

“THE SECOND LARGEST MINORITY”:  
ANALOGIES BETWEEN RACE AND SEXUALITY  
IN THE AMERICAN HOMOPHILE MOVEMENT, 1944-1968

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Degree of  
Master of History

Middle Tennessee State University  
May 2018

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that the black freedom struggle provided the template through which early gay and lesbian activists conceived of their sexuality as a basis for political organizing. In the first decade after World War II, gay intellectuals first posited a minority framework for homosexuals explicitly modeled on African American experiences. In an emerging public sphere of publications, organizations, and conferences, homophiles debated the merits of the analogy between sexual orientation and race. By the early 1960s, perceived successes in African American civil rights struggles influenced a new militancy among homophile activists, who increasingly adopted the analogy and modeled tactics and strategies on black activism. While this paradigm provided a basis for solidarity between movements, expressed in joint organizing against police brutality and electoral coalitions, it also constructed homosexual political identity as normatively white. This research offers insights into the emergence of gay liberation, the interplay between mid-twentieth century social movements, and the interconnection of race and sexuality in modern American history.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Gay is the New Black,” declared the cover story of popular LGBT magazine *The Advocate* on November 16, 2008.<sup>1</sup> Penned by white gay journalist Michael Joseph Gross, the article appeared just days after the passage of California’s Proposition 8, which amended the state’s constitution to legally invalidate same-sex marriage. As African American communities celebrated Barack Obama’s historic victory in the presidential race, LGBT activists struggled to make sense of their defeat at the ballot in a state widely assumed to be a bastion of social and sexual liberalism. In this highly charged atmosphere, the political coalition forged between two prominent “minority” communities in California from the 1970s onward seemed at risk of dissolving.

Tensions between white gay and African American heterosexual constituencies rippled through media coverage and activist debates in the aftermath of the election. As Gross’s article observed, “Many commentators noted that 70% of gays voted for Obama but 70% of blacks voted for Prop. 8. From this fact, some drew a race-baiting, false conclusion that blacks lost the election for us.” One activist who reached that conclusion was Robin Tyler, a white lesbian same-sex marriage activist and plaintiff in the court case that would eventually overturn Proposition 8. As executive director of the Equality Campaign during a week of “Freedom to Marry” rallies in 2004, she had declared, “Marriage bureaus are the new lunch counters.”<sup>2</sup> After the referendum’s passage in 2008,

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Joseph Gross, “Gay is the New Black: The Last Great Civil Rights Struggle,” *The Advocate*, November 16, 2008.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Curtis, “Freedom to Marry Week: Activists Prepare Mass Valentine Rallies,” January 8, 2004, cited in Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement: Keeping the Dream Straight?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 104.

she authored an article titled “Why We Feel Betrayed,” castigating African Americans for, in her view, siding with their oppressors to reinforce a form of discrimination analogous to Jim Crow:

The gay community wants total and equal rights with the straight community, including marriage. Offering gays only domestic unions and civil partnerships are separate and not equal. When African Americans had to drink from separate water fountains, it was called segregation... To ask us to accept only domestic unions and civil partnerships are marriage segregation.

Yet despite powerful feelings of betrayal, Tyler insisted that she and other white lesbians and gay men were “still firmly committed to continuing our fight against racism. Because, as Dr. King said, ‘injustice against one is injustice against all.’”<sup>3</sup>

In his *Advocate* article, Gross took care to distance himself from critiques such as Tyler’s. By contrast, he argued, African American political leaders had worked tirelessly on behalf of LGBT equality, despite the collective failure of white gays and lesbians to reciprocate with their political support. Commenting on signs reading “I Have a Dream, Too” and “Welcome to Selma” that appeared at post-Proposition 8 protests, he cautioned white activists to tread carefully when drawing simplistic parallels between LGBT and African American civil rights movements. Yet as he watched a drag queen screaming for the news cameras at a protest after the election, he wondered “why this movement still doesn’t have a Martin Luther King, Jr.” Gay people in the United States in 2008, he contended, were “the most socially acceptable targets for the kind of casual hatred that

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<sup>3</sup> Robin Tyler, “Why We Feel Betrayed.” Huffington Post, December 13, 2008. [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robin-tyler/why-we-feel-betrayed\\_b\\_143424.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/robin-tyler/why-we-feel-betrayed_b_143424.html) (accessed March 1, 2018).

American society once approved for habitual use against black people.” And if a similar referendum had reversed “the civil rights of African Americans, Hispanics, women, or any other minority,” he speculated, “there would be universal outrage in this country.”<sup>4</sup>

Comparisons linking gay and lesbian political movements with the black freedom struggle emerged long before Proposition 8 in 2008 or the debates over same-sex marriage that immediately preceded it. In fact, each one of the analogies drawn by Tyler and Gross between African American and gay and lesbian experiences directly mirrors claims made by activists across more than fifty years, dating back to the origins of gay and lesbian political organizing in the United States. Moral equivalence between anti-gay and anti-black discrimination; the assumption that gays had surpassed African Americans as the most viciously targeted minority group; the presumption that both communities shared similar forms of oppression and the call for solidarity between them; responding with indignation when black leaders failed to validate white gay political demands; and the borrowing of the history, strategy, and rhetoric of African American civil rights as the template for LGBT movements: every one of these themes originated in the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Understanding the comparisons and claims that animate American LGBT movements today requires an examination of how the analogy between gays/lesbians and African Americans emerged historically.

Since their inception in the decade after World War II, LGBT political movements in the United States have conceived of and attempted to legitimize their struggles through comparison with the black freedom struggle. From the 1940s onwards, activists and

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<sup>4</sup> Gross, “Gay is the New Black.”

writers began to propose an analogy between homosexuality and race as a framework for making sense of same-sex desire and imagining its political possibilities. By conceptualizing sexual identity as a political and cultural minority status based upon the template of African Americans (and to a lesser extent, other racial or religious minorities), LGBT activists located their claims within a highly charged history of civil rights and racial justice organizing.

The use of African American identities and politics by LGBT activists as key points of comparison stretches back long before the Stonewall Rebellion and the radical gay liberation movement. Its roots lie in the emergence of the first homophile organizations and the earliest extant homosexual political writings in the United States. The early activists and intellectuals of what would become the gay and lesbian movement theorized the political potential of their sexual identity through the lens of their understandings of the black freedom struggle. No documented communication or collaboration took place directly between homophile organizations and civil rights or Black Power movements until the end of this era. Nonetheless, gay and lesbian activists in the 1950s and 1960s followed directly in the footsteps—or rode on the coattails—of African American political movements.

Historians of LGBT political movements in the United States widely recognize the crucial importance of African American organizing as an influence on the overlapping movements that have been labeled homophile, gay liberation, lesbian feminist, and LGBT rights at different times. However, the black freedom struggle did not merely inspire white homosexuals to organize politically; it provided the conceptual framework through which they made sense of their experience and invested it with collective political



potential. As black lesbian poet and activist Audre Lorde explained in the 1984 documentary *Before Stonewall*, “The Black Power and the civil rights movement of the late 50s and the 60s was the prototype of every single liberation movement in this country.”<sup>5</sup> For the homophile movement, their self-understanding as a minority group, the discourses and rhetoric they adopted, the strategies and tactics they deployed, and the standards by which they evaluated their progress all derived directly from their observation of African American activism in the 1950s and 1960s. In short, the modern LGBT movement as it emerged from 1969 onward, and indeed American gay and lesbian political subjectivity itself, would be unrecognizable without the frameworks it modeled upon the black freedom struggle.

This conception of homosexual identity as analogous to the status of a racial minority seeking civil rights was not unanimously or universally adopted by gay men and lesbians during the homophile era. Alternative frameworks rejected minoritarian concepts of sexual identity and couched political appeals within discourses of individual freedom, sexual liberation, anti-fascism, psychological adjustment and human potential, and personal privacy, to name just a few. A lively debate over how to understand homosexuality and respond collectively to its challenges took place in the publications, discussion groups, and personal correspondence of activists within the fledgling movement. However, by the mid-1960s the minority paradigm modeled on the black freedom struggle had become the dominant and most politically productive articulation of homosexual identity for the growing and increasingly strident movement.

