicions. Women, always fighting for their own sexual autonomy, were forced back into domesticity if they wished to be viewed as respectable. This was compounded by McCarthy Era red-baiting where the United States government associated sexual deviancy, especially same-sex intimacy, with communists and their sympathizers.

While individual identity and gay communities were developing at a faster pace than previously, the idea of gay men and women as a minority group did not materialize until after World War II. The last years of the 1940s brought an end to masculine and feminine exploration and societal expectations of gender expression and behavior were abruptly reinforced, pushing out LGBTQ people from acceptable masculine and feminine spheres. However, the activation of workers during the interwar period and the movement of people throughout World War II created new public spaces for LGBTQ identity to develop.

### **Queer Labor**

As has been discussed, there are many variables that led to the formation of gay identity, but queer labor helped to legitimize that identity in the public sphere. Bérubé described queer labor as “work which is performed by, or has the reputation of being performed by, homosexual men or women.” Examples are male hairdressers and female truck drivers – labor that is often “gendered, racialized, ethnicized, and homosexualized.”<sup>85</sup>

The impact that labor had on individual sexual expression varies depending on geography, class, race, and industry. Peter Boag explored how transient labor in the Pacific

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<sup>85</sup> Allan Bérubé, “‘Queer Work’ and Labor History,” in *My Desire for History*, ed. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill, NC: 2011), 261.

Northwest helped define same-sex relationships between working class men in that area. These relationships and the sexual identity of the participants were greatly influenced by the transient culture that helped define life as a laborer in the Pacific Northwest at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>86</sup> As with the relationships found between men during World War II, the relationships between transient and working-class men came out of a highly gender segregated environment. According to Boag, the primary form in which these relationships manifested was the pederastic relationship between “jockers” and “punks.”<sup>87</sup>

Jockers were the older men that served as the person that helped guide the “punk”, usually a teenage youth, through the transient world. The jocker provided protection and the punk provided his jocker with companionship. Boag notes that the subservient nature of the punk to the jocker should not be confused with the effeminacy found in other male same-sex subcultures such as the fairy.<sup>88</sup> While the jocker-punk relationships of transient and working-class men facilitated same-sex companionships, it seems that it did not foster queer identity such as that in other gay subcultures. Both punks and jockers were men and identified and presented as such according to the cultural expectations of the time.

In discussing the work of both Peter Boag and George Chauncey, Leila J. Rupp notes that the early twentieth century saw a “transformation of heteronormativity, in which working class men’s masculinity and heterosexuality increasingly came into question.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Boag, *Same Sex Affairs*, loc. 226.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 239-248.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*. 438.

<sup>89</sup> Leila J. Rupp, “What’s Queer Got to Do with It?” *Reviews in American History*, Vol. 38, No. 2, (John Hopkins University Press, June 2010), 191.

The transition is important in the development of gay male identity, which was cultivated by labor and living conditions. It is important, however, to distinguish between heterosexual men that happened to participate in same-sex relationships and a homosexual outlook or identity.

In his essay titled “No Race-Baiting, Red-Baiting, or Queer-Baiting!,” Bérubé described another group of people that were heavily influenced by their working environment. The story of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union of the Pacific (MCS) illustrates how gay men were exploited for labor aboard passenger liners in the 1920s and ‘30s. Gay men were chosen specifically for jobs located on luxury passenger liners owned by the Matson Company, whose policy was to hire only white men.<sup>90</sup> These men worked in what would normally be considered the labor of women or people of color, but because the cruise liners were segregated, white men were required for the position.

The gay cooks and stewards appropriated words normally used in a derogatory way, calling themselves queens instead of queers. Empowered with an identity, these queens broke gender boundaries and performed drag shows on the cruise liners.<sup>91</sup> There was no minimum wage, few workers protections, and they could barely support themselves, much less a family; there was little way for them to conform in American society. The public space created by queer labor, in this instance, helped define their identity as gay marine workers.

