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A Divided Revolution: Social and Political Divisions in the Gay Liberation Movement

ELA M. GARZA
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Reviewed and approved* by the following:

Daniel Letwin
Associate Professor of History
Thesis Supervisor

Cathleen Cahill
Professor of History and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies
Thesis Honors Adviser

* Electronic approvals are on file.

ABSTRACT

The Gay Liberation movement in America has often been defined as a novel, liberatory, and revolutionary political movement that successfully gave the queer community the rights it has now. While this version of the story is mostly true, it is not the complete story; the movement did not include everyone. The movement began in 1969 after the Stonewall Riots, and it was an evolution from the Homophile movement that preceded it. It was revolutionary and liberatory for the young gay men who dominated it, but it did not meet the needs or wants of lesbians and trans people who took part in it, and some of the homophile activists who witnessed it. This thesis analyzes the various divisions within the Gay Liberation Movement. First, it will discuss and analyze the political gap between youth and their older counterparts through the evolution of gay politics from the Homophile Movement to the Gay Liberation Movement, as well as the experiences of younger and older activists who witnessed the transition. Second, it will discuss and analyze the alienating experiences of lesbians and trans people in the movement from the 1969 Stonewall Riots to the late 1970s. Specifically, it will focus on the sexism lesbians frequently faced from many men in the movement and the general lack of support for the trans community from lesbians and gay men from the perspectives of the people who experienced it firsthand. The thesis will also briefly explore how the above groups (the youth, lesbians, and the trans community) created movements achieve their political aims and needs.

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Introduction

The Gay Liberation Movement launched full force in the United States after the 1969 Stonewall Riots, beginning a long era of gay rights activism. Seemingly out of nowhere, a group of downtrodden, tired, and angry people fought back against police violence en masse, seeking retribution and justice for the mistreatment they had endured for far too long. After days of rioting in New York City, queer people united into various groups across the nation, crying for unity in the fight for rights. It was a radical movement in a decade of other radical movements, and they united in the struggle for the rights that had been kept out of their reach. At least, that is how the movement is remembered. In reality, the movement was divided in the same way many others were, and some people dominated the movement more than others. Gay men dominated the Gay Liberation Movement, while lesbians and the trans community were ignored and alienated from the movement. This only accelerated the longer it went on. If one was not part of the in-group—gay men and lesbians—they were not given the same resources or level of acknowledgement, leading them eventually to form their own movements.

This thesis will explore these social divisions, showing that they have been present since the beginning of the mainstream movement. The paper will start with the historical origins of queer politics and community, describing notable movements, demonstrations, and the general environment for gay men, lesbians, and trans people alike from the late 19th century to the late 1960s. Afterward, it will move into the Stonewall Riots and provide an overview of the Gay Liberation Movement that followed and the generational divide in the movement as well as the alienation of lesbians and trans people from the movement.

Chapter 1: An Evolution of Queer Politics (1830s-1968)

Gay, Trans, and Lesbian Community and Culture Before World War II

The Beginning

Modern American gay and trans communities and cultures originated out of the single-sex, homosocial, working-class communities of the early 19th century that had a fundamentally different sexual and gender dynamics than those of modern day.¹ Inversion was the primary theory behind sexual attraction during that time period. Inversion refers to the theory that males who desired other males and females who desired other females were the opposite sex internally, constituting a third sex.² The terms “homosexuality” and “heterosexuality” were first used publicly in 1880 by Karl Maria Kertbany, a German pioneer of sexology, in a contribution to a book called *Discovery of the Soul*. Richard von Krafft-Ebing was credited with popularizing the term six years later, which was when the term was popularized.³ The terms were used interchangeably until the early 20th century, when homosexuality came to simply mean attraction to the same sex (without having an inverted gender).⁴ Recognition of purely trans began in the mid-19th century, the same time gay male and lesbian communities were established. However, transgender history was intertwined with the history of both communities due to the nature of the

¹ Bronski, Michael. 2011. *A Queer History of the United States*. Revisioning American History. Beacon Press, 46; Chauncey, George. 2019. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. Second trade paperback edition. Updated edition. Basic Books, 41.

² Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 95-96; Stryker, Susan. 2017. *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*. Second edition. Revised edition. Seal Press, 50.

³ Faderman, Lillian, ed. 2007. *Great Events from History. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Events, 1848-2006*. Salem Press, 10, 12; Halem, Jessica, Jen Manion, and Carl G. Streed. 2024. “A Legacy of Cruelty to Sexual and Gender Minority Groups.” *New England Journal of Medicine* 391 (5): 385–91.

<https://doi.org/10.1056/NEJMp2407068>, 386; Reay, Barry. 2020. *Trans America: A Counter-History*. Polity Press, 18.

⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 125-126.

inversion model of same-sex attraction.⁵ Many people who would have been considered trans—typically referred to as “queens” in most accounts—in the modern day generally considered themselves part of the gay world and called themselves “gay” even when sexual attraction and gender/sex were separated in the early 20th century.⁶

Transness as a distinct concept developed around the 1880s, first being discussed in Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s 1886 book *Psychopathia Sexualis*. He, like other sexologists before him, believed that sexual desire was gendered and comprised of bodily and psychological (psychic) elements that developed during one’s life. “Abnormal” development would lead to homosexuality, which at its most extreme could create a “total sex delusion.” As a result, someone would see and present themselves as the opposite sex. While Krafft-Ebing did not use the term “transsexuality” explicitly, this likely is the earliest depiction of the concept.⁷ Perhaps the most famous sexologist of the era, Magnus Hirschfeld, wrote the most famous works on homosexuality and transness.⁸ Hirschfeld coined the terms “transvestism” and “transsexualism.”⁹ The former was coined in his book *Die Transvestites*, and the latter was coined in a 1923 lecture at the University of Berlin.¹⁰ Kraft-Ebing and Hirschfeld were part of a network of sympathetic scientists and medical professionals who would help trans people get access to medical transition in the US, though it would not become effective until the 1940s and ‘50s.¹¹

⁵ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 48-50.

⁶ Faderman, Lillian, and Stuart Timmons. 2006. *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*. Basic Books, 114.

⁷ Reay, *Trans America: A Counter-History*, 18-22.

⁸ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 55-57.

⁹ Reay, *Trans America: A Counter-History*, 25.

¹⁰ Magnus, Hirschfeld. 1923. “Die Intersexuelle Konstitution [The Intersexual Constitution].” Lecture. Translated by DeepL. March 16. <https://transreads.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/theintersexualconstitution.pdf>.

¹¹ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 58-60.

In the mid to late-19th century, two of the biggest centers of the trans community were San Francisco, California, and New York City, New York, based in the Gold Rush towns and vice districts of New York City, respectively.¹² San Francisco during the Gold Rush consisted mostly of men and was known for its loose social restrictions and gender imbalance. There were few women, and the women who were there often either sold sex or were disguised as men. It was this environment that encouraged experimentation with cross-dressing and sexual identity for both men and the few women who lived in Gold Rush towns.¹³ New York's gay community was centralized in working-class vice districts like the Bowery. The Bowery was a red-light district made up of many working-class people, often men who lived or worked in the area. Gay men, prostitutes, and straight men congregated in the saloons, and sex between men was common. Straight men had sex with prostitutes and gay men (especially "fairies") interchangeably, having sex with the latter without seeing themselves as abnormal. Middle-class gay men congregated in these districts as well to escape the restrictions imposed by their social circles.¹⁴

Documented queer history places the beginning of lesbian communities within the women's movement, the first wave of the feminist movement, in the late 1840s and 1850s. Social and economic changes, along with political movements, created all-female, middle-class communities that allowed women to earn middle-class incomes and become financially independent. Because these women were not required to marry, they could live with other

¹² Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 46; Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 34-36, 40-41.

¹³ Sears, Clare. 2015. *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco. Perverse Modernities*. Duke University Press, 28-30, 38.

¹⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 34-36, 41-44, 47-48, 65, 83,

women and make lives for themselves, which was the perfect opportunity for middle- and upper-class lesbians to live with their partners in what was called a “Boston Marriage.”¹⁵ “Boston Marriages” were also seen as a form of praxis and recruitment for women’s rights activists, defined as a nurturing relationship between two equal and morally superior individuals, as well as an opportunity for women bring other women into the movement (whether it was platonic or not).¹⁶ It was unclear how many of these relationships were sexual, as the primary forms of affection were verbal and physical, but would have depended on how the women involved were socialized to view sex and affection. According to Kinsey, 12% of women born in the 19th century had sexual contact with other women that resulted in orgasm, so there likely was sex happening in many of these relationships. It was also unclear whether working-class women had these relationships and communities, as they lacked the financial independence middle-class reformers had. The only way romantic relationships between women could work was if at least one earned a man’s wage and if they had both leisure time and some degree of social privacy. Working-class women would not have had either until the end of the 19th century.¹⁷

Backlash, Suppression, Isolation, and (Some) Resistance

The backlash against these gay and trans communities established in the late 19th century led to the creation of the tools of oppression used on the gay community that activists would challenge over half a century later. Tools like the pathologization of homosexuality and the

¹⁵ Faderman, Lillian. 1991. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*. Between Men--between Women. Columbia University Press, 11-12, 15.

¹⁶ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 17-18, 24. .

¹⁷ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 12, 38. .

creation of police harassment mechanisms originated from this period of time. The pathologization of homosexuality pre-psychiatry primarily occurred through sexology. Sexology had a negative impact on the perception of homosexuality. Outside of a few, sexologists tended to characterize same-sex love as an unfortunate, tragic affliction,¹⁸ which served as the foundation of psychiatry's treatment of homosexuality decades later, as well as the association between homosexuality and crime.¹⁹

Inversion was specifically weaponized against lesbians and early feminists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The female inversion model was based on working-class women, women who dressed and acted as men to have more freedom, and women who had shown any discontent with their sex role. The overall model conflated sex role behavior, gender identity, and to whom someone was attracted. Female inversion was specifically associated with masculinity/masculine drives, fulfilling the dual purpose of discrediting the women's movement and love/bonding between women. If a woman wanted to divert from her biological role, then it must have been because she was abnormal and inverted. Women's bonding, particularly romantic friendships, was seen as a threat to old-fashioned femininity and thus needed to be regulated or suppressed. This was true of both American and European sexology.²⁰ However, there were some positives to the inversion model for women. First, women who subscribed to the female inversion model believed they could not be pressured into becoming heterosexual. If they were "a third sex" ("intermediate sex"), their love for women was "'mysteriously determined by God or Nature'" and people would just have to accept it. Second, they had permission to be

¹⁸ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 40.

¹⁹ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 163-166; Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians*, 75.

²⁰ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 41-48, 49-50.

overtly sexual due to the masculine drive. Third, they could begin to speak out against legal and social persecution. Fourth, they knew there were others like them out there, and knew they were not alone.²¹

The overall criminalization of existing while homosexual or trans (both under the category of inversion) through an aggressive police-harassment mechanism was linked to a broader campaign against the vices of urbanization. One of the many vices was the increase in inversion, which was associated with urbanization and the massing of certain populations—particularly immigrants—and the anxiety it caused for many Americans who feared the loss of control over their cities and society. Combined with the fact that cities broke down the family and social ties that usually regulated behavior, social purists felt they needed to clean up the cities and regain control in the late 19th century. At first, gay culture was not directly targeted, but that did not mean it was not affected. Social purity groups had two methods to try to clean up the cities: reconstructing the urban landscape to minimize the effects of urban disorder and law and surveillance.²²

The use of law and police surveillance was particularly pervasive in both New York City and San Francisco. In New York City, the Society for the Prevention of Crime (founded in 1877) and similar societies compelled the police to enforce anti-vice laws, usually by exposing police corruption in the vice districts, through quasi-police powers, and through powerful economic connections that could put economic pressure on businesses and landlords. This was a common way to police gay and working-class culture. Other ways included the increased enforcement of

²¹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 57-59.

²² Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 132-133, 137.

sodomy laws and the prevention of the use of public space and businesses for sex, both of which were meant to target other crimes like prostitution and public sex between heterosexual couples.²³ Homosexuals could also be arrested for existing in public in major cities like New York City, either by themselves or in groups, typically being charged with degenerate disorderly conduct or solicitation, even before this police practice became legal in 1923. This applied in businesses and on the streets, though enforcement in restaurants, cafes, and cafeterias depended on how tolerant management was and if management had a relationship with local law enforcement and on the area the business was in. Apartments (common place by the 1920s) offered gay men, especially middle-class gay men, privacy and space to have friends and lovers over, which created a layer of protection from the constant surveillance.²⁴

In San Francisco, legislators passed a series of “good morals and decency” laws, one of which made appearing in public in a dress not belonging to one’s sex (cross-dressing) illegal in 1863. The laws were meant to target prostitution.²⁵ By the early 1860s, the city’s gender ratio began to level out, and San Francisco went through a social reorganization led by social purity groups such as the Vigilance Committee (founded in 1856). “Respectable” women and the middle-class family outnumbered “disreputable” women and other “undesirables,” and the ladies became a rhetorical device used by social purity groups like the Vigilance Committee to mobilize the cleaning up of the city, particularly of prostitution. The committee never directly condemned cross-dressing but did use cross-dressing imagery to ridicule opponents.²⁶ In

²³ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 137-138, 140-141.

²⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 158-159, 170-172.

²⁵ Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 42-44.

²⁶ Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 44, 46, 48, 50, 52, 56-58.

practice, the cross-dressing law was used to regulate multiple gender violations: feminist dress reformers, women who cross-dressed to take part in slum tours, female impersonators (drag queens), and people whose gender did not match their anatomy in legal ways. All of these groups were seen as major social threats at the time, either as a threat to male dominance as dress reformers were, a threat to social morality as cross-dressers did, and cultural gender legibility as those with a differing gender identity did.²⁷

In the late 19th century, nuisance laws were primarily used to suppress perceived problem groups. Certain bodies were categorized as “problem bodies.” Those who fell under the category were considered urban blights that needed to be managed. Under these laws, problem groups would either be excluded from public life, confined to designated areas (typically vice districts), concealed, or removed from public life. Cross-dressers and other gender variants were primarily excluded from the public (primarily through laws), but could also be confined through institutionalization or being pushed into vice districts.²⁸ Police and citizens would then act as surveillance, keeping an eye out for potential violators of anti-cross-dressing laws and ensuring it was enforced. Cross-dressing could only be done in private, or else one would be arrested if one could not pass in public. This effectively outlawed the existence of people who lived as another gender full-time and could not confine it to private space.²⁹ Homosexuals of all classes generally received similar treatment and were also often pushed towards vice districts, as well if they wanted to participate in the subculture in any capacity.³⁰

²⁷ Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 62, 65, 115.