This thesis examines the roots of the analogy between homosexuality and African

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<sup>5</sup> Audre Lorde interview in Greta Schiller, director, *Before Stonewall*. DVD. (New York: First Run Features, 1984).

American racial identity as it emerged among homosexual writers and activists between 1944 and 1968. To trace its development, I focus on movement periodicals, supplemented by correspondence and personal papers from early activists, interviews, and media coverage from the mainstream white and African American press. In this introduction, I frame the historiographical background to my research, assessing how scholars of LGBT history in the United States have, and have not, addressed questions of race, minority paradigms, and the influence of the black freedom struggle within accounts of the homophile movement and gay and lesbian life from the 1940s to the 1960s. In the second chapter, I begin the story by investigating the emergence of the minority paradigm in the early 1950s through the writings of Donald Webster Cory and the activism of Harry Hay and the Mattachine Society, and trace its development in the pages of *ONE Magazine*, *The Mattachine Review*, *The Ladder*, and other homophile publications. I also investigate critiques and limitations of the minoritarian framework identified by contemporaries, and examine how activists responded to them.

The third chapter documents a shift that had become apparent within homophile movement conversations by 1963, reflecting the widespread acceptance of the minority group paradigm among homophile activists and limited but growing acknowledgment of its validity by heterosexual commentators. In this era, activists showed increasing interest in applying not only conceptual but tactical and strategic approaches garnered from the black freedom struggle. In the years leading up to the Stonewall Rebellion, a widespread homophile movement modeled almost entirely on civil rights and Black Power struggles had taken root and was organizing actively across the country. Their efforts established the ideological framework through which gay and lesbian minority rights would be

articulated and gay/black coalitions would be negotiated in the post-Stonewall era. The fourth and final chapter concludes by tracing the use of the analogy into the 1970s, including its increasingly widespread acceptance, the forging of electoral alliances between black and gay communities, and the significance of backlash against the analogy between homosexuality and African American identity to the emergence of the religious right. I finish with reflections on the significance of this research to contemporary LGBT organizing and the long legacy of both inter-communal solidarity and racial and sexual tensions that characterize political relationships between (normatively white) LGBT and (nominally heterosexual) African American communities to this day.

Despite the substantial body of historiography exploring the homophile movement and gay and lesbian communities in the 1950s and 1960s, little explicit scholarly attention has focused on the critical importance of analogies between sexuality and race to the development of homosexual political subjectivity. John D'Emilio's seminal 1983 study *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* inaugurated the field of academic LGBT history by narrating "the making of a homosexual minority." D'Emilio's work lays the foundation for this study with its argument that homosexuality emerged as the basis for a minoritarian political identity through a contingent process of historical development and not automatically or inevitably as the expression of natural categories; in short, a homosexual "minority" was "made," not merely discovered or acknowledged. While his work frames the economic and political developments that sustained homophile organizing and led to the explosion of gay liberation, he does not directly explore the central role of comparisons with African American identity and organizing in

producing this minority consciousness among gay men and lesbians. This thesis aims to enrich D'Emilio's structural and economic thesis about the significance of capitalism, urbanization, and World War II within the making of a homosexual minority by emphasizing the social, political, and intellectual influence of black freedom organizing. This perspective reshapes our temporal and conceptual understanding of the process documented in *Sexual Politics*, *Sexual Communities*, helping to explain why homosexual identity emerged as a minority status at the time that it did and why it assumed the specific form it took.<sup>6</sup>

Studies exploring the homophile movement and gay and lesbian communities from the 1940s through the 1960s have offered limited insights into the significance of race and the impact of the black freedom struggle on early activists. Accounts of the pre-Stonewall gay and lesbian movement centered in the reminiscences of white activists, such as Toby Marotta's *The Politics of Homosexuality*, Vern Bullough's edited collection *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context*, and Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker's *The Gay Crusaders* do not substantively address race at all.<sup>7</sup> David Johnson's *The Lavender Scare* provides important detail about how federal persecution of homosexuals in Washington, DC helped to coalesce gay men and lesbians as a politically active minority. However, his account offers only limited discussion of race, omitting how exclusion of the city's African American majority from most federal jobs during the height of the anti-homosexual purges structured the racial context of

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<sup>6</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981); Vern L. Bullough, ed., *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002); Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker, *The Gay Crusaders* (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

homophile appeals, and describing only in passing the critical impact of black civil rights organizing on the aspirations and tactics of early DC gay and lesbian activists.<sup>8</sup> Community studies by Daneel Buring on Memphis, by Marc Stein on Philadelphia, by John Howard on Mississippi, and by Genny Beemyn on Washington, DC have examined the significance of race within LGBT community formation and politics during the time period and illuminated the lives and distinct communities of same-sex loving African Americans. However, these works have not delved into the importance of sexuality/race analogies by white gay men and lesbians, or how African Americans responded.<sup>9</sup> Rochelle Thorpe's examination of black lesbian life in Detroit, E. Patrick Johnson's oral histories of gay black men in the South, and Kevin Mumford's discussion of gay black men from the March on Washington through the AIDS crisis have developed our knowledge of the social history of gay and lesbian African Americans during the era. However, these works do not focus on the relationships between African Americans and white-led homophile movements, or how frameworks of race shaped white gay and lesbian political organizing.<sup>10</sup>

Some critics have challenged LGBT historians who have overlooked African American experiences and questions of race from discussions of the homophile era. For

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<sup>8</sup> David Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Daneel Buring, *Lesbian and Gay Memphis: Building Communities behind the Magnolia Curtain* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997); Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); Genny Beemyn, *A Queer Capital: A History of Gay Life in Washington, D.C.* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Rochelle Thorpe, “‘A House Where Queers Go’: African-American Lesbian Nightlife in Detroit, 1940-1975.” In *Inventing Lesbian Cultures in America*, ed. Ellen Lewin (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 40-61; E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); Kevin Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men From The March On Washington To The AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

example, Allen Drexel's essay "Before Paris Burned: Race, Class, and Male Homosexuality on the Chicago South Side, 1935–1960" takes D'Emilio to task for centering his narrative on the experiences of predominantly white homophile activists and formal organizations that rarely proved racially inclusive. By describing large and highly visible black queer subcultures in mid twentieth-century Chicago, which thrived during a time that, according to standard narratives of homophile organizing, were characterized by widespread fear and invisibility, he challenges paradigms for defining what counts as early gay and lesbian movement history that privilege white experiences. Allan Bérubé's essay "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays" elaborates on Drexel's criticisms, examining the myriad ways in which unexamined assumptions built in to LGBT historiography position white people as the subjects of gay history. These important interventions examine contemporary practices by LGBT activists and historians that continue to center white experiences within LGBT narratives. Nevertheless, neither author proposes analytic frameworks to explain the relationship between whiteness and homophile politics and identity as it emerged historically.<sup>11</sup> Without an understanding of how early gay and lesbian activists formulated their identities and politics on the basis of an analogy with African Americans, scholars and activists lack the context necessary to make historical sense of contemporary LGBT movements' claims to legitimacy based on the legacy of the African American civil rights movement.