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<sup>90</sup> Allan Bérubé, “No Race-Baiting, Red-Baiting, or Queer-Baiting!,” in *My Desire for History*, ed. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, University of North Carolina Press (Chapel Hill, NC: 2011), 295

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 302

The MCS was not only a pro-gay union, it also became one of the primary unions for marine workers of color. In 1934, teamsters in King County, Washington organized a nationwide strike of marine laborers.<sup>92</sup> Black laborers, who had actively worked against union organizing since 1921 when the Colored Marines Employment Benevolent Association (CMEBA) was formed, were concerned about deteriorating wages and working conditions. Revels Cayton, a steward and son of black community activists, helped bridge the gaps between black marine laborers and the members of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union of the Pacific. The new organization, called the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards formed that same year and brought five hundred black workers from the CMEBA to the MCS.<sup>93</sup>

The strike resulted in a combined union, but there was still much work to be done for full integration of workers of color. According to George Robertson, it was not until 1935, after the Admiral line retired its three largest ships, grounding thousands of black workers, that tensions in the MCS became strong enough to incentivize real change toward desegregation. One of the major wins for black workers was “a resolution that established a system of union-controlled rotary hiring that protected both industry seniority and equal shipping rights regardless of race.”<sup>94</sup> Before this, employers chose the laborers they wanted to hire. With the new system, available jobs went to the union members with the most

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<sup>92</sup> Eric Arnesen, “National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards,” *Encyclopedia of US Labor and Working-Class History* (Routledge, 2007), 979

<sup>93</sup> George Robertson, “Desegregating a Maritime Union: The Marine Cooks and Stewards,” Waterfront Workers History Project. Accessed November, 2018.  
[http://depts.washington.edu/dock/mcs\\_desegregation.shtml](http://depts.washington.edu/dock/mcs_desegregation.shtml).

<sup>94</sup> Robertson, “Desegregating a Maritime Union.”

seniority who were present in the union hall at the time. This created opportunity for men that would normally have been overlooked, especially black and gay men.<sup>95</sup>

According to Bérubé, this would have set the MCS apart from other unions, particularly on the west coast where to be part of a union meant to be “male and white.”<sup>96</sup> This anti-racist union was also radically communist, and they heavily democratized their organization. They made room for workers of color, being able to force shipping lines to desegregate and offered real equality of opportunity, not just for black workers, but also Asian and Mexican seamen. The MCS would continue to influence the west coast shipping industry from the 1936 strike until they were expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1950.

In 1951, Philip Murray, the president of the CIO, wrote about the expulsion of communist led unions from the organization, including the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. He claimed that communists had found a foothold in labor unions during the Great Depression. He made sure to emphasize that his industry, steel manufacturing, was able to avoid the communist invasion, but in other unions they “were able to win a considerable degree of influence at both national and local levels.”<sup>97</sup> Murray’s thoughts about communist infiltration of labor reflected an anxiety felt by many Americans in the postwar period regarding communist influence on American society.

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<sup>95</sup> Arnesen, 979.

<sup>96</sup> Arnesen, 979.

<sup>97</sup> Philip Murray, “American Labor and the Threat of Communism,” *The Annals of the American Academy and Social Science* 274, (March 1951), 126.

Due to outside pressures from rival unions and the continuous looming threat of the federal government, the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union disbanded in 1952. The radical elements of the MCS, however, would have a lasting effect on the west coast black and gay communities. According to Bérubé, the gay stewards, no longer able to work on the ships, opened their own shops and restaurants in San Francisco and Seattle, laying the foundation for the vibrant gay communities now found in these cities.<sup>98</sup>

Bérubé's research on male stewards of cruise liners is paralleled by Phil Tiemeyer in his book *Plane Queer*, detailing the experience of male flight attendants beginning in the 1930s. Tiemeyer also describes the male flight attendant as "white men who performed what large segments of U.S. society deemed servile "women's work" or "colored work" and who thereby invited scrutiny as failed men and likely homosexuals."<sup>99</sup> He refers to Bérubé's work on the history of passenger ship stewards, and states that queer labor in the early twentieth century grew out of "Jim Crow" America, citing airliner policies of only hiring white men for flight crews up until the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but that "only when white men undertook such work did it become a noticeably queer job" and that "white gay men...learned to racialize gay as white."<sup>100</sup>

The tensions between the queer community and their employers is highlights in an FBI document from 1953 that describes a security matter regarding One, Inc. and the publication *One Magazine*. *One* had printed an article describing a California airline company hiring the FBI to investigate and harass the airlines employees regarding their

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<sup>98</sup> Bérubé, "The Marine Cooks and Stewards Union," 319.