²⁸ Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 69-72, 74.

²⁹ Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 73, 76-77, 81-84.

³⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 41.

Gay culture in many cities (in New York City specifically) expanded and evolved during and after World War I because of military life, and as a result, it became a *lot* more visible. Men were able to experiment within and outside of military life and meet self-identified gay men who guided them through urban gay life and culture; many soldiers stayed in the cities after the war to continue to see and partake in it. Some men even brought back knowledge of a homosexual rights movement occurring in Europe and told their friends about works by Magnus Hirschfeld and Edward Carpenter, or tried to begin their own movements. Like African American men encountering more tolerance in Europe than they ever had in the States, homosexual men encountered a more tolerant and politically active world in Europe.³¹ There were two gay enclaves in New York City: Greenwich Village and Harlem. Greenwich Village originated as a bohemian community that drew homosexuals due to its toleration of nonconformity and social experimentation. It was considered a refuge for people who wanted to escape the supervision of their hometowns and was one of the few communities in which gay people were accepted.³² The Village had gay businesses beginning in the early 1920s, typically having some type of arrangement with police or protection against police to survive the intense police crackdowns of 1924-1925. Harlem was popular with both black and white gay men and women, though black residents had less freedom than white tourists did because they lived in the neighborhood.³³ Harlem was generally less accepting of gay and drag culture than Greenwich Village, but like

³¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 144-145.

³² Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 227, 229, 231-234.

³³ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 237-240, 244-246, 248; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 70.

Greenwich Village, it was more tolerant and less supervised than other neighborhoods in the city.

Drag was popular in both Greenwich Village and Harlem.³⁴

The post-World War I era did not have as significant an effect on establishing a lesbian subculture in America. However, the post-war period led to a lot of women experimenting sexually. In a 1929 study by Katharine Davis (“Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty-two Hundred Women”), one of the first in-depth surveys of American women’s sexuality to be conducted. Regarding lesbian sexuality, she found out that 50% of single women and 33% of married women had intense emotional feelings for other women, at least ½ of which were reported as sexual feelings and sexual relationships. When sex did happen, it did not ruin women’s lives, and married women were able to adjust to heterosexual marriage fine; lesbian sexuality was common, and it did not undermine family values. This experimentation was part of a larger culture of rebellion that included drag balls and slumming,³⁵ it was the foundation of the expansion of lesbian communities, particularly in the cities.

Lesbian communities were centered in the same areas as gay men were, particularly the working-class lesbian bars.³⁶ However, lesbianism as an identity and lifestyle was not taken seriously by heterosexual men in enclaves such as Greenwich Village and Harlem. Despite its reputation, Greenwich Village culture was generally ambivalent about lesbianism. Sexual *experimentation* between women was part of the culture, but lesbianism as an *identity* was not taken seriously by heterosexual men in the Village, who tended to believe lesbianism was a

³⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 226, 247, 249, 253, 264.

³⁵ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 63, 66-67; Faderman, *Great Events from History. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Events, 1848-2006*, 80.

³⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 228; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 79-80.

phase. Women were expected to settle down with a man and were pressured to at least be bisexual before they did. It was a slightly more progressive version of societal messaging at the time, which otherwise pushed excessive heterosexuality and a rejection of any homosexual characteristics. The lesbian subculture of Greenwich Village thrived in spite of the attitude of Village men. Harlem's culture took sex and love between women just as seriously as Greenwich Village culture did. There was a black lesbian subculture, and bisexuality was not uncommon, but lesbianism was not considered a serious identity or lifestyle by the general community.³⁷

Drag (also called female or male impersonation) had been a generally popular pastime and spectacle for both homosexual and heterosexual audiences since the early 20th century. The practice was generally centralized in vice districts and the underground urban world.³⁸ The "fairy," also called the "pansy," was just as popular a draw as drag was in vice districts. Fairies had been a common sight in working-class vice districts and early gay enclaves since the late 19th century, described as inverters who were virtually women and filled the same role as women in many of the communities they were a part of. However, unlike female impersonators, they wore little to no women's clothing; fairies/pansies typically wore unconventional, flamboyant men's fashion. They were also known to sell sex. Many middle-class men would come to vice districts like the Bowery to watch and interact with them. Pansies were especially popular through 1930-1931—also known as the "Pansy Craze"—as part of pansy acts performed in both working-class clubs and upper-class clubs. Both drag shows and fairy/pansy acts drew heterosexual tourists partaking in slumming, in which "respectable" people visited

³⁷ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 69, 73-76, 82-88, 90.

³⁸ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 114, 121.

neighborhoods and ghettos—designated vice districts—like Harlem and Greenwich Village to experience the “strange” subculture of urban nightlife.³⁹

Concerned by the increased presence and visibility of urban gay culture, social purity groups in America shifted the focus of their campaigns to target homosexuality directly during the post-World War I era. They were primarily concerned about “perverts” soliciting sex-starved soldiers and corrupting them by spreading dangerous attitudes and practices. Their goal was to eliminate or suppress the visibility of inversion/homosexuality and gender variance (“problem bodies”) in the cities. In New York City, for example, the Society for the Suppression of Vice and the New York police jointly led the campaign. The Society orchestrated police raids on the places known as homosexual hotspots, including clubs, shops, theaters, bathhouses, saloons, and the street in general. Police participated willingly and spent their time investigating and prosecuting homosexual solicitation. The laws and procedures enforced by these purity groups used the same mechanism as nuisance laws. San Francisco, New York, and cities across the nation had essentially created a legal framework that forced those classified as “problem bodies” to build an underground world only they could inhabit.⁴⁰ As a result of their efforts, the visibility of gay and trans subcultures overall decreased.

The efforts of social purity groups to suppress the visibility of homosexual and trans communities were undone by the 1919 Prohibition Amendment, which was intended to destroy the working-class nightlife culture and promote the morally correct public sociability. However, it had the opposite effect, as it expanded a thriving gay underground nightlife scene and gay

³⁹ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 121; Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 36, 40-44, 47-48, 51-52, 67, 309, 314, 319-320,

⁴⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 141-143, 146-147; Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco*, 67, 73.

subcultures. The strict policing of nightlife that had been in place for decades had been undermined. Police corruption skyrocketed, as the police were increasingly being paid off to not target the paying establishment. Crime syndicates like the Mafia also offered protection from the police. Speakeasies and clubs bribed police and developed tactics to hide their activity if raids occurred, which gay and gay-tolerant establishments had been doing since they existed. In addition popular resistance to prohibition had encouraged law-abiding, middle-class citizens to break the law and question the moral authority of both police and the law in general.⁴¹ The environment was ripe for experimentation and the expansion of city nightlife.

The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 and the Great Depression were turning points in the success of social purity movement efforts to clean up the cities. In the early 1930s, a new campaign in New York again targeted urban gay culture with the goal of exclude gay men from the public sphere. The campaign used a combination of smear articles, general street harassment, and police raids on drag balls and clubs that featured pansy acts. Once prohibition was repealed, the main mechanism of the campaign was the threat of losing a liquor license, which led to a more pervasive and effective surveillance and control of public life.⁴² After Prohibition, businesses in New York City could only retain their liquor licenses if owners and patrons complied with state regulations governing behavior in businesses. The presence of gay men, lesbians, prostitutes, gamblers, and other “undesirables” was enough to violate said regulations and prompt continuous raiding and closing of bars that accepted or tolerated gay clientele. Businesses were often closed due to disorderly patron behavior, but there was often little evidence presented for disorderly behavior. There was, effectively, an invisible code of conduct

⁴¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 305-307.

⁴² Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 331-335.

that people had to abide by, targeting those considered abnormal by the dominant culture. Most bars only lasted a few months and moved frequently. Because legitimate businesses were hesitant to challenge the State Liquor Authority, founded in 1934, organized crime syndicates took over the gay bar business. The gay bar business had been successfully destabilized but was never destroyed.⁴³

Gay life in the city became even more hidden and segregated from the rest of the city. For survival, businesses and other homosexuals were encouraged (or pressed) to reject “obvious” homosexuals like fairies. For those who still wanted to participate in bar culture, there was a hierarchy of bars; bars with less obvious patrons that could afford protection were at the top, while bars with campy, obvious patrons that could not afford protection were at the bottom. It was safer for many to avoid bars altogether and meet in private residences or establishments that did not have a gay reputation. People who chose to continue to use public spaces to engage in the gay world were in a lot more danger than before.⁴⁴ This was on top of the already negative effects of the Great Depression.

Lesbianism was also suppressed during the 1930s, but through a completely different mechanism: the Great Depression’s failing economy. This primarily affected middle-class lesbians. Middle-class women were increasingly unable to achieve and their keep financial independence, often because they lost their middle-class incomes (their jobs were reserved for men). If they wanted to survive, they would have to marry men who could either provide an adequate income or supplement their income. Working-class lesbians had no expectation of

⁴³ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 334-337, 339, 342, 345-347.

⁴⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 333, 348-351.

better jobs or wages, and some chose to take advantage of the fragile economic state. They would travel around the country as hobos with their partners, using the cover of safety or company. In an era where nonconformity was discouraged, many women were forced to compromise their overall fulfillment for security, and lesbians were no exception. Middle-class lesbians were forced into a bisexual compromise, where queer women would either be forced or encouraged into heterosexual marriage in exchange for security and financial stability. Sometimes these marriages were fronts and nothing more, but most of the time they were genuine marriages. If the woman in question was bisexual, the compromise was easier to participate in, but often these women just tolerated it. Lesbian subcultures did continue to exist, but like with gay male culture, it was hidden, usually in the cities. It flourished in all female institutions and in bar culture; however, most lesbians did not go to bars because of the risk of police harassment. Middle-class lesbians, for example, would congregate in all-female institutions (usually academic), but even in these communities, they were reluctant to identify themselves as lesbians. It was important for women to find these spaces because without them, they would be very lonely.⁴⁵

There was no mass homosexual political movement in the United States before the 1950s, but there were attempts. These attempts were inspired by the German Homosexual Emancipation, which began in 1921 and ended in 1933. The overall goal of the movement was to gain full citizenship rights, especially because many had been part of the German war effort in World War I. There were two fronts: censorship and sodomy law. After World War I, pro-censorship groups targeted the seeming onslaught of queer media after wartime restrictions were

⁴⁵ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 93-95, 97-99, 105-111.

lifted, believing that they would save youth from being influenced by it. On this front, the Homosexual Emancipation movement lost, as in 1926, with the passage of a law that effectively restricted access to “filthy” or “trashy” publications to those who were eighteen or older if one asked for it directly.⁴⁶ Abolishing Paragraph 175 (Germany’s anti-homosexual sodomy law) was equally important to prevent the intrusion of the German government into the lives of German homosexuals. The law was almost abolished in 1929, but was intended to be replaced by Paragraph 297, which would have raised the age of consent for homosexual sexual acts to twenty-one and outlawed coercive and paid homosexual sex. The increasingly prominent National Socialist Party blocked the change.⁴⁷ The Homosexual Emancipation Movement inspired some gay American soldiers, like Henry Gerber, to attempt to create a similar movement. Gerber created the first known homosexual rights organization in 1924 in Chicago, Illinois,⁴⁸ but a mass movement comparable to Germany’s was not successful until after World War II.

World War II and Official Creation of a Mass Movement/Community

With the creation of single-sex spaces in military and civilian life came increased opportunities for sexual experimentation, something the federal government paid increased

⁴⁶ Marhoefer, Laurie. 2015. *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis*. German and European Studies 23. University of Toronto Press, 20-21, 31-33, 39, 43-48, 65-67, 71.

⁴⁷ Mancini, Elena. 2010. *Magnus Hirschfeld and the Quest for Sexual Freedom: A History of the First International Sexual Freedom Movement*. 1st ed. Palgrave Macmillan’s Critical Studies in Gender, Sexuality, and Culture. Palgrave Macmillan, 118; Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis*, 120-123.

⁴⁸ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 144.

attention to during World War II. At the beginning of United States involvement in the war, draftees were screened for homosexuality, and the military aggressively enforced Article 125 (the military's anti-sodomy law). Once it was clear how many people were needed for the war effort, the military dropped that part of the screening process but became active in finding and purging homosexual soldiers. They would use a variety of methods to try to catch any soldiers who could be considered homosexual, and once they thought they caught them, they would send the soldier to a hospital psychiatric unit. There, the soldier would be interrogated, physically and sexually abused, and humiliated. Afterwards, they would receive a "blue discharge," which while neither honorable nor dishonorable, meant the soldier would not receive any military benefits nor would they be able to get a job. This had the dual effect of creating and expanding gay communities in the cities, as those who received "blue discharges" were often sent to the closest port cities (New York City, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston, etc.). Male and female discharges often stayed in these cities. It was essentially a "government sponsored migration of the gay community."⁴⁹

The massive expansion of freedom women experienced during the war massively benefited lesbians, who were able to have financial independence again. This led to the formation of a mass lesbian subculture. Communities were often centered in poorer sections of the cities, where housing was most affordable and the police were less present, and bars continued to be the center of gay culture and community.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 158-159, 165-166; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 126-127.

⁵⁰ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 171-173; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 129-130.