Recent research has moved towards more integrated understandings of

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<sup>11</sup> Allen Drexel, "Before Paris Burned: Race, Class, and Male Homosexuality on the Chicago South Side, 1935–1960," in *Creating a Place for Ourselves*, ed. Brett Beemyn (New York: Routledge, 1997), 119–44; Allan Bérubé, "How Gay Stays White and What Kind of White It Stays," in *Privilege*, eds. Michael S. Kimmel and Abby L. Ferber (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2010), 179–210.

movements pertaining to race and sexuality in the mid-twentieth century United States. Robert Self's *All in the Family* locates the homophile movement within broader shifts in gender roles, family formations, and political alignments from the 1960s onward, and describes the emergence of gay/black electoral alliances in the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> However, his account does not address the conceptual roots of these subsequent collaborations in early homophile theorizations of the analogy between sexuality and race. Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line* establishes the critical importance of race within the cultural construction of homosexuality in her study of late nineteenth century film, literature, and performance, laying the groundwork for my exploration of the political intersections of sexuality and race decades later. In *Reasoning From Race*, legal historian Serena Mayeri traces the critical importance of the analogy between race and sex to feminist legal strategy from the early suffrage movement to the Reagan era, offering key insight into how another social movement drew on paradigms based in the black freedom struggle, though she does not focus on homophile activists.<sup>13</sup> Emily Hobson's *Lavender and Red* documents gay and lesbian organizing in the Bay Area after 1969 that explicitly pursued solidarity across lines of difference and collaborative struggle with anti-racist and anti-imperialist movements. But her research does not trace the origins of gay and lesbian conceptions of "minority" politics or the pre-Stonewall attempts to build inter-movement solidarity.<sup>14</sup> Dissertations by Jared Leighton and Jennifer Jones have discussed homosexuality and the African American civil rights movement, though without

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<sup>12</sup> Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Serena Mayeri, *Reasoning From Race: Feminism, Law, and the Civil Rights Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Emily Hobson, *Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity on the Gay and Lesbian Left* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

emphasis on the homophile movement's relationship to it.<sup>15</sup> Michael Long's thorough study of the limited material available documenting Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s perspectives on homosexuality and social justice explores many useful intersections between homophile organizing and the logic of African American civil rights movements.<sup>16</sup> Kevin Mumford's 2011 article on race and gay rights organizing in Philadelphia after 1969 offers some homophile era context in his case study of post-Stonewall gay/black collaborations and tensions.<sup>17</sup> Timothy Stewart-Winter's *Queer Clout* begins an explicit examination of the history of gay/black analogies and coalitions within urban politics in Chicago from the 1960s onwards, while Kent Peacock discusses the analogy in an article analyzing racial politics in the Mattachine Society of Washington from 1961-1970, but no current scholarship traces its emergence before 1960 or comparatively across the nationwide movement.<sup>18</sup>

This thesis builds on these works by extending back to the intellectual and political origins of homophile organizing and tracing the development of analogies between sexuality and race in the nationwide movement. By focusing explicitly on how the black freedom struggle gave shape to the identities and politics of the homophile movement, we can gain a clearer understanding of the emergence of gay liberation, the interplay between mid-twentieth century social movements, and the intimate interconnection of race and sexuality in post-World War II politics. Without the African

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<sup>15</sup> Jared E. Leighton, "Freedom Indivisible: Gays and Lesbians in the African American Civil Rights Movement" (PhD diss., University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 2013); Jennifer D. Jones, "'The Fruits of Mixing': Homosexuality and the Politics of Racial Empowerment in the South, 1945-1975" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> Long, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement*.

<sup>17</sup> Kevin Mumford, "The Trouble with Gay Rights: Race and the Politics of Sexual Orientation in Philadelphia 1969-1982," *Journal of American History* 98, no. 1 (June 2011), 49-72.

<sup>18</sup> Kent W. Peacock, "Race, the Homosexual, and the Mattachine Society of Washington, 1961-1970," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 25, no. 2 (May 2016), 267-296.



American civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s as a conceptual paradigm for identities and a tactical and strategic model for organizing, the political emergence of a homosexual minority could not have taken shape in the way that it did.<sup>19</sup> Thus tracing the central significance of the analogy between sexuality and race to the early homophiles helps historians understand both *why* their movement developed as it did and why it emerged *when* it did. Crediting the civil rights and Black Power movements with the instrumental role they played as models and catalysts to the homophiles—indeed, making it possible to conceive of organizing on the basis of sexual identity in the first place—also furthers our understanding of the formidably broad and deep impact of black freedom organizing on American history, politics, and culture.

Furthermore, this story offers a key to interpreting lingering racial tensions and exclusions among gay and lesbian communities since their consolidation as a political minority. The analogy between homosexual and African American experience paradoxically produced both an impulse toward cross-movement solidarity and a gay and lesbian political subjectivity anchored in normative whiteness, the consequences of which persist to this day. Understanding the tangled world of sexual and racial identities and alliances that unraveled in the furor around Proposition 8 in 2008 requires looking back to some of the earliest efforts to conceptualize homosexual experience in political terms after World War II. Documenting the central role of the black freedom struggle as the template for white gay and lesbian conceptions of identity, politics, and freedom can offer insights into how contemporary movements can reckon with the analogy's complex racial

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<sup>19</sup> Transnational comparisons with other countries within which homosexual organizations had formed by the mid-twentieth century help illustrate this point; see the discussion below of Craig Loftin's work and the French homophile group Arcadie.

legacies, and reimagine gay and lesbian political possibility beyond “the new black.”

## CHAPTER TWO: THE EMERGENCE OF THE MINORITY MODEL, 1944-1962

This chapter traces the emergence of the analogy between race and sexuality and the first efforts to conceptualize homosexuals as a political minority by early homophile activists and writers. New York author Donald Webster Cory and Los Angeles activist Harry Hay laid the intellectual foundation for the minority paradigm through reference to African American experiences and political movements. While this new model for making sense of same-sex sexuality in political terms proved compelling to many homophiles, it also attracted considerable criticism, and did not consolidate into a hegemonic paradigm until a decade after the movement's emergence in the early 1950s. Although these proponents of homosexual minority consciousness were aware of the racial diversity of the homophile population and supported racial equality, their conceptual framework linked homosexual political subjectivity with whiteness. In publications and organizational debates, an emerging homophile public sphere compared and contrasted homosexual experiences with those of African Americans and other minorities, explored the origins of prejudice, and first articulated a basis for solidarity between different groups. Sympathetic identification with African American struggles paired with indignation when proponents of racial and religious equality neglected to rise to the defense of homosexuals. After a decade of lively debate over the analogy between sexual and racial identities, homophile activists increasingly agreed that adopting a paradigm of minority consciousness and assertive political action offered the most promising path forward, setting the stage for the emerging militancy of the 1960s modeled after black civil rights activism.

Before the Analogy: Henry Gerber and the Society for Human Rights

It was not inevitable that homosexual activism would adopt a paradigm based on an analogy between sexuality and race. In 1924, a Chicago postal worker named Henry Gerber founded the Society for Human Rights, the earliest known homosexual political organization in the United States. No known copies survive of the two issues of “Friendship and Freedom,” the organization's newsletter, so it cannot be determined whether or not that publication adopted a discourse describing homosexuals as a minority or comparing them to African Americans.<sup>1</sup> However, according to his reminiscences of the Society for Human Rights and his surviving correspondence, Gerber—perhaps alone among the earliest homosexual activists in the United States—does not appear to have originally structured his political thought around the analogy between sexuality and race. In a 1944 letter to Manuel Boyfrank discussing his ideas for a “Society Scouting Sex Superstition,” Gerber articulates the politics of the proposed group in discourses of anti-fascism, individual freedom, and population control, making no reference to the black freedom struggle or other minoritarian framings.<sup>2</sup> The goals and purposes of the Society, as articulated on the group's 1924 charter written by Gerber, euphemistically described the group's mission to “promote and protect the interests of people who by reasons of mental and physical abnormalities are abused and hindered in the legal pursuit of happiness which is guaranteed them by the Declaration of Independence.”<sup>3</sup> The first formal homosexual emancipation effort in the United States does not appear to have

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<sup>1</sup> The group's president, John T. Graves, was an African American clergyman. Bullough, ed., *Before Stonewall*, 25.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Gerber to Manuel Boyfrank, October 1944, folder 1, box 1, Henry Gerber Collection, Coll2013-034, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA. Hereafter cited as Gerber Papers.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Ned Katz, *Gay American History* (New York: Crowell, 1976), 397.

rooted its politics in a comparison African American experience, suggesting that a minoritarian approach does not form an automatic or necessary framework for organizing homosexuals politically.