<sup>99</sup> Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants*, University of California Press (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2013), Kindle ed. Loc. 143.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, loc. 256.

sexuality. The document claims the FBI was not involved in this incident and implies One, Inc. was promoting anti-government propaganda.<sup>101</sup>

It was not until after 1964 that the movement for gay rights intersected with the Civil Rights movement, and that it took more radical social protest movements, such as student and anti-war movements, to bridge the gap between labor and sexual identity. The stories of queer labor are also a poignant illustration of the struggle of minority LGBTQ people to be heard over the dominant middle-class, white culture seen with Sylvia Rivera in 1973 and the *Stonewall* film in 2015, as mentioned earlier. Still, queer advocacy in labor made a lasting impact on the development of gay identity and community well before the homophile movement of the 1950s.

## **Conclusion**

Changes in industrialization and labor created space for LGBTQ identity to grow. This manifested in different ways depending on geographical location and societal pressures experienced by an individual. Individual identity became more freely tied to an individual rather than their profession or family life, allowing LGBTQ people more freedom to explore their budding queer identities.

World War II moved millions of single people around the country, taking them away from a relatively sheltered home life and placing them in sex-segregated environments that stimulated same-sex interactions. Like the romantic friendships of the previous century, the military provided a screen behind which same-sex couples could mask their relationships. The public created cognitive biases and stereotypes regarding homosexuality

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<sup>101</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Mattachine Society Part 01 of 03," May 21, 1953, 2. <https://vault.fbi.gov/mattachine-society/mattachine-society-part-01-of-03/view> (accessed August 20th, 2019).

from the caricatures and tropes found in popular media, and LGBTQ people used these characters as a model for their own queer behavior and presentation.

Strict McCarthy Era rules and a growing anxiety regarding communist infiltration into American society put pressure on the budding gay communities around the country. In response, gender norms contracted, and acceptable gender presentation and behavior became heavily dictated by the dominant, middle-class white culture. This led to a homophile movement that facilitated activation of gay communities into a political minority and laid the foundation for the Stonewall riots to push the modern LGBTQ rights movement into the public discourse.

## Chapter 4: The March of the Mattachine

McCarthyism is often referred to in modern political discourse whenever accusations of character are made. It is a red-baiting tactic that tries to leverage fear of the other in an attempt delegitimize one's political enemies. A less known aspect of McCarthyism, but quickly gaining attention due to the documentary *The Lavender Scare* and the efforts of the Mattachine Society of Washington, D. C., is that McCarthyism not only targeted alleged communists, but also homosexual men and women working for the United States government. Gay men and women were already labeled "sexual deviants" and linking them to the perceived threat of the Soviet Union brought an even more negative impression of gay and lesbian people to the forefront of public consciousness.

However, there is little evidence that Harry Hay, the founder of the Mattachine Society, and his cohorts were on the McCarthy radar. Most of the Lavender Scare involved the State Department, and the founding members of Mattachine were not former government employees. While the idea of communists and homosexuals became nearly synonymous during this time, it was not because of any known link between Mattachine and their communist sympathies. The "homosexual" issue was little more than a political football used to smear the Truman administration and was based on an underdeveloped understanding of who gay men and women were and how easily they could be compromised by Soviet agents.

It is of interest to point out that the Mattachine Society was formed two years prior to the dissolution of the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union. While the MCS was not technically a gay activist group, it did bring attention to the plight of the gay working class.

The Mattachine Society was created under the same pressures under which the MCS folded. By 1953 there had been some form of queer militant activism since the end of World War II.

### **The Threat of Nonconformity**

Those who were unable, or unwilling, to conform to established social norms were viewed as a threat to American society. This encompassed all types of “degenerates” including single women. In her book *Homeward Bound*, Elaine Tyler May explains how the role of the family changed in the years after World War II. “The bomb” changed how Americans viewed the outside world, and the family became a sort of haven where core American values could be protected.

Women, who often participated in political movements during the 1920s and ‘30s, and went to work during wartime, were encouraged to stay home and focus on more domestic duties. Any threat to the nuclear family was perceived to be associated with the Soviets and communism, which were perceived as a primary menace to American society. May explains:

“Nonmarital sexual behavior in all its forms became a national obsession after the war. Many high-level government officials, along with individuals in positions of power and influence in fields ranging from industry to medicine and from science to psychology, believed wholeheartedly that there was a direct connection between communism and sexual depravity.<sup>102</sup>

The idea that communism was antithetical to American democracy was pervasive in the American consciousness. Sexualized, single women, often referred to as “bomb shells,”

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<sup>102</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), 94

represented “a destructive and disruptive force” that had to be kept in check.<sup>103</sup> Men, too, were expected to conform, and any deviations or effeminate behavior would be scrutinized. In his book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, John D’emilio described this relationship between communism and sexual deviancy.