Trans people and issues came into the public eye in the 1950s and 60s after news of Christine Jorgensen's successful sex change surgery (done in Denmark) hit the news cycle in 1952. This event was also when the term "transsexual" became popular in the United States, being used to refer to those who wanted to seek surgical transition and officially separate sexual orientation from gender. Harry Benjamin popularized the term a year later.⁵¹ By the 1960s, transsexuality had become a topic of fascination for the general public, and the opportunities for research and access to medical transition expanded. There were at least 6 clinics/hospitals that offered the services: Gender Identity Clinic of The John Hopkins Hospital (founded in 1966 shortly after Benjamin published *The Transsexual Phenomenon*), Department of Surgery at Stanford University School of Medicine, the Payne Whitney Psychiatric Clinic (New York, New York), Gender Identity Research and Treatment Clinic at University of California at Los Angeles, the University of Michigan, and Passavant Memorial Hospital of Northwestern University Medical School (Chicago, Illinois). The most accessible service was hormone replacement therapy, as surgery was heavily gatekept unless one could pay for it. Trans people could access simple surgical procedures and hormone therapy beginning in the late 19th century, and were eventually able to access new, more complex surgeries beginning in the 1890s. The "Transsexual Moment" simply led to more access to these procedures by legitimate medical professionals in the United States. Before the 1960s, these procedures were most common outside of the US, specifically in Europe, where they were being developed. Trans resistance

⁵¹ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, 56-57, 65, 68.

would begin because of increased access to medical transition that medical professionals like Benjamin would help provide.⁵²

Urban trans communities in the 1960s often lived in poor conditions. The center of trans life in the cities was the street, and because of this, trans life was communal in character. For example, if one person could afford a hotel room, they often invited others to join them in the room, and crammed in as many people as possible so they would also be housed for the night. Police harassment was common; trans women and drag queens were often arrested for “loitering” or “solicitation” just hanging around or walking the city streets purely because it was assumed they was selling sex.⁵³

The fifties were a political turning point for the gay community in an era of Cold War paranoia and the birth of the first mass homosexual rights movement, the Homophile Movement. There were several reasons why the movement happened when it did: the Lavender Scare, the Kinsey Report, and the increasing frequency of police harassment. The Lavender Scare was an offshoot of the Second Red Scare, specifically McCarthyism, the Communist witch hunt in the federal government led by Joseph McCarthy. Homosexuality came to be associated with Communism, leading to a homosexual witch hunt at the same time. Federal employees believed or discovered to be Communists or homosexuals were dismissed from their jobs; a majority of those dismissed were homosexuals. This was the provocation for protests specifically against employment discrimination. Meanwhile, Alfred Kinsey’s 1948 publication of the *Sexual*

⁵² Faderman, *Great Events from History. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Events, 1848-2006*, 165-167; Reay, *Trans America: A Counter-History*, 50-54, 69-70, 73-74; Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 96-97.

⁵³ Tourmaline. 2025. Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*. Tiny Reparations Books, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC. <https://catalog.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/47776301>, 43-61.

Behavior of the Human Male, usually referred to as the Kinsey Report, brought attention to the fact that a not insignificant number of American men had engaged in homosexual acts (37%), only of 8% of which were fully homosexual. This gave many the confidence to begin speaking up for themselves. Harry Hay specifically cited these two events as evidence of homosexuals being a cultural minority that was experiencing oppression.⁵⁴ Police forces were also becoming increasingly aggressive in conducting bar raids, especially in New York City. While the level of harassment was already high before World War II, it escalated even more after the war ended. The State Liquor Authority could still officially close any bar with little notice and without a challenge until 1954, when New York courts required it to show evidence of gay men and lesbians' disorderly conduct and that management knowingly allowed it. The Liquor Authority and police did not comply with the ruling. The presence of perceived homosexuals was still enough to close a bar after the 1954 ruling. Simply pointing to a patron's "disorderly" behavior (again, vaguely defined) as evidence of homosexuality and thus a reason to conduct a raid and make arrests.⁵⁵

The two main groups leading the movement were the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, and they served two functions: providing a community for homosexuals and politically advocating for the rights of homosexuals. These groups were moderate in their political approaches compared to the movement that would replace them within two decades. Their political goals included education on homosexuality and the homophile community, as well as advocating for equality under the law and the end of all forms of discrimination against

⁵⁴ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 177, 180; Faderman, *Great Events from History. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Events, 1848-2006*, 103-105; Hay, Harry, and Roscoe, Will. 1996. *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*. Beacon Press, 60-61.

⁵⁵ Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*, 342-343, 345.

homosexuals. They also provided education to fellow homosexuals on how to deal with the police and being arrested.⁵⁶

The Mattachine Society was founded in 1950 by Harry Hay and friends in Los Angeles, California. Most of the founders were or had been part of the Communist Party, USA at the time, and organized their group based on what they had learned through the Party. The Mattachine Society used a cell structure and hierarchical membership (the higher the membership, the more secret their identity was). Membership primarily consisted of men.⁵⁷ Hay also drew on the communist political model of collective memory (history) and nation-building to construct the concept of homosexuals as a cultural minority.⁵⁸ As a minority, homosexuals were being oppressed, as evidenced by the ongoing Lavender Scare, which scapegoated an already disenfranchised and non-politically mobilized group. Hay hoped to organize the community so they could fight back and stand up for themselves. While this concept was rejected by the group in favor of assimilation after Hay's departure from the group, the concept would continue to inform gay politics and how society would perceive the gay community for decades.⁵⁹ The Society recruited members through discussion groups hosted at members' homes. They also

⁵⁶ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 179-183; Gallo, Marcia M. 2006. *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*. 1st Carroll & Graf ed. Carroll & Graf Publishers, 29-30; Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 60-61; Weiss, Penny A. 2018. *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader*. New York University Press. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=5092052>, 304-305.

⁵⁷ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 179-180.

⁵⁸ Hay, Harry, and Roscoe, Will. 1996. *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*. Beacon Press, 40-41, 43, 52-53, 60. Nations were historically-evolved, stable communities that shared a language, territory, economic life, and culture. According to Hay, homosexuals as a group fulfilled 2/4 criteria (language and culture (based on the Kinsey report), which qualified homosexuals to be considered a cultural minority.

⁵⁹ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 179-188, 184; Cervini, Eric. 2021. *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*. First edition. First Picador paperback edition. Picador, 72-74; Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 40-41, 43, 52-53, 60, 81-83, 131-132.

helped homosexual defendants in legal cases where police entrapment was involved, most notably the Dale Jennings case in 1952.⁶⁰

The original chapter was split in 1953 after Hay and the other original founders resigned. It sent out a political questionnaire about homosexual rights to local political candidates, which prompted a columnist for a local newspaper to investigate the group at the same time the House Un-American Activities Committee was in Los Angeles for hearings. Both the founders and members across the state were worried for different reasons. The founders were worried about the group's longevity if their connections to the Communist Party were discovered, while members were confused about what was happening and demanded transparency. Hay and the rest of the founders resigned shortly after the controversy began. After the founders resigned, the new central leadership stopped any political or legal activism and rejected the idea of a homosexual minority, which led to a massive decline in membership and resignations. The national organization dissolved in 1961, and the remaining chapters became autonomous.⁶¹

Daughters of Bilitis was founded in 1955 in San Francisco, California, by Phyllis Lyon, her partner Del Martin, and a few of their lesbian friends. The organization started out as purely social, but within a year, Lyon and Martin (and a couple of other founders) began to get involved in the Homophile Movement, which led to half the members in the small group leaving because they wanted the group to stay social and not become political. This did not stop the rest from continuing to get even more involved in the Homophile Movement. One of their early focuses

⁶⁰ Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*, 69-71. Jennings had been at home when a cop (who had followed him) forcibly entered his home and put Jennings's hand down his pants and arrested him. The Society provided his bail, a lawyer, and publicized the case to get support.

⁶¹ Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*, 71-74; Katz, Jonathan. n.d. "Harry Hay: Founding the Mattachine Society: 'A Call to Me . . . More Important than Life' · Harry Hay: Founding the Mattachine Society, 1948-1953, by Jonathan Ned Katz · OutHistory." OutHistory. Accessed November 11, 2025. <https://outhistory.org/exhibits/show/hay-mattachine/hhfm>.

was working with homosexual men to fight anti-homosexual laws, something that was controversial among members who did not want to associate with gay men or gay male eroticism and viewed the association as one of the biggest sources of anti-homosexual sentiment.⁶²

The group's overall goal was to reach out to other lesbians and help them develop self-confidence. DOB was both a social and political group, depending on the chapter one was in. It overall prioritized assimilation and respectability like the Mattachine Society. The debate over how political the group should be continued until the national organization dissolved in 1970, especially during the 1960s. DOB leaders were very politically active, taking part in actions like picketing, while members' involvement depended on their chapter. The original chapter was the most active out of the entire organization. Many left the organization due to the political activity of groups, disagreeing with "radical tactics" such as picketing.⁶³ Involvement with the feminist movement was particularly controversial. Feminism had been an integral theme in early discussions; many early members believed their discrimination as lesbians was rooted in their status as women. While many joined the movement as it rose to prominence in the late 1960s (including Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin), others were put off by the discrimination against lesbians in the feminist movement. The national organization dissolved in 1970 for many reasons, including infighting, a frustrating and inefficient bureaucracy, and the hijacking of their signature magazine, *The Ladder*.⁶⁴

⁶² Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, xlv, 1, 6-9, 15-16.

⁶³ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 16-18, 24, 86, 105, 110-111, 115-119, 131, 170.

⁶⁴ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 134-139, 156, 159-161, 165, 167-170, 173-175.

By the mid to late 1960s, the queer community was beginning to express their resentment towards society and were starting to demand their rights in more radical, sometimes even violent ways. The younger generation of homophile activists was leading the charge and was pushing for a bolder and more radical Homophile Movement, primarily through picketing. The first major demonstrations from the Homophile Movement were led by the Mattachine Society of New York and the Mattachine Society of Washington (DC) from April to October 1965, who led multiple pickets in front of the White House, United Nations headquarters, and the Civil Service Commission.⁶⁵ In the same year, Craig Rodwell (a member of the Mattachine Society of New York) began the Annual Reminder organizing tradition, in which every Fourth of July, a picket would be held in Philadelphia with the goal of reminding the American people that homosexuals still did not have rights.⁶⁶ However, some of the more violent, effective demonstrations looked more like the Stonewall Riots and were led by the younger, gay and trans working-class communities of the major cities rather than the middle-class.

There were three major riots, primarily centered in late-night hot spots in cities. One of the earliest known riots happened in May 1959 at Cooper's Do-Nuts, a popular late-night coffee/donut hangout in Los Angeles. Drag queens, hustlers, and patrons leaving the two nearby gay bars gathered at Cooper's late at night to the early morning, and police regularly patrolled the area and stopped people for no reason. Police in the area typically targeted trans people who refused to show ID, and often arrested them on suspicion of prostitution, vagrancy, and loitering. One night, drag queens were being rounded up by police when they began to resist alongside

⁶⁵ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 112-114, 117.

⁶⁶ Carter, David. 2004. *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*. 1st ed. St. Martin's Press, 40.

witnesses; donuts were thrown at the police, and the night ended in street fights and arrests. In 1965, multiple demonstrations from April 25th to May 2nd at a Philadelphia cafeteria, Dewey's Lunch Counter, led to its management stopping their practice of indiscriminately denying gay patrons' service. That April, the business management had started denying service to young customers in "nonconformist clothing," claiming they were driving away business. On the 25th, 3 teens refused to leave and were arrested and charged with disorderly conduct, to which the queer community reacted with a series of pickets and sit-ins. When police failed to do anything, Dewey's management folded.⁶⁷

The 1966 Compton's Cafeteria Riot was the most effective demonstration of the three. Compton's was a popular late-night hotspot in San Francisco, California's Tenderloin neighborhood. Its management had instituted a service charge for customers who were at the cafeteria for an extended period without buying food, but arbitrarily applied it to street kids and trans youth, the same customers they frequently called the police on. On one night in August, management had called the police on a group of young queens, who resisted. The gay crowd in the business resisted alongside them, and a riot ensued. The riot was part of a recent campaign of organized resistance in the neighborhood, which was opposing an urban redevelopment project threatening the neighborhood. In 1965, a group called the Vanguard formed to support and educate others about the challenges street youth (young gay hustlers and trans people) faced, including police harassment. They would often hold meetings at Compton's and decided to confront its management over its treatment of trans women and street queens. A trans-Liberation movement began in San Francisco soon after the Compton's Cafeteria riot. Part of the soon-

⁶⁷ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, 81-84

formed Central City and Anti-Poverty Program office handled police-homophile community relations and expanded to include the trans community. Trans women were also taught work skills they could use to escape prostitution and could take part in support groups.⁶⁸

Throughout the 1960s, a generation gap had begun to form in regard to the political goals and actions of the Homophile Movement. Older activists had lived through McCarthyism and the paranoia it created around homosexuality, and it was extremely dangerous for them to be out and politically advocate for homosexual rights. At best, they could lose their jobs and be shunned, but at worst, they could lose their freedom. It was also likely that they would have been excluded from any political cause they were part of regardless of ideology. It was not uncommon in the fifties for lesbians and gay men to marry each other for their own safety and security. This sense of paranoia continued even after society became more liberal.⁶⁹ In an April/May 1970 *Ladder* article, Fen Gregory described their mindset as assimilationist and rooted in respectability. As she explained: “They may be A (insert any minority), but they are also just as B (nice, moral, devout, etc.) as you and I. Therefore, it is unfair to discriminate against them because of ‘A.’”⁷⁰ In contrast, the younger generation did not have the same level of baggage. They proudly and loudly believed that they had the right to be different and society should not dictate their individual lives and actions. As a result, they were more aggressively political and preferred more overt actions, such as protests or riots. They were also involved in political causes outside of the Homophile Movement, like the Civil Rights movement, the feminist movement, and the

⁶⁸ Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 84-87, 89, 91-92, 94-105.

⁶⁹ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 144, 148, 155-156.

⁷⁰ “*Ladder* April/May 1970.Pdf.” n.d. Accessed April 7, 2026.

<https://archives.rainbowhistory.org/files/original/d0b1fdc68330c0fccc2e23a21ad33c85.pdf>, 27.

anti-war movement.⁷¹ Unfortunately for the youth, their elders still held the reins and were not willing to change the direction of the Homophile Movement. The infighting within the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis was emblematic of the movement overall; it was clear the youth wanted more out of the movement than their elders were willing to give.

Harry Hay was one of the other few veterans of the movement, besides Fen Gregory, who noticed that this dynamic was hurting the movement. In line with his early advocacy for a more radical, militant movement, Hay heavily critiqued the movement he helped create. It was too cautious in action and mindset, and there was too much infighting between gay elders and youth to be effective. According to Hay, his generation needed to recognize two fundamental things: the gay community was a minority—not a group of individuals dealing with individualized problems—and their resistance to change was causing both infighting and the continued lack of success of the movement.⁷² He summarized the problem as follows:

We, these elders, who yet possessively grasp at positions of power and influence in our organizations, have become the real enemies of unity. The young of today are not as we were—they are far closer to one another; much more ready to extend the hand of fellowship. The middle groups meanwhile suffer in silence the anguish of our obscene struggles with one another, yearning for the day when they will break loose from our strangle-hold.⁷³

⁷¹ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 152; “Ladder April/May 1970.Pdf,” 27-28.

⁷² Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 149-159, 167-170.

⁷³ Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 170.

Hay and Gregory accurately describe the shift in political intensity that would later lead to the Stonewall riots. As evidenced by the various riots and increased political activity, led by the youth, many in queer community were tired of their mistreatment and the lack of action and success of the Homophile Movement. They were ready to fight back, which they did in 1969.