By 1954, however, Gerber had begun to draw on the analogy between homosexuals and African Americans. In a letter to *Writer's Digest*, he opined: "Now that we are at last overcoming segregation of colored people, we might as well do away with the unreasonable and uncivilized attitude towards some sexual variants."<sup>4</sup> This late shift likely reflects the prominence of analogies between sexuality and race within the emerging homophile movement and the influence of Donald Webster Cory and his book *The Homosexual in America*. It must also be understood within the context of the increasing visibility given to African-American struggles against segregation in the media, most notably the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision issued on May 17, 1954, less than three months before Gerber's letter to *Writer's Digest*. While a single individual's thought cannot serve as a basis from which to extrapolate broad conclusions about the intellectual history of homosexuals and social movements in the mid-twentieth century United States, the evolution of Gerber's ideas is suggestive. Framing homosexuals as a political minority analogous to African Americans was not necessarily intuitive to early activists. The analogy between sexuality and race took hold within the specific historical context of the escalating prominence of the black freedom struggle and the tentative emergence of a homophile public sphere dominated by intellectuals who advocated the analogy as a guiding paradigm. The first instances in which homosexuals struggled to make sense of their identities through the lens of the black freedom struggle

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<sup>4</sup> Henry Gerber to ONE Incorporated, August 12 1954, folder 1, box 1, Gerber Papers.

must be located within broader discussions and tensions around race, sexuality, and minorities that bubbled up during the Second World War and continued into the McCarthy era.

Sexuality and Race During World War II: “The Homosexual in Society” and the Campaign Against Blue Discharges

The first documented use of the analogy between African American and homosexual experience appears in the earliest extant political essay published about homosexuality by a self-described homosexual in the United States.<sup>5</sup> The August 1944 issue of Dwight MacDonald’s journal *politics* published an essay by bohemian poet and anarchist Robert Duncan titled “The Homosexual in Society.” Strikingly, the very first sentence in one of the first American political essays in defense of homosexuality stages the comparison between African Americans and another “group” based on sexual orientation. The piece opens:

Something in James Agee’s recent approach to the Negro pseudo-folk (*Partisan Review*, Spring 1944) is the background of the notes which I propose in discussing yet another group whose only salvation is in the struggle of all humanity for freedom and individual integrity; who have suffered in modern society persecution, excommunication . . .<sup>6</sup>

Duncan draws on the sexuality/race analogy to label attacks by hostile critics on homosexuals in the arts “as rabid as the attack of Southern senators upon ‘niggers.’” As a

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Duncan would recall in 1979, “I was the first person ever to write publicly that I was homosexual, [in] that essay ‘Homosexual and Society.’” *Gay Sunshine* 40/41 (Summer/Fall 1979), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Duncan, “The Homosexual in Society,” *politics* (August 1944), 209-211: 209.

model for translating their marginalization into political engagement, he proposes that homosexuals emulate “Negroes who have joined openly in the struggle for human freedom, made articulate that their struggle against racial prejudice is part of the struggle for all.” The contours of homosexual experience also emerge in comparison with Jewish identity; for Duncan, the use of the derogatory term “goy” by Jews in the ghetto corresponds to the flippant, slangy contempt directed by homosexuals at heterosexuals, and archly compares homosexual and Jewish tendencies to base a sense of group belonging on shared miseries.<sup>7</sup> Yet from the first sentence of the essay to the last, African American experiences form the “background” against which a new political mode of thinking homosexuality can be articulated.

Writing in 1944, before the African American civil rights movement had captured the white liberal public imagination, Duncan does not label homosexuals a “minority,” nor does he propose a model of interest group civil rights politics as would later homophile activists inspired by the analogy between race and sexuality. Instead, “The Homosexual and Society” uses the comparisons among sexuality, race, and religion to argue that homosexuals must overcome their parochial in-group mentality and defensive sense of superiority, asserting not their essential difference but their common humanity relative to the heterosexual majority. Through literature that uses the experiences of the marginalized to speak to universal themes rather than the interests of particular groups, and through political action fighting for human dignity and equality for all, homosexuals can live up to the humanistic example set by some black or Jewish artists, intellectuals, and activists. But to successfully commit oneself to the cause of human freedom, Duncan

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 210.

maintains, “One must disown all the special groups (nations, religions, sexes, races) that would claim allegiance.”<sup>8</sup>

By the late 1940s, other white homosexuals were beginning to consider their experiences in light of African American political movements, while early indications existed that those movements might see common interests with homosexuals in challenging shared oppression under certain circumstances. World War II had produced a crisis in race relations, which remained unresolved in peacetime. During the war, African American servicemen had encountered racism in accommodations, division of work assignments, opportunities for advancement, and relations with superior officers; African American women faced discrimination within the Women’s Army Corps and were excluded entirely from the Navy until 1945. Incidents of resistance proliferated, from the Port Chicago Mutiny in 1944 to everyday acts of insubordination and defiance. Meanwhile, on the home front, racial tensions erupted into violence in Beaumont, Detroit, and New York, while civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph maneuvered President Franklin Roosevelt into concessions by threatening to march on Washington.<sup>9</sup> After demobilization in 1945, many African American veterans returned home with newfound determination to challenge their subordination.<sup>10</sup>

One notable campaign waged by an African American newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, challenged the “blue discharges” through which disproportionate numbers of

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>9</sup> On African-American experiences during World War II, see Neil A. Wynn, *The Afro-American and the Second World War* (New York: Homes and Meier, 1993); Robert L. Allen, *The Port Chicago Mutiny* (Berkeley, CA: Heyday Books, 2006); Andrew E. Kersten and Clarence Lang, eds., *Reframing Randolph: Labor, Black freedom, and the Legacies of A. Philip Randolph* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11-38.



African Americans who resisted racial discrimination in the Armed Forces were released from the service. This form of “other-than-honorable” discharge could result in an ex-GI being denied government benefits and struggling to find employment. In addition to defiant black soldiers, thousands of homosexuals in the army received blue discharges. In their effort to secure promised benefits for returning black servicemen, the *Courier* sympathetically recognized the plight of homosexuals who had been “preyed upon by the blue discharge,” demanding to know “why the Army chooses to penalize these ‘unfortunates’ who seem most in need of Army benefits.”<sup>11</sup> While not drawing analogies between African Americans and homosexuals as minorities, the *Courier*’s coverage linked the two groups through shared victimization and foreshadowed the considerably more supportive coverage that African American newspapers would offer to the homophile movement in the years to come. And while black resistance had not yet seized the attention of white Americans to the extent that it would in the following decades, many, particularly on the political Left, recognized race relations as a critical fault line within American society and African American struggles as potentially significant to broader social transformation.

“An Oppressed Cultural Minority”: Harry Hay and the Founding of the Mattachine Society

Harry Hay was one such leftist whose analysis of African American struggles for justice would lead him to propose a radically new political conception of sexuality.

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<sup>11</sup> Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Penguin, 1990), 233-241. See also Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011), 159.

Working as an educator for the Communist Party in Los Angeles in the 1940s, he absorbed Joseph Stalin's definition of a minority, rooted in common language, territory, economy, and psychology and culture. By the late 1940s, Hay had come to believe that homosexuals, or "the androgynous minority," by virtue of sharing a language and a culture, could theoretically be understood as a legitimate cultural minority within Marxist terms. Also, the release of sexologist Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* in 1948 stimulated excited discussion and speculation among homosexuals about its demographic and political implications. The Kinsey Report—which documented considerably higher incidence of homosexual behavior than many had previously imagined—suggested the prospect that homosexuals might in fact constitute "an organizable minority."<sup>12</sup>

And the timing was appropriate, Hay speculated, because in the emerging repressive post-war environment, they formed a likely target as a new bogeyman. US-Soviet tensions were escalating in the new environment of an emerging Cold War; before long, the McCarran Act, federal loyalty and security programs, and the rise of Senator Joseph McCarthy would harden anti-Communist and anti-homosexual attitudes and prompted witch hunts and persecutions. As Hay would later recall, he anticipated the impact of the post-war swing to the right on his "androgynous minority": "Blacks were beginning to organize and the horror of the Holocaust was too recent to put the Jews in this position. The natural scapegoat would be us, the Queers. They were the one group of disenfranchised people who did not even know they were a group because they had never

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson, 1990), 134.

formed as a group.”<sup>13</sup> Of course, African Americans had been organizing for many years, but the heightened attention to domestic racism through the World War II-era “Double V” campaign and the militancy of some returning black servicemen led white activists to take greater notice of black struggles in the late 1940s. This upswing in visible anti-racist organizing, combined with Hay's accurate reading of forthcoming anti-gay repression, helped to lay the foundation for his vision of homosexuals organizing together similarly to African Americans.