Communists taught children to betray their parents; mannish women mocked the ideals of marriage and motherhood. Lacking toughness, the effete, overly educated male representatives of the Eastern establishment had lost China and Eastern Europe to the enemy. Weak-willed, pleasure seeking homosexuals – ‘half-men’ – feminized everything they touched and sapped the masculine vigor that had tamed a continent.<sup>104</sup>

### **“Identity Politics for Homosexuals”**

In 1951, Harry Hay, along with seven others, formed the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles. The selective social memory of the Mattachine Society is that it was the first gay rights advocate group, but because of their determination to remain respectable in the public eye they were unable to make much traction in the way of equal rights for LGBTQ Americans. In truth, Mattachine was formed by men that had been actively participating in communist political movements. The organizational structure mimicked the secret network of communist cells in order to protect members from police interference. To the founding members of the organization, this was a necessary precaution. The Mattachine Society was formed in the middle of a government purge of homosexuals and communists

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<sup>103</sup> May, 110.

<sup>104</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940 – 1970*, Second Ed., (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 49.

from public service and that homophobic sentiment had quickly filtered down into the public.

In 1953, because of concerns about communist infiltration, the leadership and founders left the group and the activities of the Mattachine Society became significantly more benign. This new, softer approach of the Mattachine Society is often blamed for the perceived futility of the group, but as oral historian Martin Meeker points out, this was only their public “mask.” He explains in his essay *Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice*, that “the presentation of a respectable public face was a deliberate and ultimately successful strategy to deflect antagonisms of its many detractors.”<sup>105</sup> One of the stated goals of the Mattachine Society was to “unify homosexuals as a group” and this was a necessary step for the events of 1969 to take place. By presenting to the public eye an ineffectual, benign organization they were free to be able to go about their work under the radar.

In the Security Matter regarding the Mattachine Society, the FBI confirmed the interest the federal government had in finding bad actors, deviants, and homosexuals. It shows a clear knowledge of the Mattachine Foundation, Inc. when it was reorganized in 1953. The main bulk of the document shows the FBI’s interest in the Mattachine Society’s ties to the Communist Party and claims that a certain person involved with One, Inc and the publication of *One Magazine* was influenced by the Communist Party, and they deny any claims made by One, Inc. that the FBI was hired by anyone to harass gay employees.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Martin Meeker, “Behind the Mask of Respectability,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (University of Texas Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>106</sup> FBI, “Mattachine Society Part 01 of 03,” 6.

While it is arguable how effective the Mattachine Society was throughout the 1950s, there was clear growth in community organization throughout this time. *One*, first published in 1953, and *The Mattachine Review* in 1955, were the first major publications to openly discuss gay issues. In the 1959 San Francisco mayoral race, Russel Wolden challenged the incumbent mayor George Christopher claiming that he had allowed the city to become “the national headquarters of the organized homosexuals in the United States.”<sup>107</sup> This not only shows the growth within the gay community in San Francisco, but also an increased public perception of gay mobilization.

By the 1960s, the Civil Rights movement was in full swing and the burgeoning student and anti-war movements brought social protest to the forefront of American politics. The homophile movement adapted the tactics of these other groups to bring awareness to their cause, fundamentally transforming how they approached the issue of individual rights for gay and lesbian Americans. In 1961, Frank Kameny formed a chapter of the Mattachine Society in Washington D.C. Under the leadership of Kameny, homophile activism took on a much more militant zeal. He urged gay men and lesbians to reject the label of the respectable homosexual, and demand acceptance from society.

Growing pressure from individual gay men and women forced change at local levels. In 1961, Jose Sarria became the first openly gay person to run for public office in the United States. In San Francisco in 1963, gay bars banded together to form a Tavern Guild, and the Society for Individual Rights was founded in 1964. Five years later, this new generation of activists would be the ones to blow out the closet doors at the Stonewall Inn in the summer of 1969, but it was the homophile activists such as the Daughters of Bilitis and the

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<sup>107</sup> Miller, 346

Mattachine Society who created the social apparatus that allowed for the success of Gay Liberation in the 1970s.