Chapter 2: Revolution

“The Hairpin Drop Heard Around the World”: The Stonewall Riots, June 28th, 1969

The Stonewall Inn

In 1967, there were two important developments. First, the Mattachine Society of New York successfully got the State Liquor Association barred from revoking licenses on the basis of homosexual solicitation. Second, a mafia member named “Fat Tony” bought the Stonewall Inn and opened it as a private bottle club.⁷⁴ The bar was set up like a 1920s speakeasy and was selective about who they let in. There were two ways to get into the bar. First, a potential customer could knock on the front door to get the bouncer’s attention, who would let them in if their appearance was deemed acceptable or if they could correctly describe the Inn’s interior. Alternatively, customers would sneak in through an unguarded side door. Those who were allowed to enter paid either \$1 (weekdays) or \$3 (weekends) and signed false names in the name book. The bar was built to keep police out and ensure the customers would (usually) stay

⁷⁴ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 53, 67-68, 77. Registering a business as a private bottle club was a common cover used by the Mafia to continue to collect revenue from gay bars,

anonymous. The bar had a front room and a back room. The front room had a long bar and dancing area with a juke box, while the back (furthest out from the front of the bar) had a small bar and juke box. More marginalized customers congregated in the back room, including the homeless street youth, young black customers, and Puerto Ricans, which earned it the nickname “the black room” or Puerto Rican room. The bar was a popular place to dance, a feature rare outside of designated dance clubs.⁷⁵

Clientele knew, to some degree, that the Stonewall Inn was run by the mafia. Organized crime syndicates were typically the only groups able to run gay bar businesses because of their relationships with police. Not only was the owner of the bar a member of the mafia, but it was also known that the bar paid police to leave the bar (mostly) alone, aside from coordinated raids used as a cover.⁷⁶ Police often coordinated raids with bar management, under the arrangement that they would conduct them when they were not too busy. When management was aware that a raid was going to happen, they hid the cash, presumably the cash they were not going to use to pay off the police. Patrons and employees were kicked out, and the doors were padlocked, and the police left after they got their payout. The bar always reopened the next night.⁷⁷

This connection to the mafia heavily influenced how management treated the bar’s clientele. The gay community resented mafia-ran bars like the Stonewall Inn because they were usually mistreated by management. Craig Rodwell, a then-member of the Mattachine Society of

⁷⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 69-74; Baumann, Jason and New York Public Library, eds. 2019. *The Stonewall Reader*. With Edmund White. Penguin Classics. Penguin Books, 158; Tourmaline, Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 77.

⁷⁶ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 111-112. After the Stonewall raid and riots, high-up management denied they were part of the mafia. They claimed that they were harassed because of their clientele and because they had Italian names.

⁷⁷ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 78-81; Marcus, Eric. 2002. *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*. 1st ed. Perennial, 127-128; Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 13, 135-136; Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 110-111.

New York and leader of the Homophile Youth Movement in Neighborhoods (1968), recalled:

“They liked our money and hated our guts. And that was one of the major issues around Stonewall. There was that collision between the officers and the mob, and we were caught in the middle all the time.” The bar’s conditions were unsanitary, and the bar did not even provide basic amenities, including a fire exit. They were also often made to deal with the police during the planned raids. The police would usually harass the patrons before leaving, only arresting those who violated Section 240.35 of the New York Penal Code, which stipulated that people had to wear three articles of clothing that belonged to their birth sexes. This earned it the nickname the “three articles law.”⁷⁸

The bar’s clientele was a mix of every group in the Village’s gay community. The bar primarily served gay men and did at least allow some women, trans people, and drag queens, though how many of the latter groups were let into the bar varied between first-person accounts.⁷⁹ Accounts from trans women and drag queens agreed that access to the bar was limited for them and other gender-nonconforming people, and when they were let in, they were sent to the back room. Their access depended on the mood of bouncers and whether the bouncers recognized them as big spenders or famous. The Stonewall Inn was not generally considered popular with the trans/drag community, who preferred other bars in the area, like the Sewer or

⁷⁸ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 87, 172-173, 176; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 78-81, 87-88; Tourmaline, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 71, 73-74.

⁷⁹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 75-76, 285; Tourmaline, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 75, 79. Carter explains in his book that determining how many trans people and/or drag queens there were at Stonewall is difficult because of the terminology at the time. The term “queen” was widely used in the sixties to indicate any gay man who was not conventionally masculine. Tourmaline claimed that gender-nonconforming people were often grouped together under the term. There were several types of queens with differing levels of gender-conforming presentation. Carter claims that “flame queens” (effeminate men who wore eye make-up and teased hairstyles) were the likely were the “queens” described in accounts of raid and riots. The term “transsexual” would only become popular after Stonewall.

Washington Square Bar, which did not have any conditions, quotas, or restrictions. Nonetheless, it was one of the few gay bars in the Village that served drag queens and trans women, likely because they were the only ones in the community who used cash, which incentivized the mafia-run bar to allow them into the bar in the first place. Some women were allowed into the bar, typically only the occasional butch lesbian or friends of male clientele. There was always a sizeable degree of gender transgression at the bar, though customers often were not dressed in full drag because it was illegal.⁸⁰

Part I: The Raid

The raid on the 28th was part of a series of raids on the bar, being the second within a week. Deputy Inspector Seymore Pine sent four officers into the Stonewall Inn at 11 pm on June 27th to identify potential “gender transgressors.” Pine was supposed to wait for the officers to come out and report anything incriminating they saw to him, but only two of the four officers returned. When he had not seen the remaining two officers leave the bar from 1-3 am,⁸¹ he initiated the raid. He did not warn management in advance that the bar was going to be raided.⁸² He and his fellow officers officially raided the bar on the basis of illegally selling alcohol. The lights went off briefly before coming back on just as fast, signaling a raid. The police came in shortly after, sealed the doors, and checked IDs before sending people outside one by one after confirming they were not underage or had a mismatched ID. Those who stayed behind were

⁸⁰ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 135-136, 158, 166, 172-173, 176, 178; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 74-77; Tourmaline, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 77, 79.

⁸¹ This is an estimated range based on different accounts; some accounts said 1 am, another said 1:30 am, and others said 2 or 3 am.

⁸² Pine does not recall in his personal account of the night that there was a relationship between the police and bar even though every other source agreed that there was one.

either underage, had mismatched ID (i.e., were transvestites), or did not have ID on them; they were temporarily sent to the coatroom. Those suspected of violating the “three articles” law and/or having a mismatched ID were stripped and “checked” for appropriate genitalia in the bathroom.⁸³ Those who were sent out congregated in front of the bar.⁸⁴

Resistance likely began inside the bar before the riots outside. Those being “checked” in the back of the bar were the first to resist; Marsha P. Johnson and other people of color likely started the resistance. Once a few resisted, the rest of the group began to resist as well; it was this point Pine decided to detain the entire group and call for an additional police wagon (he initially only planned to have one). What normally happened during raids was that officers would conduct examinations, single out one person to arrest, and then kick the rest of the group out. However, this group’s resistance that night made him change the plan. In the front room, the few lesbians present that night were “frisked” (groped) and pushed around by police out of sight from the rest of the patrons when they also began to resist. While waiting for the first wagon, Pine did the normal raid procedure. He gathered the bar’s alcohol in preparation for transportation. He then went outside with the intention of ordering a few stragglers outside the bar to leave the area. However, instead of the few stragglers he was used to seeing, he found a large crowd that refused to leave.⁸⁵

⁸³ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 74-77. Pine claimed the “checks” were only a humiliation for the transvestites (the term he used) before doing the normal procedure of arresting one and kicking the rest out.

⁸⁴ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 99, 113, 121-122, 124, 128-130; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 134-137; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 127; Tourmaline, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 79-83.

⁸⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 140-143; Tourmaline, *Marsha: The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 79-83.

Part II: The Riots

There being a crowd at all was unusual. Customers of raided bars typically left after being kicked out, but on the 28th of June 1969, the crowd stayed behind. Many were waiting for their friends to get out of the bar or had simply seen the commotion and were curious. Police brought out multiple arrestees, who performed for the crowd despite being manhandled. Outside, the crowd seemed cheerful, but there was an underlying feeling of anger. There was a general sense of resentment for a long time before that night toward the police. Bar raids in the area had increased in frequency in the last few weeks before the raid, and Stonewall specifically had been raided a few days before. Police also had cut down trees in a nearby cruising spot to make surveillance easier. The community was already fed up with the police, but its anger was subdued until the police wagon arrived and the arrestees were loaded into it. In the meantime, Pine came out of the bar to help with the process and tried to call for the other wagon over the radio to transport all the arrestees and alcohol, only for his order to get intercepted.⁸⁶

Throughout the entire process of transporting arrestees, police were saying derogatory things to the crowd and being rough with arrestees and crowd members, which intensified the crowd's anger. However, the riot started after a series of police brutality incidents. First, as arrestees were loaded into the wagon, one of the officers shoved a transvestite and clubbed them when they retaliated. The crowd attacked the wagon and tried to push it over while police brought out more arrestees and put them in the wagon. The second and final incident was the

⁸⁶ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 114-115, 121-123; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 143-151.

violent attempts to shove one of the lesbians in the bar into a police cruiser. After that, the crowd erupted and the rioting began.⁸⁷

The crowd threw many different objects at the officers and the bar, including coins, bricks, and potentially rocks and a parking meter.⁸⁸ The police were *terrified* of the size and aggressiveness of the crowd and were unprepared to deal with the situation effectively.⁸⁹ They had not anticipated that the night would turn out the way it did. The police barricaded themselves and Howard Smith, a journalist for the *Village Voice* who was documenting the raid, in the bar after the crowd began throwing objects at them. Pine briefly stayed outside to urge the wagon driver to leave, drop the prisoners off, and hurry back before he joined his fellow officers in the bar. People were intermittently dragged into the bar. Pine first took Dave Van Ronk in with him as he was heading to the bar to barricade himself in. Ronk was visiting a heterosexual folk singer who had started to leave after observing the riot when he was hauled into the bar.⁹⁰ At least a few others were singled out and beaten by police in the bar before getting arrested. Police tried to stop rioters from getting into the bar and held back the crowd while avoiding flying objects coming from any openings the rioters found, and the crowd managed to break a window. Notably, they used the bar's firehose to stop the rioters from coming in, which did not seem to affect the crowd at all. The rioters got in at least twice during the riot. The rioters also set the bar on fire multiple times while the police hid inside it. Potential methods used to try to set the bar

⁸⁷ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 114-115, 121-123; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 143-151.

⁸⁸ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 100; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 155-157; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 127-129.

⁸⁹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 160. Pine and his partner Charles Smythe said that night was the most scared they had been since their deployment in World War II, though all the officers present denied being scared when Howard Smith asked.

⁹⁰ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 157. Pine claimed that he was Ronk throw a coin at an officer before he tried to leave.

on fire included stuffing paper into the cracks of the walls and setting them on fire, throwing Molotov cocktails, pouring lighter fluid on the front window, or throwing burning garbage at the building. The police kept putting out the fires using an extinguisher and the hose.⁹¹

The crowd just kept getting bigger as the night went on, originally starting off at two hundred people. Curious tourists, people trying to drink at Stonewall, street youth, and friends of people either at the raid or part of the riots joined in. For example, the men who would provide pivotal early eyewitness accounts, Howard Smith, Lucian Truscott (another journalist for the *Village Voice*), and Dick Leitsch (the president of the Mattachine Society of New York at the time of the riots), heard there was a commotion at the bar and went to investigate. Both Smith and Truscott ran into each other when Truscott was observing the riots, and Smith was running over after hearing about it. Leitsch heard about it on the radio. Many people either called their friends or went around the Village to spread the word. Those who were a part of the riots or watched them felt like the whole neighborhood was fighting that night. The most marginalized groups fought back the hardest during and after the night. Drag queens in particular took up a lead role in the riots, being the first to throw objects and attack the police. They would also lead the famous kick line routines used to confront the Tactical Police Force.⁹²

It took a long time for Pine to get backup. He kept trying and failing to call for outside help on both radio and phone until an officer was able to escape through a vent to get help.⁹³ Soon, the firefighters arrived to put out the remaining fires. A second police wagon came to

⁹¹ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 99-100, 108-111, 115, 121-123; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 155-157, 160, 162-164, 168-169, 171-177; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 129.

⁹² Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 167-168; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 44, 143-145, 157, 162-163, 167-168.

⁹³ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 168, 171. Carter believed the one of rioters may have gotten onto the police frequency and that the phone line was likely cut.

transport the rest of the prisoners and alcohol, and the Tactical Police Force arrived to provide back-up and let the remaining police escape. It took hours for the rioting to end, as the crowd kept evading police; they would run around, and street youth would periodically confront police with a kick line routine. The riot ended around 4:30 am.⁹⁴

The energy of the initial riot did not end for the next few days and was expressed in a variety of ways. The first demonstration after the Stonewall raid was also on the 28th. The Stonewall Inn reopened as a “free store” the same day of the raid, and at approximately 9 pm, a crowd gathered around it. The crowd kept growing, joined by weekend tourists, and was singing and chanting while Stonewall’s management tried and failed to attract customers to the bar. When the crowd spilled into the street, they decided to block off, and later slow down, Christopher Street; they only allowed vehicles with gay people in them and rocked vehicles that did not. Two police cars were attacked, which led to reinforcements (including the TPF) being sent in to try to control the crowd and police violence. One young man was taken out of the crowd and beaten by police until the crowd was able to get him back and protect him from police assault. The crowd was eventually pushed to the side of the road and dispersed around 2:30 am on the 29th. Similar demonstrations happened on and off from the 29th to the 31st, but not on the same scale. Protest activity and rioting slowly dwindled, and demonstrations or gatherings were put down by police. In place of protests and riots, the community started organizing a new political movement.⁹⁵

⁹⁴ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 99-100, 111; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 172-177.

⁹⁵ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 100-104, 115-118, 123-124; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 182-193, 196-197.

The Gay Liberation Movement

The energy generated by the riots was funneled into a new wave of political activism. The Gay Liberation Movement was an evolution of gay politics. Its goals were not entirely new, but they went beyond civil rights. The Gay Liberation Front, the first major Gay Liberation group, identified two forms of oppression that the movement would confront: legal and psychological. Legal oppression was the use of laws to legally reinforce societal ignorance of homosexuality. Like the Homophile Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement wanted to abolish said laws and legal mechanisms. The political and legal goals of the movement included: the abolition of anti-sodomy laws, protections against discrimination (employment specifically), the end of police harassment towards the gay community, and the legalization of gay bars.⁹⁶ The Gay Liberation Movement's confrontation of psychological oppression was what differentiated it from the Homophile Movement. Psychological oppression took two forms: the internalized and externalized belief that homosexuals were sick and perverted for their sexuality, and the oppression of other homosexuals through practices like sexism (a reflection of heterosexual society). This aspect of the movement was embodied in the cultural goals of the movement, which were the de-pathologization of homosexuality and fostering a sense of visibility/liberation.⁹⁷ The Gay Liberation Movement essentially advocated for both equality and a broader societal change within and outside of the gay community.