At an August 1948 house party of gay men in Los Angeles, Hay first articulated the notion of organizing homosexuals politically under the rubric of “Bachelors for Wallace,” fantasizing that the progressive presidential candidate could be persuaded to adopt a platform including legal reforms decriminalizing homosexuality if a sizable number of homosexuals organized publicly to support him. He soon wrote out a prospectus outlining his ideas that he would revise and develop over the next two years. He described his “INTERNATIONAL BACHELOR’S FRATERNAL ORDER FOR PEACE AND SOCIAL DIGNITY, sometimes referred to as BACHELOR’S ANONYMOUS” as “a service and welfare organization devoted to the protection and improvement of Society’s Androgynous Minority.” From the initial conception, Hay’s notion of homosexual minority politics entailed solidarity with other social movements: “We aim to contribute to the general welfare of the community by making common cause with other minorities in contributing to the reform of judicial, police, and penal practices which undermine the honesty and morale of the community.” The organization’s proposed services included fighting blackmail and police brutality as well as

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 135.

campaigning for minority rights and self-determination.<sup>14</sup> When after two years of searching he finally found other homosexuals willing to undertake the organizing with him, the Mattachine Society was born. In 1951, the new group declared their aim to create “an ethical homosexual culture . . . paralleling the emerging cultures of our fellow-minorities—the Negro, Mexican, and Jewish peoples.”<sup>15</sup> Hay later considered the development of the concept of homosexuals as an oppressed cultural minority as the contribution to the early homophile movement of which he was most proud.<sup>16</sup> Early Mattachine leader Chuck Rowland agreed: “That was a new idea. Harry is the first person I know who said that gays are a minority—an oppressed minority. This was a profound contribution, and really the heart and core of the Mattachine movement and all subsequent gay movements.”<sup>17</sup>

“An Intensified Minority”: Donald Webster Cory and *The Homosexual in America*

Yet Hay was not the only, or necessarily the first, to directly articulate the notion of homosexuals as a political minority who could organize.<sup>18</sup> Across the country in New

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<sup>14</sup> “Bachelor's Anonymous - Preliminary Concept” (1948), folder 3, box 1, Harry Hay Papers, Coll2011-003, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, CA. Hereafter cited as Hay Papers.

<sup>15</sup> Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage, 1995), 334.

<sup>16</sup> Timmons, 136.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>18</sup> In a 1963 biography of early lesbian author Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge recalled that in the mid-1920s, Hall brought up the idea of writing a novel about “sexual inversion” that would be accessible to general public. Troubridge recalled, “It was her absolute conviction that such a book could only be written by a sexual invert, who alone could be qualified by personal knowledge and experience to speak on behalf of a misunderstood and misjudged minority.” If Hall used that language at the time, it may have been one of the earliest documented descriptions of homosexuals as a minority group. However, Troubridge's account, written decades later when the minority paradigm for conceptualizing homosexuality was gaining broader traction under the influence of the African-American civil rights movement's successes, may have adopted contemporary language to describe the thinking that led to the publication of *The Well of Loneliness*. Una [Vincenzo], Lady Troubridge, *The Life of Radclyffe Hall* (New York: Citadel, 1963), 81-82, cited in Katz, *Gay American History*, 397.

York City, a disgruntled perfume salesman named Edward Sagarin living in New York City with his wife and son was secretly putting the finishing touches on a powerful new book that would energize the nascent homophile movement and provide an inspiration and lifeline to thousands of lesbians and gay men growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the pen name Donald Webster Cory, he would release *The Homosexual in America* in 1951, introducing many to the concept of homosexuals as “the unrecognized minority.” Hay’s biographer Stuart Timmons notes, “Cory had been in correspondence with Hay and Rowland prior to the publication of the book but most likely reached his conclusion independently.”<sup>19</sup>

Through Cory’s work, sociological understandings of race, prejudice, and power provided a conceptual framework within which a new homosexual politics could be articulated. He detaches the definition of a minority from mere demographics and locates it within relations of social power, making the case that homosexuals are “an intensified minority, with all the problems that arise from being a separate group facing us that are faced by other groups, and with a variety of important problems that are unshared by most minorities.”<sup>20</sup> Homosexuals, “like the Negro in America,” are not seen as mere people, but as members of a minority group, thus coupling negative prejudices to any behavior they exhibit and burdening them with responsibility for the actions of others. Yet they alone among minorities lack the support of ethnic groups and suffer unrelenting social condemnation and isolation.<sup>21</sup>

*The Homosexual in America* was published within a Cold War context in which

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Donald Webster Cory, *The Homosexual in America: A Subjective Approach* (New York: Greenberg, 1951), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 24.

lesbians and gay men were associated with being security risks and vulnerable to Communism, and thus scapegoated, vilified, and hounded out of employment. The book opens with the claim that the rights of minorities will provide the “challenge of this century; they are regarded as the corner stone upon which democracy must build and flourish, or perish in the decades to come,” because “the lack of recognition of the rights of dissident and nonconforming minorities is the most distinguishing characteristic of totalitarianism.”<sup>22</sup> Cory concludes his arguments for understanding and accepting homosexuals as members of a minority by arguing that well-behaved minorities served as “a pillar of democratic strength,” since these “many and variegated waves in the sea” provided a diversity that “no force will be able to weave . . . into a single totalitarian unity.” By stepping out of the shadows into self-conscious minority status, homosexuals, rather than threatening to undermine national security, could in fact become “a pillar of strength in the defense of our threatened democracy.”<sup>23</sup> Cory thus sets the stage for the homophile movement’s efforts to simultaneously evoke American values of democracy and national security while endeavoring to challenge sexual conventions.

*The Homosexual in America* went through many printings and a second edition, and became the most widely read book offering a positive and political approach to homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall era. By 1952 it graced the display windows of bookstores in Los Angeles’s gay neighborhoods, where members of the rapidly growing Mattachine discussion groups would encounter them. Nearly every prominent homophile organizer acknowledged its significance to their thought and activism, including Jack

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 224.

Nichols, Frank Kameny, Barbara Gittings, and many others.<sup>24</sup> Gittings, for example, found herself so inspired by the book that she contacted the author, learned from him about the Mattachine Society, and hopped on a plane to California to meet homophile activists in person and get involved. Through his subsequent writings in the pages of ONE Magazine and the Mattachine Review, speeches to gatherings such as the ONE Midwinter Institute and the Daughters of Bilitis Convention, as well as his popular mail-order book service, Cory remained the single greatest intellectual influence on the homophile movement until becoming disillusioned and turning against it in the late 1960s.<sup>25</sup>

The book also influenced mainstream discussions of homosexuality, even in otherwise sharply homophobic venues. For instance, the March 1953 issue of the African American tabloid monthly *Color* ran a sensational article titled “The Danger of Sex Perverts,” warning parents about the destructive threat of homosexuality to youth. Yet this otherwise hostile article included a section called “The Unrecognized Minority,” in which the author summarizes Cory’s views at length, without criticism:

Mr. Cory attempts to prove that the problem of homosexuality is the same as the problems of the Negro and the Jew—that just like the Negro is a Negro by nature, and the Jew is a Jew because of religious heritage, the homosexual is a homosexual both by nature and heritage or environmental adjustments. As such, concludes the author, homosexuals are an unrecognized minority which should be recognized as a minority by society. His belief is that once society recognizes

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<sup>24</sup> David K. Johnson, “Donald Webster Cory.” *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> John Kyper and Steven Abbott, “The Betrayal of Donald Webster Cory?” *Fag Rag/Gay Sunshine* 9 (Summer 1974), 23.

homosexuality as a minority problem, steps will be made to solve this problem just like is done for the problems of the Negro and Jew—instead of trying to change them or ‘cure’ them.<sup>26</sup>

This surprisingly sympathetic exposition of the analogy comparing sexuality with race and religion, appearing in an African American publication, indicates both the authoritative status accorded to Cory’s arguments about homosexuals as a minority as well as the analogy’s potential power to disrupt conventions of anti-homosexual discourse within publications oriented towards other “minorities.”<sup>27</sup> Whereas articles on homosexuality within popular magazines and tabloids had usually only cited anti-homosexual perspectives from psychologists, religious leaders, and law enforcement officials prior to 1950, writers and editors now had an “authority” to cite on the topic, whose framing of homosexuals as an unrecognized minority now began to seep into broader public consciousness.