### **Social Protest in the 1960s**

The 1960s also brought about a new image of masculinity, a more aristocratic version that removed itself from the more brutish masculinity of the 1940s and '50s. This was embodied in President John F. Kennedy, who was a counterpoint to the previous eight years of Republican administrations.<sup>108</sup> In his book *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*, Robert D. Dean describes Kennedy's masculinity as the "image of youth, 'vigor,' moral courage, and 'toughness.' But also "an aristocratic persona embodying the virtues of the stoic warrior-intellectual."<sup>109</sup>

Kennedy being somewhat of a repudiation of the politics of the 1950s came at a turning point for the country. After a decade of heating up, the Civil Rights movement came into full swing by the mid-1960s. The Mattachine Society of Washington had evolved with other civil rights groups, and in 1965 organized the first protest for gay rights in front of the White House.<sup>110</sup> In November 1965, Philip Mandelkorn from *TIME* magazine wrote a letter to homophile advocate Frank Kameny requesting an interview. Philip stated that

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<sup>108</sup> Robert D. Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy*, (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 170.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 169

<sup>110</sup> Will Kohler, "46 Years Ago Today: First Lesbian & Gay Protest at the White House." *The Bilerico Report*, (2011), [http://bilerico.lgbtqnation.com/2011/04/46\\_years\\_ago\\_today\\_1st\\_lesbian\\_gay\\_protest\\_at\\_the.php](http://bilerico.lgbtqnation.com/2011/04/46_years_ago_today_1st_lesbian_gay_protest_at_the.php).

*TIME* was planning on publishing a piece on homosexuality and hoped that “an enlighten public will prove more compassionate than days past.”<sup>111</sup>

Other social protest groups, such as the Students for a Democratic Society, came about at this time as part of the New Left. They served as agitators and organizers, providing a blueprint for gay activists to follow. In 1968, the year before the Stonewall riots, two leading figures pushing for social change in the United States were assassinated: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr and Robert F. Kennedy.

After the chaos of the Democratic National Convention later that summer, the New Left fell apart in disarray. This, along with the growing national awareness of gay and lesbian communities, made room for the pressure building up in gay communities to explode at Stonewall in 1969, in what is now remembered and memorialized as the impetus for the modern LGBT rights movement.

### **Drag It Out into the Open, the Birth of Gay Liberation**

While the riots were central to a newly activated community of LGBTQ Americans, they were not a unique occurrence. Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage in “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth” explain that “[the riots] were not the first-time gays fought back against police; nor was the raid at the Stonewall Inn the first to generate political organizing.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Philip Mandelkorn, “TIME Magazine Letter to Frank Kameny,” The Kameny Papers, November 16, 1965. <http://www.kamenypapers.org/correspondence/TIME%20Magazine-%20Nov%2016%201965.jpg> (accessed July 5, 2019).

<sup>112</sup> Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M Crage, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth.” *American Sociological Review* Vol. 71 (2006), 725.

Print culture among gay communities also became more widespread in the latter half of the 1960s. The now defunct *Advocate* began as a newsletter that was distributed by the advocacy group Personal Rights in Defense and Education (PRIDE) in the local gay bars of Los Angeles beginning in 1967. The newsletter was a response to a New Year's Eve police raid on the Black Cat Tavern in L.A. and was an integral part of organizing the protests that occurred over the next month. By the time the Stonewall riots occurred in 1969 the newsletter had become *The Advocate* with a nationwide distribution, showing that prior to the event there was at least a loose network of gay communities around the country, connected through a variety of print media.

The year before the raid on the Black Cat, the drag queens of the Tenderloin district in San Francisco rioted at Gene Compton's Cafeteria. These events have largely faded from the collective consciousness of the LGBTQ community. Part of this involves differences in how organized the protestors and rioters were as well as the activation of gay friendly media. The Compton's Cafeteria riots did not make the news until 1972 when an article was published in a newsletter for San Francisco's first Pride parade. According to Dr. Susan Stryker of the University of Arizona, these riots [not Stonewall] were the first known instance of collective militant queer resistance to police harassment in United States history."<sup>113</sup>

Some of the differences in how successful collective action was in a particular place can be attributed to the level of political activity in the various gay communities around the United States. According to Christopher Agee, San Francisco gay bars had achieved

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<sup>113</sup> Ryan Kost, "The Riot That Predated Stonewall, 50 Years Later," San Francisco Chronicle, June 26, 2016 <https://bit.ly/2Map9Z4>.

liberation from the oppression of the San Francisco Police Department and the Alcohol Beverage Control by 1966.<sup>114</sup> They were highly organized, and by the time of the Stonewall Riots had been actively resisting persecution and participating in political discourse since at least the 1959 reelection of George Christopher as the mayor of San Francisco.<sup>115</sup> During this election, Christopher's opponent, Russell Wolden accused Christopher of being overly friendly to gay people. This created a ripple in the San Francisco gay community, and the Mattachine Society responded by announcing its intent to sue Wolden for slander.<sup>116</sup> This open rebuke of a politician helped open the way for even more political activism.