⁹⁶ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 238-242, 251-252; "Gaaconst.Pdf." n.d. Accessed December 29, 2025. <https://thesexualrevolution.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/gaaconst.pdf>, 1. Civil Rights Digital Library. n.d. "Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement." Accessed December 18, 2025. http://crdl.usg.edu/record/wau_protests_404.html, 1.; Wittman, Carl. "A Gay Manifesto." 1971. April 9, 2026. <http://digitalcollections.lib.washington.edu/cdm/ref/collection/protests/id/416>, 6.

⁹⁷ "Gaaconst.Pdf.," 1; Civil Rights Digital Library, "Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement," 1; Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto," 4-6.

The Major Players

The first two major groups were the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance.⁹⁸ Though they often collaborated on achieving the same goals, they had fundamental differences in political ideology.

On July 9th, 1969, the Gay Liberation Front was formed, and they set the radical, anti-assimilationist tone of the early Gay Liberation Movement, to the dismay of Dick Leitsch and other older homophile veterans. The Front had originally been the Mattachine Action Committee, a committee created by the Mattachine Society of New York to coordinate political action post-Stonewall. The Front worked primarily on the movement's cultural goals rather than its political/legal goals of the movement, focusing on consciousness-raising, providing material support for the movement, and direct action. There were at least seven United States chapters outside of New York: Atlanta, Iowa City, Los Angeles, Louisville, San Francisco, Seattle, and Tallahassee.⁹⁹

The group's platform was summed up in a July 16th, 1969, Mattachine Society meeting: “We don't want acceptance goddamn it! We want respect! Demand it! We're going to go where straights go and do anything with each other they do and if they don't like it, well, fuck them!”¹⁰⁰ The platform itself began as follows: “The basic purpose of GLF is the liberation of homosexual men and women in this society from the basic three-pronged oppression they suffer. We have one overriding governing principle—EQUALITY.”¹⁰¹ The group promised to confront the three

⁹⁸ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 210-211.

⁹⁹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 212, 215-216, 225; Faderman, Lillian. 2015. *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*. First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition. Simon & Schuster, 202.

¹⁰⁰ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 215.

¹⁰¹ “Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement,” 1,

fundamental types of oppression through a variety of programs and activities. To confront societal oppression, GLF wanted to educate society about homosexuality and create opportunities for people to learn about alternative lifestyles and accept others through taped discussions, speaking opportunities, host seminars in experimental and free schools like Alternate U., and potentially provide counseling services for parents of gay children. On the legal front, they demanded that discriminatory laws and legal practices should be abolished to provide the gay community with the same opportunities as everybody else. The group wanted to confront legal oppression through asserting themselves publicly, obtaining legal aid, and creating a political caucus to fight for gay (and general minority) rights. To fight psychological oppression, the group wanted to develop people's confidence in their gay identity and confront one another on their mistreatment of one another by leading consciousness-raising sessions and small rap groups, providing gay reading lists, and publishing an accessible newsletter (*Come Out!*).¹⁰² The primary difference between the Gay Liberation Front and groups like the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis was that GLF believed homosexuals should be more than equal; they should also have pride in themselves as individuals and a community, and they needed to use that pride to demand respect and fight for the complete liberation of all oppressed people.¹⁰³

On July 24th, 1969, they led a march and Gay Power vigil with about five hundred participants, the first openly gay march on the East Coast¹⁰⁴. On September 12th, 1969, GLF held a picket and handed out a petition in front of The *Village Voice* office after the paper left out the

¹⁰² "Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement," 1-3.

¹⁰³ "Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement," 3.

¹⁰⁴ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 217-218,

word “gay” twice in advertisements the group had submitted prior and explained the decision by saying that “gay” and “homosexual” were categorically equivalent to a cuss word and thus could not be printed in an ad.¹⁰⁵ This was despite the fact that the Lucian Truscott and Howard Smith articles recounting the Stonewall riots used the words “faggot” and “dyke.” The newspaper’s publisher (Ed Fancher) relented on the policy the same day. The group also disrupted the October 1969 mayoral candidate forum after having their submitted questions ignored and received the audience’s support, who followed the group out when they left.¹⁰⁶

The Gay Liberation Front was characterized by constant infighting, character assassinations, and general chaos, so much so that they could not get anything done, according to defecting members. The group tried to reduce infighting by creating specialized ‘cells’ that focused on different issues, but that only shifted the problem to cell versus cell clashes. This was one reason many left the group. Arthur Evans, one of the founding members of the Gay Activist Alliance, claimed the group had a lot of passion, but “...were totally incapable of putting their passion to use.” Members merely talked about radical change without putting in effort because they were investing their energy in constant conflict with each other. This environment was not universal across all chapters. There was likely some infighting across all chapters, but the original New York group was infamous for its high levels of infighting. Some chapters were also more action-orientated than their parent group. The foundation of infighting within GLF was the question of who the group was for. Many believed the group was too focused on helping other political causes when they should have been focused only on gay issues, while others believed

¹⁰⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 226. The Village Voice never explained why “gay”, and “homosexual” were categorized the way they were.

¹⁰⁶ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 225-227, 229, 230.

that the group could and should focus on gay issues and total liberation. The issue of the group's commitment to gay issues came to a head in November 1969. In a mid-November GLF meeting, members were asked to vote on whether donations generated from GLF dances (\$500) should be given to the Black Panthers. The motion was defeated, but was passed after a recount weeks later. Opponents did not want to give their money to a non-gay organization that did not actively support the gay community, but supporters argued that sending the money would demonstrate solidarity with the racial equality cause. This incident was the last straw for members who felt the group was prioritizing other groups over the gay community; many were also tired of the infighting and lack of action.¹⁰⁷

A small group of dissenting members founded the Gay Activists Alliance in December 1969 to do what they believed GLF could not. Instead of endless talk of revolution and infighting, the GAA channeled its passion and militancy into direct advocacy for gay rights. Another major difference between the groups was ideology. The founders of GAA had a similarly radical background to the founders of GLF, but in recent years they had come to believe that they did not need to tear down the system as the GLF founders did. Instead, they wanted to open the system and create a powerful political bloc to fight for their rights. Their goal was to "...claim a place at the American table as a bona fide family member, whether the rest of the family liked it or not."¹⁰⁸ The Gay Activists Alliance's platform was similar to the Gay Liberation Front's platform. The Alliance demanded the right to their own feelings (gay pride), the right to love, the right to their own bodies (freedom from external control), and the right to be

¹⁰⁷ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 232-235; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 200-201, 210-213.

¹⁰⁸ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 234; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 214-215.

treated like every other citizen. There were three major differences between the platforms: a disdain for political and social ideology,¹⁰⁹ a sole focus on gay issues, and the rejection of alliances with groups that were not dedicated to gay rights.¹¹⁰ They were also more involved in legal initiatives than GLF.

Most of the group's early actions confronted local politicians who were either silent on or hostile towards gay issues, specifically New York City Mayor John Lindsay, whom they targeted well over three different times. Their first confrontation happened on March 5th, 1970, when they tried to meet with the mayor to discuss police harassment and entrapment, and picketed city hall when he refused. Michael Dontzin, Lindsay's adviser, promised GAA that he would talk with Lindsay and get back to them later if they left. The group left, but Dontzin did not contact them afterward. On April 13th, GAA interrupted Lindsay's speech at the anniversary ceremony for the Metropolitan Museum of Art and asked him multiple questions about his lack of support for gay rights when shaking his hand at the end of the ceremony. Six days later, GAA sent in members to infiltrate the live audience of his weekly TV program to ambush him live. First, two members ran up to him onstage and made demands before being dragged offstage; the rest of the group in the audience pestered Lindsay with questions. The cameras were turned off, and Lindsay told the crowd to talk to Dontzin if they wanted answers, then threatened GAA members with arrest for public disturbance. Many of the non-GAA members in the audience were shocked by Lindsay's seeming inability to answer questions not prepared in advance, and they did not approve of his threat of arrests. GAA members continued to hassle Lindsay when the cameras came back on.

¹⁰⁹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 234-235. Arthur Evans, who wrote the platform, believed GLF was trying to create revolution using an ideological formula, which was not effective enough to create a revolution according to him.

¹¹⁰ "Gaaconst.Pdf," 1.

One of the founding members also confronted Dontzin about his lack of contact, to which Dontzin promised to arrange a meeting for the next week. The meeting happened on April 29th; GAA representatives read a list of demands and were told city officials would work with the group to address them, though it was unclear if officials followed through. There would be many other times they targeted Lindsay. The group also participated in the first Christopher Street Liberation March on June 28th, 1970, alongside other gay organizations in the Village.¹¹¹

The original group had the same problems GLF had before the GAA founders left the group, according to Bruce Voeller, who was the president of GAA for a brief period in 1973 before resigning and leaving the group in the same year. The same character assassinations, infighting, chaos, and slow action had set in by 1973, pushing away some members who were tired of the organization's "street drama."¹¹²

Legal and Cultural Goals

One of the four legal goals of the Gay Liberation Movement was ending employment discrimination, an initiative it inherited from the Homophile Movement. Employment discrimination had been a problem since the post-World War II firings of gay federal workers and expulsion of gay soldiers in the United States Military.¹¹³ Frank Kameny was a pioneer in this realm. Kameny, founder of the Mattachine Society of Washington (DC), had been fired from his job with the Army Map Service in 1956 after the Civil Service Commission found out that he

¹¹¹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 237-238, 243-247, 251, 253.

¹¹² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 258-260.

¹¹³ Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 142, 144, 150-155.

was homosexual.¹¹⁴ The Mattachine Society of Washington was founded in 1961 as part of his campaign to challenge federal laws that had denied homosexuals full equality, including employment discrimination.¹¹⁵ In the mid-1960s, (mostly) younger, radical homophile activists became a lot more active in confronting (federal) employment discrimination as well. The new generation of Gay Liberationists continued the momentum and were more aggressive about it, particularly the Gay Activists Alliance.¹¹⁶

The movement made significant progress in fighting employment discrimination. There were around twenty-nine nondiscrimination laws and ordinances nationwide that included sexual orientation by 1976, but within a couple of years, many would either be challenged or repealed because of the nationwide collaboration of conservatives, interpreting “homosexuals” as a threat to families and children. Anita Bryant’s 1978 “Save Our Children” campaign did much to undo the movement’s progress. Her campaign had successfully repealed a 1976 amendment to Dade County, Florida’s nondiscrimination ordinance—which banned housing and employment discrimination on the basis of sexual preference—and Bryant made it clear she wanted to help other conservatives follow in her footsteps; she inspired other prominent conservative religious and political leaders to lead similar campaigns against similar amendments and ordinances.¹¹⁷

Ordinances that protected gay people from discrimination based on sexual orientation in Saint Paul, Minnesota, Eugene, Oregon, and Wichita, Kansas, were also repealed within the year. The

¹¹⁴ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 129. Kameny had been arrested for sodomy in August 1956 after another man touched his penis; the officers who arrested him had been spying through the ventilation.

¹¹⁵ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 129-133.

¹¹⁶ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 236, 243-247; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 111-117; Myers, JoAnne. 2009. *The A to Z of the Lesbian Liberation Movement: Still the Rage*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/pensu/detail.action?docID=467226>, 159.

¹¹⁷ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 218-224; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 328-329, 351-355.

defeat of the Californian Briggs initiative/Proposition 6—which prohibited gay people from working in education—and Initiative 13 in Seattle, Washington, on November 7th, 1978, stopped the spiral. Success on the federal level did not come until the late 2010s and early 2020s.¹¹⁸

On another front, the movement fought to abolish sodomy laws. Abolishing sodomy law was important to the Gay Liberation Movement because it was essential to confronting all other key issues the movement wanted to challenge. If same-sex relationships were illegal, then so were gay people as individuals. Abolishing sodomy law was not as central a focus in the Homophile Movement, and many lesbians did not want to touch on the issue at all. More radical (younger) homophile activists were more likely to take up the issue before. The movement primarily challenged sodomy laws through the courts, and older, more moderate gay activists led the charge, like Frank Kameny.¹¹⁹

There were a few sodomy cases between 1969 and 2003 that challenged the sodomy laws of various states, some of which reached the Supreme Court level. From 1969 to 1980, there were two cases: *Buchanan v. State [of Texas]* (1971) and *John Doe v. Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Richmond* (1975). *Buchanan v. State [of Texas]* began on May 26th, 1969. Alvin Buchanan was engaging in public sex acts with another man in a park bathroom when two police officers (who had been spying on the pair) burst in and arrested the men. Lawyer Henry McClusky combined Buchanan's case with two other complaints—one heterosexual couple and another gay man who engaged in private sex acts—in the hopes of getting the issue of sodomy to the Supreme Court. After a series of trials, a federal district court declared that Texas's sodomy

¹¹⁸ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 357-359, 367-369, 383-389; Media Reference Guide – In Focus: Nondiscrimination Laws & the LGBTQ Community | GLAAD. 2022. February 21. <https://glaad.org/nondiscrimination/>.

¹¹⁹ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 182-183; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 538.

law (Article 524 of the Texas Penal Code) was too broad and unconstitutional in 1971 and ordered Texas to repeal it.¹²⁰ It was only a partial victory, however, as in 1973 Article 524 was replaced with Section 21.06, which targeted private and public male and female homosexuality specifically.¹²¹ Texas legislators essentially declared that heterosexual sodomy was okay, but not homosexual sodomy. *John Doe v. Commonwealth's Attorney for the City of Richmond* was a class-action lawsuit in Virginia filed to challenge the state's sodomy law (Statute 18.1-212). However, the judge rejected the case because he did not believe "John Doe" (supposed to represent all homosexuals in Richmond) had the right to sue because they had not been prosecuted for consensual, private sodomy, and thus could not demonstrate any harm. The judge also cited Judaic and Christian law as precedent for sodomy laws. A 1976 appeal to the Supreme Court upheld the decision.¹²²

There was one potential case in California that did not get off the ground. Frank Kameny and attorney Albert Gordon planned it to be the perfect test case. Kameny had planned to recruit two "respectable" same-sex couples to purposely be caught having sex in a private setting, and Gordon agreed to the plan in 1974. Three volunteer couples—a gay couple, a lesbian couple, and a heterosexual couple—wrote out statements confessing to sodomy that Gordon delivered to the police with information on their whereabouts for their arrest. When the police did not follow through on the arrests, Morris Knight (who recruited the couples) made a "citizen's arrest" and

¹²⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 538. Buchanan was still sentenced to two simultaneous prison sentences, one for the initial incident and the other for another incident in a retail store.