#### “An Audacious First Step in White Protestant History”: Whiteness and Homosexual Political Subjectivity

Yet from its very inception, the structure of this analogy contained an unintended consequence: the conceptual linking of homosexual identity with whiteness. Comparisons between African Americans and homosexuals as discrete minorities with parallel but separate collective interests implied that the groups were mutually exclusive. Given that the Mattachine Society included a handful of black members alongside Hay, and Cory’s

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<sup>26</sup> “The Danger of Sex Perverts,” *Color* 8, no. 12 (March 1953), 40-41.

<sup>27</sup> Cory noted that the popular African-American magazine *Jet* was one of the only mainstream publications to review *The Homosexual in America*.



long term male lover during his years of homophile activism was black, these men certainly understood that same-sex loving people were not exclusively white. Nevertheless, in formulating their understandings of homosexuals as an oppressed cultural minority by comparison with and in distinction to African Americans, Cory and Hay coded whiteness into homosexual political subjectivity. In a 1952 letter to Cory, Hay wrote, “This is the first time our minority has ever conceived of taking the offensive ‘as a minority,’ and this in itself is an audacious first step in white Protestant history.”<sup>28</sup> By defining the organizing of homosexuals as a “white Protestant” development, the Mattachine founder acknowledged how African American and Jewish experiences as political minorities formed the template for emerging homophile political consciousness, but across a line of constitutive difference. While Duncan’s 1944 essay used the analogy to propose overcoming parochial group interests as racial, religious, or sexual groups in pursuit of a common universal commitment to freedom, Cory and particularly Hay deployed the analogy to argue for the importance of homosexuals developing consciousness of their collective identity, and envisioning an ethical homosexual culture that affirmed their distinctness from heterosexual society. Affirming commonality as a cultural minority on the basis of sexuality, in contradistinction to African American cultural identity on the basis of race, produced a “race neutral”—that is, normatively white—homophile political subject.<sup>29</sup>

Not all early formulations of homosexual organizing relied on this constitutive

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<sup>28</sup> Harry Hay to Donald Webster Cory, May 1 1952, folder 1, Donald Webster Cory Papers, Coll2011-022, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA. Hereafter cited as Cory Papers.

<sup>29</sup> For a contemporary analysis of normative whiteness in multiracial LGBT organizations, see Jane Ward, “White Normativity: The Cultural Dimensions of Whiteness in a Racially Diverse LGBT Organization,” *Sociological Perspectives* 51, No. 3 (2008), 563–586.

whiteness. For example, the Knights of the Clock, a short-lived gay organization formed in Los Angeles in 1948, existed to support black and white interracial homosexual couples with their romantic, family, and social relationships and legal issues.<sup>30</sup> Early homophile activist W. Dorr Legg, who became president of the Knights in 1949, recalled that after moving to Los Angeles in the 1940s, “The so-called ‘problem of homosexuality’ was something I was beginning to see as a form of oppression quite similar in many ways to that directed against those Americans born into minority status because of their skin color or ethnic backgrounds.” But the Knights, by pursuing “a three-way sort of integration,” translated the analogy into a conception of homosexuality within which racial and sexual difference were not comparatively opposed, but synthesized through explicitly addressing how experiences of race and homosexuality intersected.<sup>31</sup> Yet by 1952, the Knights had folded, Mattachine was on the rise, and the emerging homophile consciousness took shape around Hay and Cory’s analogies between African Americans and white homosexuals.

“We Know We Are the Same”: Homophile Resistance to the Minority Model and the Mattachine Review

Even as the “minority model” of understanding homosexuality by analogy with African American racial identity began to proliferate into wider circulation, it encountered resistance among segments of the homophile movement itself. As the Mattachine Society grew between 1951 and 1953, and the ideological similarity of the

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<sup>30</sup> Articles of Incorporation (1948), Knights of the Clocks Collection, Coll2014-087, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, USC Libraries, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>31</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* (February 1973), 8.

tight-knit “fifth circle” of leftist founders and leaders contrasted against a wider range of perspectives among the rank and file of discussion groups, many homosexuals challenged the notion that they constituted a minority. Some believed that conceiving of one’s experience of sexuality in terms of “the rights of the homosexual minority” entailed a “great disadvantage,” because of “the support it gives to neglecting the opportunity we have to develop ourselves as individuals.”<sup>32</sup> The association of minority status with African Americans in particular led some white gay men to disassociate themselves from the concept in order to preserve a sense of superiority and racial privilege. As Hay bluntly recounted, “They said I was making ‘niggers’ out of them.” Early Mattachine leader Konrad Stevens recalled that many participants insisted, “‘We’re *not* a minority.’ I think they didn’t want to be. To admit that meant you were in an inferior position.”<sup>33</sup> Cory would later reflect that in the early 1950s, “Many were surprised, shocked, and indignant at this concept” that homosexuals constituted a minority; given the defensive sense of superiority many gay men felt, some “may have been indignant at being consigned to the rung of just another mundane minority group.”<sup>34</sup> These reactions, signaling both the priority assigned to individuality and nonconformity and the white supremacist attitudes towards racial minorities among many white gay men and lesbians, would not be overcome on a large scale until the linkage between whiteness and homosexual political identity had been more firmly established.

These conflicts over whether homosexuals should conceive of themselves as a political minority, and thus accept an implicit similarity to or affinity with African

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<sup>32</sup> Lewis Ferguson, “Sex & Sensibility,” *ONE* 11, no. 1 (January 1963), 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Timmons, 151.

<sup>34</sup> Untitled document, c. 1975, folder 1, Cory Papers.

Americans, came to a head at the Mattachine Society conventions held in April and May 1953. After a provocative Los Angeles Daily Mirror column hinting darkly at the prospect of communist infiltration prompted conflict between anti-Communist and leftist factions within the organization, the founders organized a meeting for representatives from the various local discussion groups to create a new constitution and plan the future direction of the organization. At the opening of the April convention, Hay and Rowland delivered impassioned speeches advocating for the minority model of homosexual identity and politics, to a mixed response.

At a follow-up convention the following month, an opposing faction led by Ken Burns and Marilyn Rieger returned to deliver a strong critique of the founders' vision. Rather than emphasizing the distinctiveness of homosexuals as a cultural minority, as Rowland had proposed, Rieger argued to the assembled delegates, "We know we are the same, no different from anyone else. Our only difference is an unimportant one to the heterosexual society, *unless we make it important.*" Only by integrating into the dominant society as individuals possessed of a sexual variation "irrelevant to our ideals, our principles, our hopes and aspirations," she maintained, can homosexuals forestall hostility and work towards equality.<sup>35</sup> While the membership remained divided on the question of whether to adopt a minoritarian approach, the resignation of the original founders cleared the way for Burns and Rieger to assume leadership positions in the reconstituted organization, and over the coming years the Mattachine Society pursued a course away from political identification with minority struggles.