In 1961, bar owners banded together and formed the Tavern Guild to stand up to police extortion. Agee gives credit to the fact that more and more of the gay and lesbian bar owners in San Francisco came under the ownership of gay and lesbian entrepreneurs who were much more likely to resist delicensing than they had been previously.<sup>117</sup> This is in stark contrast to the New York City gay bars, such as the Stonewall Inn, that were still run by the mob. The bar owners, in league with the Society for Individual Rights, the Mattachine Society, and the Daughters of Bilitis, formed queer friendly networks with professional doctors, therapists, protestant pastors, and a growing liberal white-collar class. In 1964, the Council on Religion and Homosexuality (CRH) was formed between the Tavern Guild and local clergy.

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<sup>114</sup> Christopher Agee, "Gayola: Police Professionalization and the Politics of San Francisco's Gay Bars, 1950-1968," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* Vol. 15, No. 3 (Sep. 2006): 489.

<sup>115</sup> Agee, 476.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 477.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 479.

On New Year's Day in 1965, the CRH sponsored a dance for the gay and lesbian community in San Francisco. The dance, known as the New Year's Day Ball, is discussed by historians as a major turning point in the fight for equality in San Francisco. Hundreds of people attended the ball and had to go through a mob of SFPD officers to enter the venue. Four people, three lawyers and a pastor, were arrested for obstructing the police. The next day the SFPD was publicly called out by the CRH in a press conference. The complaints against the police, backed by the decidedly more legitimate voice of the clergy, were acknowledged by the press and the rebuffed SFPD ceased its organized raids on gay and lesbian bars.<sup>118119</sup>

The relationship between homophile organizations and bar culture was somewhat tenuous. The goal of homophiles such as the Mattachine Society, was to maintain a respectable public image. They worked closely with professional doctors, lawyers, psychologists, and sociologists as a liaison between the gay community and the public at large. The success of local homophile, and later gay liberation, activists may be linked to the relationship between the local gay bars and police departments.<sup>120</sup> According to historian Peter Boag, Portland's homophile and gay liberation movements were belated because bars in the area did not come under the same scrutiny by municipal authorities that the bars in other locations such as Seattle and San Francisco experienced. Boag explains that "there appeared to be no need after 1964 for Portland bars to remain active, by forming a tavern guild – as San Francisco activists had done in 1962 – to present a unified front against

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<sup>118</sup> Agee, 485.

<sup>119</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 194.

<sup>120</sup> Boag, "Portland," 8.

municipal policies and actions. Because police did not constantly harass bar patrons, there was little immediate incentive to protest.”<sup>121</sup>

As Boag points out, the experience of Portland LGBTQ people is quite different than that of other western cities. The growth of homophile activism and militant resistance seems localized, varying greatly across cities and regions. Homophile groups were more active in areas with a more visible bohemian movement such as Seattle and San Francisco. But the San Francisco Mattachine Society pursued change too incrementally for their east coast colleagues in New York City, and the national organization collapsed in the early 1960s.

It is interesting that many of the major events of the 1960s involved drag queens. The balls promoted by the CRH and the Society for Individual Rights (SIR) often featured men performing in drag. The ubiquity of drag queens in gay culture has bled into the narrative of Stonewall. A common belief is that on the night of the police raid on the Stonewall Inn it was the drag queens that threw the first bricks as they were being arrested for crossdressing and gender nonconformity. This part of the narrative may have been popularized by novelist Sarah Schulman, who claimed it was “drag queens, Black drag queens, who fought the police at the famous Stonewall Inn rebellion in 1969”<sup>122</sup> This phrase is ubiquitous in online articles discussing the 1966 Compton’s Cafeteria riots, but no sources citing it name the novel.

It is unknown exactly who began the resistance at Stonewall, and police records do not reveal enough detail about who was arrested to come to a decisive conclusion. A

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<sup>121</sup> Boag, “Portland,” 34.