¹²¹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 538-539; Justia Law. n.d. "Buchanan v. Batchelor, 308 F. Supp. 729 (N.D. Tex. 1970)." Accessed January 22, 2026. <https://law.justia.com/cases/federal/district-courts/FSupp/308/729/1568632/>.

¹²² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 539-541.

brought the couples to the police. The police commander refused to book them because he did not see them commit any crimes.¹²³

Cases from 1980 to 2003 had mixed results. The *Baker v. Wade* (1982) decision resulted in Section 21.06 (the Texas law) being declared unconstitutional, but the decision was later reviewed by the Supreme Court and reversed in 1985. The same thing happened in the *Bowers v. Hardwick* (1986) case. The movement finally succeeded in 2003 with *Lawrence v. Texas*, which made sodomy laws unconstitutional nationwide.¹²⁴

Another prominent issue the Gay Liberation Movement inherited from the Homophile Movement was the frequent police harassment of the gay community, a fight that had been fought for decades. Well-known gay neighborhoods and enclaves were used to police being present. The police surveillance mechanism created in the early 20th century was omnipresent; there were two types of harassment outside of bar raids: general surveillance (sweeps, spying) and sexual entrapment. Police conducted sweeps of public bathrooms and known cruising spots in public parks, particularly Central Park where they would conduct multiple sweeps a night. Entrapment was an extremely common police practice; police often sent in plainclothesmen to either entice men they believed were homosexual or force men to touch them sexually in order to arrest them for solicitation or lewd conduct. Dick Leitsch told Eric Marcus in a 2019 interview that so many men were arrested and sent to trial that police would mix up men's stories; it happened so often that police typically used one standard, formulaic story to explain the reason behind an arrest. It was practically illegal to exist as homosexual.¹²⁵

¹²³ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 539-540.

¹²⁴ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 541-546, 550-551.

¹²⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 30; Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*, 70; Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay*

Police harassment (general, entrapment, and bars) was a primary issue for homophile groups. The Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis provided both advice on what to do if one was arrested and material that educated others on entrapments effects on the homosexual community. The Mattachine Society also provided legal support for members who were arrested. In New York City, the Mattachine Society used a combination of demonstrations (“Sip-ins”) and the courts to challenge the State Liquor Association’s practice of denying license to gay bars, which resulted in a 1967 ban on the practice.¹²⁶ Despite the efforts of the Homophile Movement, bar raids, entrapment, and general surveillance continued into the early 1970s and the Gay Liberation Movement continued the fight. The end to sexual entrapment, surveillance, and arbitrary arrests were tackled as part of the push to abolish sodomy law. However, a mix of legal tactics (led by older homophile activists) and more radical, direct action was used to end bar raids. The Mattachine Society of New York continued using the legal process and set a foundation for gay liberationist efforts, but it was the tragic impalement of Alredo Diego Viñales that sealed the deal.¹²⁷

Police were still raiding bars in Greenwich Village after Stonewall, specifically a bar called the Snake Pit, which was raided on March 8th, 1970. Deputy Inspector Pine raided the bar and customers who refused to leave; Pine arrested all of them to avoid another Stonewall riot. Customers were taken to the police station, where they were told that they would not be identified and would not have to pay bail. Viñales, an Argentinian with an expired visa, either

Male World, 1890-1940, 170-172, 181-183, 195-198; “Dick Leitsch.” n.d. Making Gay History. Accessed February 1, 2026. <https://makinggayhistory.org/podcast/dick-leitsch/>.

¹²⁶ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 53; Cervini, *The Deviant’s War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*, 70; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 64; Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 135-136; Katz, “Harry Hay: Founding the Mattachine Society: ‘A Call to Me . . . More Important than Life.’”

¹²⁷ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 251-252.

did not understand what was happening or was worried about being deported and decided to escape the station. He ran up to the next floor and attempted to jump through a window onto a nearby roof but missed the jump; Viñales was impaled on the fourteen-inch fence spikes and sent to the hospital. When the firemen came to cut the fence, an officer reportedly told one of them: “You don’t have to hurry, he’s dead, and if he’s not, he’s not going to live long.”¹²⁸ After finding out about what happened, the customers still inside the station got angry and rowdy, as did the gay community.¹²⁹ GAA led a protest march and vigil in honor of Viñales the next day; the march included every gay organization in Greenwich Village and directly confronted the police. The incident negatively shifted the public’s attitude towards the police, who were seen as unnecessarily brutal and out-of-control. The Alfredo Diego Viñales incident and the Mattachine’s efforts led to legalization of gay bars in New York, as the incident would not have happened if gay bars were legal and unmolested by police. Forcing the police out of gay bars and prohibiting them from making arbitrary, unconstitutional arrests gave the gay community breathing room to exist in public without needing to worry about being arrested for being themselves. It also loosened the grip the mafia had over the gay bar business, even if the mafia still found ways to capitalize on plights of the gay community.¹³⁰

The Gay Liberation Movement primarily challenged internalized oppression. Internalized oppression was defined as the “...oppression of the homosexual by himself” that “[reflected]

¹²⁸ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 238-240; The New York Times. 1970. “Homosexuals Hold Protest in ‘Village’ After Raid Nets 167.” Archives. March 9. <https://www.nytimes.com/1970/03/09/archives/homosexuals-hold-protest-in-village-after-raid-nets-167.html>.

Viñales survived but was re-arrested.

¹²⁹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 240.

¹³⁰ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 240-243, 251-252.

the programming perpetuated in the society that creates the feeling that they are somehow ‘sick’ or ‘perverted’” and damaged the individual and prevented them from accepting themselves.¹³¹

It was for this reason that it was so important that homosexuality be removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Activists believed it would lead to the depathologization of homosexuality in society and undermine one of the most popular anti-gay arguments societies used: homosexuality was a sickness and should be suppressed legally and socially. The idea that homosexuality was a sickness or at least could lead to the development of mental illness dated back to the late 19th, century in the United States. The earliest reference of homosexuality in a medical manual was in the *Standard classified nomenclature of disease* (1935), which classified homosexuality under pathological sexuality in the ‘psychopathic personality’ category. Before then homosexuality would have been vaguely referred to as “sexual perversion,” which the *Statistical Manual for the Use of Institutions of the Insane* classified as “constitutional psychopathic inferiority (without psychosis).”¹³² The pathologization of homosexuality had been established decades before the first DSM classified homosexuality as a sub-category of the new, distinct Sexual Deviation diagnosis in 1952.¹³³ For many, this association was one of the biggest contributors to anti-homosexual social stigma that was the

¹³¹ “Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement,” 1.

¹³² Anderson, Joel, and Holland, Elise. 2015. “*The Legacy of Medicalising ‘Homosexuality’: A Discussion on the Historical Effects of Non-Heterosexual Diagnostic Classifications.*” *Sensoria: A Journal of Mind, Brain, and Culture* 11 (January): 4–15. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282671297_The_legacy_of_medicalising_'homosexuality'_A_discussion_on_the_historical_effects_of_non-heterosexual_diagnostic_classifications, 6; De Block, Andreas, and Pieter R. Adriaens. 2013. “*Pathologizing Sexual Deviance: A History.*” *The Journal of Sex Research* 50 (3–4): 276–98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2012.738259>, 286; Faderman, *Great Events from History. Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Events, 1848-2006*, 31-35.

¹³³ Anderson and Holland, “*The Legacy of Medicalising ‘Homosexuality’: A Discussion on the Historical Effects of Non-Heterosexual Diagnostic Classifications,*” 6.

ancient foundation that many, if not all, anti-homosexual laws were based on.¹³⁴ Some in the Homophile Movement had started the fight in the 1960s, though the issue had been controversial at the time. Some activists felt the movement needed to be more assertive in challenging the seemingly omnipotent authority of psychiatry. Some urged others to start questioning the psychiatric institution and its findings, and some took part in studies led by professionals willing to challenge the psychiatric establishment.¹³⁵

Efforts began almost immediately after the Stonewall riots. In May 1970, a large group of feminists and gays infiltrated and invaded a behavior therapy meeting that year's APA convention and yelled at those present to "Stop talking about us and start talking with us!" For the next two years, gay people were part of the annual convention. In 1971, six gay panelists were invited to participate in a discussion about non-patient homosexuals, and in 1972 convention Frank Kameny and Barbara Gittings (founder and first president of the New York chapter of DOB and editor of *The Ladder* from 1962 to 1966) were allowed to run an exhibit and were invited onto a panel about homosexuality. The 1972 APA convention was a turning point for the Gay Liberation Movement because it was there that Kameny and Gittings met gay psychiatrists who were willing to open and advocate for change in the APA. After meeting those psychiatrists, Kameny and Gittings realized that they needed to bring one onto the panel to make their message more effective. Once they got permission, they asked for a volunteer and eventually got one of the psychiatrists they met to agree on the condition that they remained anonymous. The presence of "Dr. H, Anonymous" and the written testimonies of other gay

¹³⁴ Drescher, Jack. 2015. "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality." *Behavioral Sciences* 5 (4): 565–75. <https://doi.org/10.3390/bs5040565>, 569-570, 572; Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America*, 130-131.

¹³⁵ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 87-88.

psychiatrists was enough to motivate the gay psychiatrists in the audience to convince the APA to allow the creation of an official gay group in the organization. The APA would officially approve the removal of homosexuality from the DSM, a decision that "...cured [homosexuals] overnight by the stroke of the pen," in the words of Barbara Gittings.¹³⁶ However, the APA did not fully remove homosexuality until the DSM-5, published in 2013; homosexuality was a diagnosable mental illness if an individual wanted to become heterosexual until the DSM-5 came out.¹³⁷ The definition of homosexuality was simply re-adapted and de-emphasized as a disorder over time.

However, it was not enough to just change the societal understanding of gay people. The community also needed to have a sense of pride in itself. "Come Out!" became the most important rallying cry of the movement. As succinctly expressed by the Gay Liberation Front, the movement made two demands:

That we come out of the closet and fight for our acceptance as people instead of being looked on as perverts, and gain strength and momentum from our own numbers. That we stop degrading our own sexuality and realize that it is nothing to be ashamed of. We must develop a new sense of gay pride.

¹³⁶ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 131; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 38, 146-147, 178-179.

¹³⁷ *DSM III: Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 1980. 3rd ed. American Psychiatric Association, 281-282; Drescher, "Out of DSM: Depathologizing Homosexuality," 571; McHenry, Sara E. 2022. "'Gay Is Good': History of Homosexuality in the DSM and Modern Psychiatry." *American Journal of Psychiatry Residents' Journal* 18 (1): 4-5. <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp-rj.2022.180103>, 5.

....unite the gay community by creating a rallying point from which to fight oppression.¹³⁸

The idea was not only to make it clear that the community was there and would *not* go back to their closets, but to also cultivate a community that was willing to stand up for themselves against their oppression internally *and* externally. Gay people as a group needed to change just as much as straight society needed to change. Full change needed to start from within, and only then would gay people be liberated. Like the other goals in the movement, this was inherited from the Homophile Movement to a certain degree. Founding members of the Mattachine Society, especially Harry Hay, had thought of the homosexual minority as a distinct, oppressed cultural group that needed to develop a new sense of pride in itself.¹³⁹

Hay did not see his vision materialize until the Gay Liberation Movement. The Stonewall riots and decades of resentment before them did a lot of work, showing that the community could fight back and no longer needed to comply with their oppression now that they could fight their battles on their own. The widespread resentment served as fuel for the revolutionary fire gay people adopted nation-wide and used to create a new movement. Many also came out *en masse*, bringing in new energy and increasing the presence of the community.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ "Gay Liberation Front Program-Platform Statement," 2.

¹³⁹ Hay and Roscoe, *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, 52-53, 80-86.

¹⁴⁰ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 218.

The Gap Becomes the Chasm

The same generational and political gap that had existed in 1960s persisted in Gay Liberation Movement, but the balance of power had shifted between younger gay activists and older homophile activists. The youth were leading the charge and cared a lot less about how mainstream society viewed them, alienating many older activists who did not like the new direction the gay rights movement had gone. Younger activists in turn did not respect their elders, viewing them as cowardly and too focused on respectability. The political tides had changed, something that was made clear on July 4th, 1969, Annual Reminder demonstration, the fifth year of the tradition.

The idea of the demonstration was to picket once a year on the Fourth of July in Philadelphia to remind the American people that there was still one minority group without any basic rights. While radical for the mid-1960s, it was not enough for younger activists who were just joining the movement after the Stonewall riots. The group was larger, louder, and more informal than in years past, a direct effect of the Stonewall riots that had only ended a day before. The demonstration began like all the others, quiet, circular, single-file marching, but within half an hour participants started to break the conduct rules. When a lesbian couple *held hands* while walking, Frank Kameny angrily broke the couple apart, which angered Craig Rodwell and other participants. Rodwell convinced ten other couples to also hold hands, which drew the media's attention. Another participant changed his sign to say, "SMASH SEXUAL FACISM!" Rodwell also interrupted Kameny while he was talking to the media, asking if the media knew about the recent Stonewall riots and telling Kameny, "We're tired of not being able

to hold hands in public, and the leadership of our demonstrations has to change.”¹⁴¹ Things had changed too much for the movement to go back to the way it used to be. As David Carter writes, “The old wineskin was not able to contain the new wine.”¹⁴²

Many older homophile activists who had wanted their movement to be more militant embraced the new, radical energy of the Gay Liberation Movement. Craig Rodwell had already been disillusioned with the movement before 1969. He joined the Mattachine Society of New York in 1964 and had actively worked towards a more politically militant Society with fellow militants—Randy Wicker, Frank Kameny, Jack Nichols, Barbara Gittings, and Kay Tobin (Gitting’s partner) pre-Stonewall.¹⁴³ He tried to change key aspects of the homophile political culture he resented, like the strict dress codes and conduct rules for demonstrations. As the Vice President of MSNY, he tried to get the organization to interact with the community more by physically putting themselves in space (bookstore, fund-raising headquarters, office, etc.), but his idea was rejected, prompting him to resign in 1967.¹⁴⁴ Rodwell was part of the Stonewall riots and saw firsthand that the energy of the movement had changed. The 1969 Annual Reminder was the last straw for his relationship with the Homophile Movement, and he focused on radical politics going forward.¹⁴⁵ Martha Shelley, president of the New York Daughters of Bilitis branch during the riots, eagerly joined in the new wave of activism as well. She felt politically constrained by the Daughters of Bilitis (and the Mattachine Society) and felt that the

¹⁴¹ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 216-217.