Free from its founding leftist leaders, the Mattachine Society pursued an

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<sup>35</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 77-79.

increasingly strident anti-communist direction, including suspicion of civil rights and minority group politics. The Society's Board of Directors announced its support in 1955 for “calling attention to the Communist danger, particularly as it is embodied in presentation of sub-themes appealing to minority groups.”<sup>36</sup> At the time, African American civil rights organizations such as the NAACP were subject to unrelenting red-baiting by politicians who deployed charges of communism to interfere with organizing against white supremacy, while many supporters of African American and minority politics did in fact hold left wing views.<sup>37</sup> In this context, anti-communists such as Burns and Rieger associated appeals to minority interest, rather than individualism within a framework of national patriotism, with political subversion.

Accordingly, throughout the 1950s, the *Mattachine Review*, the group's publication, included relatively few articles exploring the conception of homosexuals as a minority analogous to African Americans. While some readers attempted to draw lessons from the civil rights movement for homosexuals, they often received harsh criticism from the editors. Emblematic was the response published in October 1957 to a letter from a reader in Denver, Colorado, who argued, “I believe the time has come for homosexuals to demand their civil rights as aggressively as Negroes are demanding theirs. We will get nowhere by pussy footing our own cause . . . Some people in their lethargy need to be shocked into consciousness.” In response, the editors chastised,

We cannot counsel you to use demands or aggressions and only hope you won't

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<sup>36</sup> *Mattachine Review* 1, No. 3 (May-June 1955), 2.

<sup>37</sup> On the connections between red-baiting efforts directed against the NAACP and controversy over homosexuality, see Stacey Braukman, *Communists and Perverts Under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2012.

come begging on our doorstep if YOUR aggression stirs up retaliative aggressive acts against YOU. Education and enlightenment are the Mattachine Society's goals, but shock techniques are not its way. Problems disappear through evolution; they are only aggravated by revolution.<sup>38</sup>

In the same issue, the editors complimented another letter writer, "It's certainly refreshing to have a homosexual identify himself as part of 'the general public' instead of proclaiming his 'minority group' identity."<sup>39</sup>

The only exceptions to this trend of anti-minoritarian opinion appeared in articles that conformed to the Mattachine's ideology of encouraging homosexuals towards taking responsibility for self-improvement. An April 1956 article by Ward Summer about hypocrisy criticized the tendency of homosexuals, "as a member of a significant minority group," to respond with intolerance to other minorities, specifically African Americans and Jews. "Haven't we homosexuals learned anything from our own persecution?" Summer scolded his readers. "Can't we remember what it's like when people have said the same things about us?"<sup>40</sup> Similarly, William A. Baker argued in 1957 that homosexuals must emphasize their similarities to heterosexuals in order to find acceptance, since "as long as the minority group member thinks of himself primarily as just that, then he can only be accepted or rejected on that basis."<sup>41</sup>

Leo Zeff's 1958 article "Self-Acceptance v. Rejection" developed this theme, defining a neurotic homosexual as one who "measures everything and defines all or most

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<sup>38</sup> *Mattachine Review* 3, no. 10 (October 1957), 35.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Ward Summer, "The Problem of Hypocrisy . . . Does it Affect Homosexuals?" *Mattachine Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1956), 34-6.

<sup>41</sup> William Baker, "View the Positive Aspects," *Mattachine Review* 3, No. 11 (November 1957), 16.

of his experiences in terms of his homosexuality.” In contrast to the editors’ warm praise for the homosexual who identifies with “the general public” over his “minority status,” an over-identification with minority status can be pathological and self-defeating. “It is the individual’s negative reaction to this minority status that causes him at least as much trouble as the attitude of the majority group,” Zeff maintained, urging homosexual readers to avoid the negative “self-fulfilling prophecies” that sabotage the progress of African Americans. Citing an essay on the topic that “deals with the minority problem of the Negro,” he noted that “if anyone would substitute his own minority problem for the word negro [sic], the paper would certainly speak directly to him.”<sup>42</sup> When explicit comparisons to African Americans appeared in the pages of the *Mattachine Review*, they rarely served as invitations for their white readers to identify and feel solidarity, but more often as cautionary warnings of negative minoritarian tendencies to avoid.<sup>43</sup>

#### The Tensions of Minority Respectability: The Daughters of Bilitis and *The Ladder*

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), founded in 1955 as the first lesbian organization in the United States, based their rhetoric on the cautious approach of the Mattachine Society, but proved more ready to acknowledge homosexuals as a minority group. In the first issue of their magazine, *The Ladder*, published in October 1956, the editors expressed hope that the new publication “will encourage the women to take an ever-increasing part in the steadily-growing fight for understanding of the homophile minority.” The group’s statement of purpose advocated proposing changes to penal codes

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<sup>42</sup> Leo Zeff, “Self-Acceptance v. Rejection,” *Mattachine Review* 4, no. 3 (March 1958), 6.

<sup>43</sup> The first reference of any kind to a “Negro” in the Society’s journal dealt with a heterosexual participant in a support group for sexual psychopaths, who had molested his niece. *Mattachine Review* 1, no. 5 (September/October 1955), 15.

“to provide an equitable handling of cases involving this minority group.”<sup>44</sup> Anticipating an audience skeptical about collective action as a political minority, they encouraged readers “who still have doubts and reservations concerning the time and the wisdom of pursuing the fight for full citizenship for members of the homosexual minority” to read *Homosexuals Today*, Marvin Cutler’s overview of the homophile movement, as “an expression of the ideals, the hopes and the aspirations of a minority group that has ceased to run.”<sup>45</sup>

But the success of the homosexual minority in achieving their goals of acceptance and equality, the DOB believed, required that lesbians adopt “a mode of behavior and dress acceptable to society.” The predominantly middle-class members of the DOB encouraged more butch-presenting lesbians to adopt feminine attire and offered social outlets for women outside of rowdy and legally risky bars. With options for participation in the workforce and public sphere already severely circumscribed for women of any sexual orientation relative to their male counterparts, lesbians who wanted to survive without dependence on male partners or family members were particularly vulnerable to the social costs of nonconformity. Analogies between African American and white lesbian experiences articulated in early issues of *The Ladder* often pertained to the imperatives posed to both communities by the politics of respectability.<sup>46</sup>

The gendered imperative towards respectability intensified for women of color, as the testimony of African American playwright and *Ladder* subscriber Lorraine Hansberry

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<sup>44</sup> *The Ladder* 1, no. 1 (October 1956), 3.

<sup>45</sup> *The Ladder* 1, no. 3 (December 1956), 5-6.

<sup>46</sup> See Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A history of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century American* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) and Marcia Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Seal Press, 2007) for further discussion of the politics of lesbian respectability and its discontents in the DOB and beyond.



highlighted. “As one raised in a cultural experience (I am a Negro) where those within were and are forever lecturing to their fellows about how to appear acceptable to the dominant social group,” she explained in a 1957 letter, “I know something about the shallowness of such a view as an end in itself.” While oppression and discrimination result from majority prejudice against those who are different, not the minority group’s moral failings, she recognized that “as a matter of facility, of expediency, one has to take a critical view of revolutionary attitudes which in spite of the BASIC truth I have mentioned above, may tend to aggravate the problems of a group.” Comparing the disturbance engendered by “the sight of an ill-dressed or illiterate Negro” to “the sight of the ‘butch’ strolling hand in hand with her friend in their trousers and definitive haircuts,” she maintained that to successfully change attitudes on the part of heterosexuals, lesbians should indeed strive to conform to gendered expectations.<sup>47</sup> Alongside the pressures of middle class standards of behavior and dress and patriarchal social norms, white lesbians shared with African Americans the additional scrutiny placed on minorities as presumed representatives of their racial or sexual identity. Not until the arrival of the rising feminist and Black Power movements in the mid-1960s would lesbians inside and out of the DOB begin to strongly contest this strategy of shielding themselves from social oppression through cultivating respectability.