<sup>122</sup> Nicole Pasulka, “Ladies in the Streets: Before Stonewall, Transgender Uprising Challenged Lives,” NPR, (May 5, 2015), <https://n.pr/2GWxDRJ>.

misrepresentation of the use of the word “queens” in the *New York Daily News* article published on July 6<sup>th</sup> may have influenced the rumor, or perhaps the retelling of the Compton’s Cafeteria riot had merged with the narrative of Stonewall. It is significant that images of the riot at Compton’s Cafeteria are used to refer to the queens at Stonewall, even though the queens at Stonewall were effeminate men rather than the transgender women that rioted in the Tenderloin District in San Francisco three years prior.

The momentum found by LGBTQ advocates at the Stonewall Inn was the result of decades of oppression and activism that created a nation-wide network of LGBTQ people and their allies. Bar culture promoted community growth and the homophile organizations quietly instilled a need for validation and sense of identity among LGBTQ people across the country.

### **“Queen Bees are Stinging Mad!”**

On July 6<sup>th</sup>, 1969 Jerry Lisker, a writer for *The New York Daily News*, exclaimed “Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees are Stinging Mad!”<sup>123</sup> The sensational article described the explosive riots that occurred at the Stonewall Inn, a mob run bar in Lower Manhattan, the week prior. This event is now popularly considered to be the impetus of the modern Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) rights movement.

The riots themselves were reactionary to systemic oppression of LGBTQ people in New York City and around the United States. The Stonewall Inn was a known haven for not just gay people, but those that were unwelcome at more sophisticated gay hangouts. Homeless youth, people of color, gender non-conforming individuals, along with some

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<sup>123</sup> Jerry Lisker. “Homo Nests Raided, Queen Bees are Stinging Mad.” *The New York Daily News*, (July 6, 1969).

more elite clientele were all attracted to this location. Little more than rumor suggests why the New York Police Department decided to raid the Stonewall Inn that night. It was not uncommon for the Morals Squad to harass LGBTQ people, and the Stonewall Inn was not the only gay bar that had been subject to routine raids. The fact that the bar was so popular among the most visible, and vulnerable, of New York City's LGBTQ population may have contributed to the explosive nature of the riots. According to Dick Leitsch from the Mattachine Society of New York, the bar was significant enough to fight for because to many it was the only thing in their lives worth fighting for.<sup>124</sup>

For the police at the Stonewall Inn this would be one of the first times they had faced any kind of resistance from patrons of the bars they raided. Even though advocate groups such as the Mattachine Society had been publicly active throughout the latter half of the 1960s and other homophile advocacy groups were sprouting up around the country, these kinds of raids were still considered routine and the victims of harassment were expected to comply with the authorities.

The Stonewall Inn was not a public bar, but a private club. Liquor licenses were revoked from institutions selling liquor to gay men and gender-nonconformists. The owners of the establishment got around these laws by fronting as a private drinking club that required its patrons to sign in. The exclusivity was shallow, as firsthand accounts say that the Stonewall became a haven for the rejected of society shortly after it opened. The relationship between the bar owners, reportedly mafia, and the "Morals Squad" of the

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<sup>124</sup> Garance Fanke-Ruta, "An Amazing 1969 Account of the Stonewall Uprising," *The Atlantic*, (January 24, 2013), Accessed October 21, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2tChRD>

police department is an important part of the story. According to the narrative, the police raided the Stonewall Inn because they had not received their kickback, as mafia owners were known to extort some of their wealthier, closeted clientele. If they did not pay, the police would inevitably raid the club.<sup>125</sup>

By the mid-1960s there were signs that public opinion was starting to turn in favor of LGBTQ people. In April of 1966, Dick Leitsch accompanied by two other members of Matachine Society of New York attempted a “sip in” where they would loudly proclaim their homosexuality and then request a drink. This would have gone against liquor laws in the city that prohibited the selling of alcohol to gay people in an attempt to stifle public meetings and curb perceived immoral behavior. According to a *New York Times* article titled “3 Deviates Invite Exclusion by Bars”, the three men had to go to several bars before they were refused.<sup>126</sup>

The sip in is significant because it is one of the first events of direct action led by the Mattachine Society since the early 1950s. After restructuring in 1953, the group had been mostly discreet, not wanting to call attention to itself. The nature of the sit in goes along with the other forms of social protest occurring during the Civil Rights Era and the Vietnam War. It also shows that local business owners were not as discriminatory against gay men as Leitsch had expected. Growing public support for LGBTQ people, brought about by the 1960s counterculture, would be vital for the success of the movement.