¹⁴² Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 216.

¹⁴³ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 38; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 131.

¹⁴⁴ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 110; Downs, Jim. 2016. *Stand by Me: The Forgotten History of Gay Liberation*. Basic Books, a member of the Perseus Books Group, 65-70. Rodwell opened the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, which was a political and literary hub for gay New Yorkers for those who were not part major homophile groups.

¹⁴⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 147, 149, 159, 167, 175, 179, 217.

organization held her and others back politically (outside political beliefs, ideologies, lifestyle). She also did not have a good relationship with Dick Leitsch (president of the Mattachine Society of New York) because of his sexism and desire to lead the only gay organization in New York. Shelley and other former DOB members helped found the Gay Liberation Front (presumably after leaving DOB) as an alternative to the more restrictive political style of the homophile organization.¹⁴⁶

However, many older homophile activists were put off by the movement, at least initially. Randy Wicker, a member of the Mattachine Society of New York at the time of the Stonewall riots, summarized one reason behind older homophiles' reluctance to embrace Gay Liberation:

I had spent ten years of my life going around telling people homosexuals looked exactly like everyone else...And then all of a sudden Stonewall broke out and there were reports in the press of chorus line of queens kicking up their heels at the cops like Rockettes...And this I thought...it was like Jesse Jackson used to say, rocks through windows don't open doors...I was horrified...I thought...they were setting back the gay liberation movement, because...all this work that we had done to try to establish the legitimacy of the gay movement that we were nice middle-class people like everyone else and...suddenly there was all this, what I considered riffraff.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 123-124, 131-134, 137-138.

¹⁴⁷ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 138-139.

For activists like Wicker, Frank Kameny, and Dick Leitsch, the new direction of the cause they had been part of years was too much, which was ironic considering all three were considered radicals before Stonewall. Both Wicker and Kameny helped organize the first picketing demonstrations for homosexual rights in 1965¹⁴⁸ and overall wanted a more militant Homophile Movement.

Frank Kameny began the Mattachine Society of Washington (DC) with a different model than the typical Society groups and homophile organizations. He, like Rodwell, believed the overall Homophile Movement was complacent and lacked the ability to effectively advocate for the homosexual rights cause. He had been one of the first to somewhat successfully directly challenge the Federal government and was one of the few activists who directly said that homosexuality was not inferior or immoral, yet he emphasized respectability in his rhetoric and organizing, and he brought that perspective with into the new era of gay politics.¹⁴⁹ As Lilian Faderman puts it: "...he was a product of the repressive midcentury, and he was stodgy in his dress and manner. He hadn't experienced the joyful intoxication of the Stonewall riots. He didn't understand that what happened there had already changed the world—or at least the world of urban gays."¹⁵⁰ While he did participate in the Gay Liberation Movement, a lot of his focus was on legal initiatives rather than radical direct action. Wicker would also eventually join the movement within a few years; he joined the GAA because he preferred its structure and exclusive focus on gay issues over GLF's intersectional, scattered approach to gay politics.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 39-40, 212-213.

¹⁴⁹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 133. 189-190; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 81, 83, 96-97, 210.

¹⁵⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 189-190

¹⁵¹ Clendinen, Dudley, and Adam Nagourney. 1999. *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America*. Simon & Schuster, 144.

Dick Leitsch was similar to Kameny but was more radical than Kameny on the issue of respectability. He was critical of Kameny's orderly tactics and warned him that they would not get the attention of the public; the movement needed to catch the public's attention if it wanted to succeed.¹⁵² He also was critical of Kameny's emphasis on respectability and cultivating a "good image," questioning what a good image was for a homosexual:

"What is a good image? Young, attractive, well-dressed people who are almost no different than everyone else?'... 'The Homosexual's concerns are wider. What about 'cruising,' drag,' and other issues which do not fit? [What about] sodomy charges in men's rooms and other 'distasteful' matters?' 'THEY ARE OUR PROBLEMS....the homosexual freedom movement...is an attack on conformity.'"¹⁵³

As Lilian Faderman observes, his words were similar to statements made by post-Stonewall gay activists, yet he still abided by core Mattachine values when the opportunity came to take advantage of the political moment. In a July 16th, 1969, New York Mattachine meeting, Leitsch said the following before being interrupted by an audience member: "Police brutality and heterosexual indifference must be protested...at the same time, the gay world must retain the favor of the Establishment, especially those who make and change the laws. Homosexual acceptance will come slowly, by educating the straight community, with grace and good humor

¹⁵² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 190.

¹⁵³ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 191.

and--[audience interruption].”¹⁵⁴ Leitsch seemed to agree with some aspects of the burgeoning movement while disagreeing with others. He did not agree that the movement needed to overhaul society alongside other marginalized groups, *but* he did believe that the movement needed to use dramatic, attention-grabbing tactics to make its demands known, hence why he allowed the creation of the Mattachine Action Committee in July 1969. However, he was unsure that marches and rallies were the “right” type of action. The homophile Movement had spent years cultivating alliances with establishment, which had brought the movement success; it didn’t make sense to change something that was not broken.¹⁵⁵ Unfortunately for him, the homophiles were no longer leading the political moment and would be taking the backseat.

For many homophile activists, the bigger problem was that they felt their contributions had become irrelevant. Many had reduced the demands of young gays to a simplified list of civil rights demands and did immediately grasp that the youth wanted more than that.¹⁵⁶ In turn, the youth reduced their contributions, being distrustful of their elders, especially those from established homophile groups. This distrust was built into founding of the Gay Liberation Front itself, who heavily influenced the attitude shift against the Homophile Movement.¹⁵⁷ However, that was only one factor in the distrust and discreditation of their elders. Many youths gave existing homophile groups a chance because they were the only prominent gay political groups

¹⁵⁴ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 215; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 190-191.

¹⁵⁵ Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 210-211; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 191-194.

¹⁵⁶ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 190.

¹⁵⁷ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 192-193. Three founding members of GLF, including Shelley, disliked MSNY for at least one reason, and at least one of those reasons was because of Leitsch.

in the country before the riots. When the youths realized the groups were not as radical, they either tried to make them more radical and aggressive or created their own groups.¹⁵⁸

Older homophile activists who joined the Gay Liberation Movement early on were usually disparaged by gay youths when they joined the movement. Barbara Gittings and Kay Lahusen recalled hearing heavy criticism of the Homophile Movement and the frequent character assassinations (often targeted toward older homophile activists) in (early) GLF meetings.¹⁵⁹ The couple still attended meetings because they did not have any other viable alternatives at the time if they wanted to be politically involved. Lahusen compared the dynamic to their previous one in the Daughters of Bilitis, saying, “Certainly, we had our differences with Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon at DOB. We had said to them, ‘You’re over the hill. Your thinking is out of date.’ So GLF did the same to us.”¹⁶⁰ They (and other moderate refugees from the Homophile Movement) left GLF to either form or join GAA.¹⁶¹

Alienation: Sexism, Transphobia, and Exclusion in the Gay Liberation Movement

Lesbians were vocal about the sexism and chauvinism they experienced in the Gay Liberation Movement. Del Martin, one of the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis, gave the most scathing critique in the December 1970/January 1971 *Ladder* article, “If That’s All There Is.”

¹⁵⁸ Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States*, 210; Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 212.

¹⁵⁹ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 136. Lahusen claimed that she believed GLF was a Communist or New Left plot to infiltrate the gay rights movement.

¹⁶⁰ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 136.

¹⁶¹ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 96-97, 135-139.

The article begins with a recounting of the August 26th, 1970, North American Conference of Homophile Organizations, where she and other DOB representatives confronted the male-dominated coalition about its exclusion of lesbian/women's issues, and only received a singular resolution that expressed support women's liberation.¹⁶² According to Martin, the coalition claimed their organizations were open to lesbians, but they didn't know how to convince lesbians to join. When Martin and her group brought up that their programs were neither inclusive nor relevant to women, all the men did was denounce women's organizations as segregationist. The men did not address the fact that women needed separate organizations because of the sexism lesbians faced in heterosexual society and the homophile community. That was not the only example of the lack of acknowledgement of lesbians. Martin also recounted a political action dinner meant for the entire community but only primarily of men and recognized only the men at the dinner; the few women in attendance were never called up to and were even pushed around by men trying to get to the stage. To Martin, the whole event was a representation of the invisibility of lesbians in the movement.¹⁶³

Martin then said goodbye to the movement and gay culture, including the men and male-dominated organizations that ignored lesbian issues, and explained why she (and other lesbians) were leaving. The men in the movement did not represent the whole community and prioritized their cause over everyone else's, either did not go far enough in general (homophiles), did not sincerely want to include lesbians (homophiles and GLM), or did not understand the issues of the

¹⁶² Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 175-176; "Ladder December 1970/January 1971." 1970. Periodical. THE LADDER, December. <https://archives.rainbowhistory.org/files/original/bbd89cc1da368c96416a053ea0fb6175.pdf>, 4-6.

¹⁶³ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 175; "Ladder December 1970/January 1971, 4.

community (homophiles and GLM). Women in the movement who were loyal to the cause were demeaning themselves by acting as assistants, secretaries, and mothers while believing the lies of the men, and needed to realize that they were and would always be treated as afterthoughts. She emphasized that it was important for her (and others like her) to leave for the betterment of everyone involved. She felt she would find fulfillment in the women's movement that she missed in the homophile/Gay Liberation Movement.¹⁶⁴ She ended her article with the following lines, lines that embodied the central reason why many lesbians would leave the movement.

I will not be your 'nigger' any longer. Nor was I ever your mother. Those were stultifying roles you laid on me, and I shall no longer concern myself with your toilet training. You're in the big leagues now, and we're playing for big stakes. They didn't turn out to be the same. As I bid you adieu, I leave each of you to your own device. Take care of it, stroke it gently, mouth it and fondle it. As the center of your consciousness, it's really all you have.¹⁶⁵

Martin's words were provocative and caused controversy in the gay rights movement. While many lesbians would leave the movement with her, others like Barbara Gittings (and her partner Kay Lahusen) felt her anger was misdirected. They did not believe that most men in the movement were sexist, nor did they believe that they had been discriminated against because of

¹⁶⁴ "Ladder December 1970/January 1971, 4-6.

¹⁶⁵ "Ladder December 1970/January 1971, 6.

their womanhood. They wanted to continue to fight for their rights as gay people with the men they had working with for a long time.¹⁶⁶

This was not first time Martin had expressed disappointment and alienation from the “‘boys club’” of the gay rights movement. In 1959, she and Phyllis Lyon spoke at the Mattachine Sixth Annual Convention. The president of the national Society had invited the two to present them with an honorary membership, and to potentially discuss merging the Society and DOB, but instead Martin rebuked the crowd of mostly men for ignorance of lesbian issues,¹⁶⁷ saying:

‘What do you know about lesbians? You speak of the male homosexual and follow it with—‘and incidentally, there are some female homosexuals, too, and because they are homosexual, all this should apply to them as well’...’Lesbians are *women*, and this twentieth century is the era of emancipation of women’...’Lesbians are not satisfied to be auxiliary members or second-class homosexuals.’”¹⁶⁸

This resentment was not new, nor did it come out of nowhere. There was a clear precedent set about a decade before the Gay Liberation Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement was not much better than their homophile counterparts.

There were not many lesbians in the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activists Alliance. In the former 10-15% of members were lesbians and, in the latter, less than 10% of

¹⁶⁶ Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 176.

¹⁶⁷ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 227.

¹⁶⁸ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 227.

members were.¹⁶⁹ Neither organization gave women much recognition either. In the GLF, women who spoke with as much passion and authority as the men were often resented by the men. GLF dances also made lesbians in the group uncomfortable; only 15% of attendees were women, and the women who did attend them felt alienated. There was no place for women to hang out without being surrounded by men and male eroticism, as men “sucked up all the air in the room” to the point where women did not feel they could breathe. Women had to organize separate dances for themselves.¹⁷⁰ In GAA, women were not given the same speaking or leadership opportunities as the men were. When Jean O’Leary was able to create a lesbian committee (Lesbian Liberation Committee) in the early 1970s,¹⁷¹ men took up spots at meetings and did not help with set up or clean-up of their events. The group ended up splitting off from GAA in 1973, renamed to Lesbian Feminist Liberation.¹⁷²

Not all gay men in the movement were unsympathetic or ignorant, nor did gay women and gay men refuse to work together entirely forever. Steven F. Dansky and some other GLF men would form the Effeminist group/movement, a pro-feminist group that advocated for women in the movement and critiqued the sexism and the “overwhelming male presence” in the movement. Women had to either “elbow their way through” to find other women or leave at the door in GLF dances and the Gay Liberation movement. He specifically criticized men in the GLF, who he claimed either needed to stop attacking and avoiding women’s liberation or risk

¹⁶⁹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 230-231.

¹⁷⁰ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 201, 228.

¹⁷¹ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 230. The proposal to create the committee was met with questions of relevance to gay rights, because it apparently sounded like it was about women’s issues.

¹⁷² Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 228, 230-231; “Lesbian Tide February 1973.” 1973. Periodical. The Tide Collective, February.
<https://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/Assorted%20Pubs/Lesbian%20Tide/lesbian%20tide-7302.compressed.pdf>, 10; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 136.

becoming the young, hip, counter-culture version of the Mattachine Society leading another “man revolution” at the expense of lesbians.¹⁷³

Sexism in the Gay Liberation Movement remained an issue for years, but it had changed form by 1973. Men in the movement moved to attacking lesbian liberation politically, either by smearing as communists, socialists, or “dupes” those ideologies, or emphasizing the aid given to lesbians by other groups or by men to undermine their contributions. Lesbians who were willing to tolerate the sexism to continue fighting for Gay Liberation continued their work in the movement. They were still dealing with the same issues as gay men (employment discrimination, housing discrimination, criminal status, , etc.) and they were not going to get pushed out, for the simple reason that their “...real enemy [was] too strong for [them] to spend many more years fighting each other.”¹⁷⁴

Many lesbians joined the feminist movement instead, especially after 1970 when the somewhat hostile relationship between the lesbians and the feminist movement changed for the better. Before 1970, radical feminists were the few feminists who welcomed lesbians into the movement. Betty Friedan, one of the founders of the National Organization for Women, was hesitant to allow lesbians into the movement, worried that lesbians (“the Lavender Menace”) would ruin the movement’s image. By May 1970, Daughters of Bilitis had been removed from the sponsor list for the First Congress to Unite Women by Friedan, and the New York chapter of NOW had purged suspected and self-identified lesbian members. Despite this, lesbians would continue to be involved as much as they could, some in conjunction with the Homophile

¹⁷³ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 196-197, 199.