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<sup>125</sup> Carter, 77-80.

<sup>126</sup> Thomas A. Johnson, “3 Deviates Invite Exclusion by Bars,” *The New York Times*, (April 22, 1966), 43. <https://nyti.ms/2AMeTBD>

## Beyond the Narrative

How Stonewall has been memorialized, the impact of contemporary political and social movements, and a growing national discussion on race, class, and gender all contributed to the ascendance from a routine police raid on a gay bar to an abstract idea of gay emancipation, and it is essential to explore these intercepting dynamics to understand how the riots have gained traction as the founding myth of the gay rights movement. The demonstrations following the riots and the Pride parades that have occurred annually around the world borrowed heavily from the volatile political and social environs of the 1960s. Larry Gross, a professor at the University of Southern California-Annenberg and contributor to the progressive news site *truthdig.com*, explains that “the name Gay Liberation Front was an obvious reference to the Vietnamese National Liberation Front, reflecting the activists’ engagement in the anti-war movement.”<sup>127</sup>

The name of the movement is just one example; the gay liberation movement borrowed rituals as well as symbols to help legitimize the undertaking. Marches were organized reminiscent of the Civil Rights movement and eventually large rallies were held at the National Mall, something that protest groups of many political and social viewpoints had participated in since the early 1900s. To understand the Stonewall riots, the influence these other protest movements had on the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and other LGBTQ rights groups that formed after Stonewall must be acknowledged.

On the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall Michael Bronski’s article “Stonewall was a riot” was published on *The Rag Blog*, an online continuation of the underground periodical *The*

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<sup>127</sup> Larry Gross, “Homo Nest Raided, Queen Bees Stinging Mad.” *Truthdig* (2011), <https://bit.ly/2LVmLWN>.

*Rag*. Bronski details his experience with Stonewall as a young man and explains what he would like his students to understand about the events of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969.

I try to impress on my students...that without the prevalence of the Vietnam War protests, without the women's liberation movement, without the example of the Black Panthers, the Young Lords, the counterculture's mantra of 'sex, drugs, and rock and roll,' there would have been no Stonewall riots. There would have been no gay liberation movement (at least not as it happened in 1969). The queens – and let's remember that they were aided by the street people in the village, men and women we would now call homeless – rioted at Stonewall because everybody was rioting; they protested because everyone was protesting. The Stonewall riots were completely in sync with the crazy, frantic, angry, and yes, sometimes heedless political activities...of the late 1960s.<sup>128</sup>

Bronski's article is a reminder that events can only be fully understood within their historical context and lose meaning when they are removed. However, in order to tackle the claim that Stonewall was the impetus of the LGBTQ rights movement, a movement must be defined. How social protest and collective action manifest must also be explored to fully understand why the Stonewall Uprising became the spark that ignited a world-wide shift toward gay liberation.

## **Conclusion**

The 1950s and '60s saw a rise in LGBTQ activism starting with the Mattachine Society. Because of McCarthy Era policies regarding employment of homosexuals in the federal government, LGBTQ people, who were beginning to coalesce into a political minority group, reacted in different ways depending on location. Cities that had a more

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<sup>128</sup> Michael Bronski, "The Rag Blog: Stonewall Was a Riot: Gay Liberation and the Struggle for Social Change," *The Rag Blog*, (June 27, 2009), <https://bit.ly/2OfDNvy>

autonomous gay bar culture found liberation earlier than those like Chicago and New York City, where bars were often owned by the mob and at the mercy of a corrupt police department. San Francisco gay bars had won their right to dignity and public spaces years before the riots at the Stonewall Inn in 1969.

The Mattachine Society used the momentum created by the Civil Rights movement to stage their own direct action, such as the sit in and the march at the National Mall in Washington D. C. in 1965. The modern LGBTQ rights movement, therefore, does not begin with the 1969 Stonewall riots. They did, however, serve to unify a growing national community of LGBTQ people who then utilized the events at Stonewall to catapult LGBTQ rights issues into the public discourse. The watershed moment said to occur at the Stonewall Inn was created by changes in political and social regulations of gender expression, decades of individual direct action, and a growing self-awareness of LGBTQ people.

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