¹⁷⁴ “Lesbian Tide April 1973.” 1973. Periodical. The Tide Collective, April.
<https://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/Assorted%20Pubs/Lesbian%20Tide/New/LesbianTide-2-9.pdf>, 20-21.

Movement.¹⁷⁵ In 1970, the Radicalesbians, a lesbian group created by Rita Mae Brown, seized main stage of the Second Congress to Unite Women and forced the women in attendance to listen to them. The group shared their manifesto (*The Woman-Identified Woman*), which critiqued the feminist movement's exclusion of lesbians, and won over the conference. At the next year's conference, representatives of various NOW chapters passed a resolution affirming the importance of lesbian rights.¹⁷⁶

Like lesbians, the trans community felt their contributions were ignored, but the trans community's oppression went farther. Not only were their contributions ignored, but they also felt like they were treated like a liability, and no one was more cognizant of this than Sylvia Rivera. The 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day was the most visible example of exclusion and discrimination in the movement (by both gay men and lesbians). Rivera, the cofounder of Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries, took the opportunity to express her outrage at the movement. Her famous speech on the day embodied the resentment many trans people had towards the Gay Liberation Movement:

I've been trying to get up here all day for your gay brothers and your gay sisters in jail that write me every motherfucking week and ask you for your help....They've been beaten up and raped after they've had to spend much of their money in jail to get their self home and try to get their sex changes. The women have tried to fight for their sex changes or to become women of the Women's

¹⁷⁵ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 233-235; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 173; Rosen, Ruth. 2000. *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*. Viking, 74-75.

¹⁷⁶ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 231-237; Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement*, 174.

Liberation and they write STAR, not to the women's groups, they do not write to men, they write STAR because we're trying to do something for them. I have been to jail. I have been raped, and beaten. Many times....But, do you do anything for me? No. You tell me to go and hide my tail between my legs. I will not put up with this shit...I have had my nose broken...I have lost my job. I have lost my apartment for gay liberation and you all treat me this way? What the fuck's wrong with you all?....I believe in Gay Power. I believe in us getting our rights, or else I would not be out there fighting for our rights. That's all I wanted to say to you people.¹⁷⁷

Rivera had hit her breaking point after years of disrespect towards her and her community. No one was helping them despite the fact they were supporting the same cause as gay men and lesbians and were sacrificing the same things they were. It was especially clear during the annual Christopher Street Liberation Days. After the first Christopher Street Liberation Day parade in 1970, the afterparty hosted by New York University was supposed to have a black trans performer, but she was not allowed to perform. The organizers justified the decision by accusing drag queens of mocking "real" women and doubled down on the decision when confronted by Rivera, Marsha P. Johnson (the other cofounder of STAR), and one of their friends.¹⁷⁸ The 1973 Christopher Street Liberation Day parade was not any different. Jean O'Leary's Lesbian Feminist Liberation had been protesting the inclusion of a "transvestite" performer for weeks

¹⁷⁷ Sylvia Rivera. 1973. Sylvia Rivera Y'all Better Quiet Down 1978. June 24. <http://archive.org/details/sylvia-rivera-yall-better-quiet-down-1978>.

¹⁷⁸ Tourmaline, Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 104-106.

before that year's march, and O'Leary planned to make a speech attacking the performer and men who "cross-dressed for profit" during the march. Vito Russo, one of the organizers allowed her to make the speech even though march was not supposed to be political. STAR was supposed to march in the parade, but the group was prevented from marching, and their banner was removed from the bandstand. STAR marched anyway and dealt with the slights thrown their way while they did. Rivera also wanted to make a speech and had to fight event organizers to get onto the stage to deliver hers. Rivera left the movement shortly after she made the speech.¹⁷⁹

The gay community, as summed up by Rivera, was "always embarrassed by the drag queens."¹⁸⁰ Trans people were excluded from major groups like the Gay Activists Alliance. The Gay Liberation Front was the only group that did not push them away, but even it had some issues with exclusion, at least early on. The term drag queen" was used as a put-down in early meetings.¹⁸¹ Different accounts of the period blame different groups for the exclusion of the trans community. Rivera and Miss Major Griffin-Gracy claimed that the gay community was generally unsupportive, but said certain groups were worse than others. Rivera said lesbian-feminists, specifically O'Leary and her group, were the worst. Griffin-Gracy and Johnson claimed gay men were worse than lesbians who were welcoming according to Johnson. The divisions between everyone were deeply entrenched and did not narrow until the AIDS crisis when cooperation meant life or death.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 154-156; Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, 128; Tourmaline, Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 140, 149-144.

¹⁸⁰ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 152.

¹⁸¹ "Come Out! November 1969." 1969. Periodical. COME OUT!, November. <https://outhistory.org/files/original/42b46f17f4fd7c6d62f105c1489d7b47.pdf>, 12; Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 231; Tourmaline, Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 101-103.

¹⁸² Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 178-179, 226-227; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 152.

Lesbian-feminists were particularly known for being exclusionary. Del Martin accused drag queens of mimicking heterosexual society and making the gay community a laughingstock to society and destroying the community's personhood. If the community wanted to be taken seriously, it needed to stop indulging in drag.¹⁸³ Jean O'Leary left the movement partly because the Gay Alliance allowed transvestites/drag queens like Rivera and Johnson to be members due to her feminist beliefs.¹⁸⁴ Similarly to Martin, she was also worried that including transvestites would ruin the image of Gay Liberation Movement and its chance at success. When she and others were trying get a gay rights bill passed in New York City, transvestites wanted to be included in the bill. O'Leary and the others rejected them, explaining: "“This doesn't work. We are never going to get the bill through the city council if transvestites are included in the bill. This is not what our battle is about. It's about gay rights, not transvestite rights. We're talking about being able to love someone of your own sex...This is not about how we dress.”" O'Leary admitted that transvestites could have been included in the bill, but the gay community did not want to be associated with them out of fear that working with them would ruin their chances at getting the bill passed. She regretted it later on, telling Eric Marcus: "“It was horrible. How could I work to exclude transvestites and at the same time criticize the feminists who were doing their best back in those days to exclude lesbians?”"¹⁸⁵

It is important to note that not every lesbian feminist agreed with excluding trans women from their movement. In 1972, the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis group voted against the admission of transsexuals into their organization, but it was not a unanimous vote. Some

¹⁸³ "Ladder December 1970/January 1971, 5.

¹⁸⁴ Faderman, *The Gay Revolution: The Story of the Struggle*, 213.

¹⁸⁵ Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 156.

members of the branch believed transsexuals were “synthetic women,” not lesbians, who faced a different type of oppression than lesbians. Others argued against this reasoning, claiming that transsexual women were born in the wrong body and the issue really boiled down to whether an individual accepted society’s definition of transsexualism and how individuals defined lesbianism. An editorial in the *Lesbian Tide* by its collective sided with the latter side, accusing the women who voted no of siding with their oppressors, then invited transsexuals to join the Los Angeles branch. Del Martin was interviewed about the issue and claimed that because transsexual women could only be legally classified as woman if they surgically transitioned, they should not be allowed to be members until they had surgery. She also added that the issue was taking away too much time that could have been dedicated to other lesbian concerns and deflected by saying it was too controversial to be decided by DOB leadership when her interviewer pointed out the how some feminist groups had the same attitude towards lesbians. Staff from an affiliated DOB periodical walked out and resigned from their positions in protest.¹⁸⁶ This exclusion was common and palpable, but it was not universal.

No matter if one group was more exclusionary and discriminatory than another, the trans community did not receive enough support, consideration, or respect to focus its energy on the Gay Liberation Movement. Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera created Street Transvestite Revolutionaries in 1970 to address the increased presence of street youth (street queens) post-Stonewall. Both had lived on the street since they were young, and wanted to keep as many

¹⁸⁶ “Lesbian Tide December 1972.” 1972. Periodical. The Tide Collective, December. <https://www.houstonlgbthistory.org/Houston80s/Assorted%20Pubs/Lesbian%20Tide/lesbian%20tide-7212.compressed.pdf>, 21, 29, 31.

youths off the streets as possible. When the group had stable housing, they provided shelter, advice for living on the streets, and even cheap wigs and make.¹⁸⁷

The group barely received any support from the gay community. Rivera recalled in an interview with Eric Marcus the following, “When we asked the community to help us [tears coming down face] there was nobody to help us. We were nothing.” She mentioned GAA being particularly unhelpful, saying, “...GAA had teachers and lawyers and all we asked was to help us teach our own so we could all become a little bit better.”¹⁸⁸ According to her, the only ones who were supportive were Bob Kohler, who helped them repair the apartment, and the Gay Liberation Front, who both gave unspecified support and acknowledged their importance as “vanguard of the revolution.” The group did not have enough money to establish a permanent shelter and safety because of the lack of support from the gay community; the group disbanded in 1973.¹⁸⁹ Miss Major Griffin-Gracy recalled Rivera and Johnson’s efforts to protect their community the best they could. While she was only occasionally involved with the women, she commended them for their dedication in an interview with Abraham J. Lewis: “...Sylvia and Marsha were trying to take care of community before we really knew we need to be taken care of. They had a vision, they saw what was coming. And they did their best to protect us. To make us aware of it.”¹⁹⁰ From her account, they were the few who fought for and cared for the trans community [in New York]; the rest of the community was unsympathetic.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ Tourmaline, Marsha: *The Joy and Defiance of Marsha P. Johnson*, 106-112, 119-139.

¹⁸⁸ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 146.

¹⁸⁹ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 146-147; Marcus, *Making Gay History: The Half-Century Fight for Lesbian and Gay Equal Rights*, 151-152; ; Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 111.

¹⁹⁰ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 175, 181-182.

¹⁹¹ Baumann, *The Stonewall Reader*, 175-181.

CONCLUSION

The gay community developed, expanded, and evolved from the late 19th century to mid-20th century despite multiple attempts by conservative, social-purity focused groups to suppress it. These groups helped create the legal, social, and medical mechanisms used to oppress gay people, and by 1950 many in the community had enough of their oppression and started to fight back collectively. From 1950 to the early 1970s, three major divisions developed within the gay community and gay politics. The first was younger activists versus older activists.

The Homophile Movement began in the 1950s with the founding of groups like the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, but many within these groups did not agree on what the right course of action was. Some wanted the community to be proactive in challenging the systems that held the community back through direct political actions like pickets, while others wanted to change society and the institution through education and legal challenges. The difference in political tactics was heavily dependent on age, a dynamic that came to a head in the mid to late 1960s. Younger generations generally wanted the movement to be more direct and militant, preferring more radical and controversial acts like picketing or any actions that were outside the system and institutions. Older generations, who had lived through the McCarthy era and the Second Red Scare paranoia, preferred educating society on the plight of the homosexual and challenging the laws and mechanisms that created said plight through the legal system. Older generations generally had the upper hand during the Homophile Movement, taking up the majority of leadership roles and creating a political environment that felt stifling to younger

activists (and a few older activists) who felt the movement was too rigid and cautious. This was only one of three examples of divisions in the overall gay rights movement.

The Stonewall Riots were a turning point in the gay rights movement. On June 28th, 1969, a normal bar raid in Greenwich Village, New York City turned into a historic riot that flipped the direction and tone of gay politics going forward; it was as if a switch had been flipped and almost everyone in the Village that night (and the larger community going forward) collectively decided to express their anger at the mistreatment they had been experiencing. The fervor of the few days of rioting that raid generated became the foundation of the Gay Liberation Movement. Its goals included the abolition of anti-sodomy laws, securing protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation, ending police harassment towards the gay community, legalizing gay bars (the center of gay culture), removing homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, and cultivating a sense of pride and confidence in being gay (individually and collectively) in an effort to unite the community. The movement largely inherited its goals from its predecessor, but it was different from its predecessor in three ways. First, the goals it inherited from the Homophile Movement were tackled in more direct ways—with the exception of abolishing sodomy law—like marches and rallies. Second, the main goals of the Homophile Movement did not include more cultural goals like removing homosexuality from the DSM or creating a sense of collective confidence among the gay community. Third, the power dynamic of the Gay Liberation Movement was the opposite of that within the Homophile Movement; the youth led the movement, not the elders. Homophile activists were part of the Gay Liberation Movement, but they were not the ones driving the movement.

The Gay Liberation Movement did not succeed in uniting the community in the way many in the movement wanted. This is when the second and third divisions within the community and gay politics became visible: lesbians versus gay men and trans people versus the gay community. Lesbians and trans people were often unacknowledged and rejected from the movement. Both groups felt alienated from the movement. Lesbians experienced sexism from men in the Gay Liberation movement in a variety of ways. They were often treated as assistants or secretaries and were hardly ever given leadership or speaking opportunities. Many lesbians also did not feel that the movement was addressing their issues (based on the feminist movement), either because men in the movement did not acknowledge them or attacked the feminist movement. Additionally, the near omnipresent presence of men and male eroticism made lesbians feel uncomfortable, especially at dances. Trans people were outright rejected from the movement, including by lesbians, and were considered embarrassments or liabilities. Their needs, wants, and contributions were often ignored and they had to care for themselves. Neither group felt like they fit in with the movement, and trans people were cast out of both the movement and the gay community; gay men dominated the Gay Liberation Movement and left little room for their lesbian sisters and the trans community to contribute and be recognized for their contributions. Both lesbians and trans people needed to advocate for themselves separately if they wanted their needs to be addressed.

The Gay Liberation Movement did a lot of good for the queer community and deserved the recognition it has received. It successfully challenged most of the institutions that had oppressed the community for over half a century, and cultivated a sense of confidence in a collective gay identity that is still visible today. However, all the good it did for the community has not erased the palpable divisions and exclusions it had while it was happening; not everyone

in the movement received the same benefits. Gay men dominated the movement and reaped many of the rewards, while lesbians and the trans community received little recognition of their issues or their contributions to the movement. Both groups were excluded from the movement in one way or another. Gay men were not necessarily less sexist than heterosexual men, nor were lesbians and gay men necessarily more supportive of trans people than the rest of society. There were lines separating different groups in the community, and they showed in how lesbians and trans people were treated by Gay Liberation Movement.

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