#### Debating and Legitimizing the Analogy: *ONE Magazine*

While the *Mattachine Review* reflected a more conservative and anti-minoritarian tendency within the early homophile movement, and the DOB couched its minoritarian

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<sup>47</sup> *The Ladder* 1, no. 8 (May 1957), 27-8.

assertions within a strict politics of respectability, the Los Angeles-based homophile publication *ONE Magazine* provided the primary platform for debating the direction of the fledgling movement. *ONE*'s considerably wider readership and circulation, and the more extensive space offered to correspondence from readers reflecting a variety of viewpoints, positioned it as the primary venue in which homosexuals explored and debated the analogy between race and sexuality and the oppressed minority thesis since its founding in 1952. In the magazine's fifteen years of publication, over one hundred articles or letters comparing African American and homosexual experiences appeared, with discussions of minority group strategy for the homophile movement correlated closely to developments in the African American civil rights movement. While the debate over the relationship between homosexuality and racial minority status remained lively over the next decade, the majority of readers and writers who discussed the homophile experience in political terms in the publications of the 1950s and 1960s would come to accept their sexuality as conferring minority status in terms primarily analogous to that of African Americans.

The analogy with African Americans or other politicized minority groups often functioned to distinguish homosexuals as a legitimate social group, in contrast to attempts by authorities to frame them as a problem of public order, social delinquency, or criminality. In condemning a Miami police roundup of twenty-one "males with a feminine bent" who "prance around the 22nd Street Public Beaches in droves," an indignant *ONE* editor opined: "*What racial, religious, or age group DOESN'T congregate to have fun?*"<sup>48</sup> In his initial document outlining the proposal that would

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<sup>48</sup> *ONE* 2, no. 1 (January 1954), 6.

evolve into the Mattachine Society, Harry Hay noted alongside his proposed aim of promoting adjustment to “the mores and ethics of the standard community” that “within the recognized minorities, people are bad not because they are Jews or Negroes but because of the external nature of their political and economic environments.”<sup>49</sup> By implicitly comparing his “androgynous minority” to Jews and Negroes, he shifted away from criminological discourses towards an investigation of the underlying conditions that produced the behaviors he aimed to challenge among homosexuals. Marcel Martin deployed the language of the minority fighting discrimination to relocate the conversation about homosexuality away from the realm of law enforcement and religion: “The world at large is critically aware of the efforts of minority groups everywhere to achieve equality, and in general society is sympathetic to that struggle. Why should we not take advantage of this predisposition toward justice, and endeavor to remove homosexuality from the realm of crime or sin or morals and place it where it truly belongs: in the realm of social and legal discrimination?”<sup>50</sup>

Critical to the validity of the political analogy between racial and sexual minorities, and thus the claim that homosexuality “truly belongs in the realm of social and legal discrimination,” is the assumption that race and sexual orientation are equally immutable. *The Homosexual in America* set the tone by contending that homosexuality “is as involuntary as if it were inborn,” with desires “virtually as ineradicable as if it involved the color of one’s skin.”<sup>51</sup> As Mr. D from Los Angeles wrote to *ONE* in 1955, “We homosexuals are a minority group with generally a much smaller degree of social

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<sup>49</sup> “Bachelor’s Anonymous - Preliminary Concept,” Hay Papers.

<sup>50</sup> *ONE* 13, no 1 (January 1965), 11.

<sup>51</sup> Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 5.

visibility than some minorities, such as the Negro . . . [but] there is no more chance for us to resign from our particular minority than there is for the Negro to change the color of his skin.”<sup>52</sup> While many homophiles emphasized this point strenuously, the seeming lack of equivalence between the outward visibility of race and the presumably concealable internal reality of sexual orientation would present an Achilles heel for gay and lesbian rights opponents in the future.

Whether or not skin color and homosexual desires were comparably unchosen and unchangeable attributes, some homophiles remained skeptical about the analogy between sexual orientation and race. Indeed, despite the rapid proliferation of the concept in the 1950s, not all participants in the early homophile movement recognized themselves as part of a minority group that could model itself on African American experiences and political movements. Jeff Winters contended in a 1954 *ONE* article, “It is erroneous to assume that all those who are inclined toward members of their own gender constitute a concrete minority.” In a direct rebuff to the arguments of Hay and Rowland, he argued, “Those of homosexual experience have no more in common than have ‘normal’ persons . . . Homosexuals do not and cannot share a culture.”<sup>53</sup> Some who critiqued the minority model cited the disconnection of homosexuals from one another and their lack of common culture. As Arthur Krell contended in 1954, “The Negro or Jewish individual does not stand alone; he is guided by group tradition and linked in warm human relationships,” in contrast to the isolation of the homosexual, who lacks the “tribal wisdom” that heterosexuals imbibe from one another.<sup>54</sup> Professor G. Kempe maintained

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<sup>52</sup> *ONE* 3, no. 11 (November 1955), 46.

<sup>53</sup> *ONE* 2, no. 1 (January 1954), 6.

<sup>54</sup> Arthur B. Krell, “We Need a Great Literature,” *ONE* 2, no. 5 (May 1954), 5.

the following year that while “a specifically homophile culture does not exist,” homophiles do nonetheless “form a minority group.”<sup>55</sup> Others noted that their status as a minority did not necessarily parallel that of other groups; according to A.E. Smith, “A Negro, Catholic, or a Jew is a member of a minority in a far different sense than is a homosexual a member of a minority. The word ‘minority’ should not be so loosely used . . . A minority we may be, but if we are, we are certainly a unique and limited one.”<sup>56</sup> Author Carle agreed in a 1955 *ONE* article: “Ours is a strange minority. We possess neither distinction of color nor bone structure, and a great part of our members are indistinguishable even among ourselves. . . . We cannot, as other minority groups, proudly segregate ourselves in special sections, with our own literature, entertainment, and education—the Negroes have Africa, the Asiatics, Asia, the Jews, Palestine . . . .”<sup>57</sup> The distinctions between the salient characteristics marking homosexual identity and those that distinguished racial, ethnic, and religious groups led some homophiles to question whether the minority paradigm could apply to their communities.

Other critics, motivated by reactionary attitudes towards minority struggles for civil rights, strove to articulate the homophile movement’s self-conception and aims on a distinct basis. *ONE* reader “H.S.” complained in February 1960 that minority group advocates used the term “discrimination” so broadly as to make it “almost equivalent to a complaint about the basic right of every individual to choose for himself his friends, his neighbors, his business . . . . These minority groups have made it appear that anyone who goes against them has created an intolerable situation and is guilty of committing the

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<sup>55</sup> Prof. G. Th. Kempe “The Homophile in Society *ONE* 3, no. 3 (March 1955), 9-10.

<sup>56</sup> A.E. Smith, “The Myth of the Homosexual Vote,” *ONE* 12, no. 1 (October 1964), 6-8

<sup>57</sup> Carle, “The Fifth Freedom,” *ONE* 3, no. 10 (October 1955), 25.

lowest and most despicable crime imaginable.” While homophiles should merely attempt to adjust laws “so that the homosexual life can be lived without improper restraints,” minority groups such as Jews and Negroes “attempt through legislation and coercion to gain for themselves rights and privileges that they have no natural claim to . . . It is not an argument for freedom when an all-white community must accept Negro neighbors. It is not freedom that results in the forcing of integration in an all-white school. It is robbing one group of their rights to be given indiscriminately to another.” Homophiles thus should not “make it a matter of policy espousing the minority causes.”<sup>58</sup> This opposition to solidarity with other minorities, and specifically African Americans, would remain a counter-current within white LGBT politics through the coming decades.

“The Parallel is Inescapable”: Equalizing and Explaining Prejudice and the Roots of Solidarity

While some contested the analogy between race and sexual orientation, the majority of homophile observers focused on the underlying similarities between the conditions of African Americans and homosexuals. To sidestep some of the asymmetries between the experiences of the respective groups, activists often focused on comparing anti-black and anti-homosexual prejudice as ethical equivalents. Homophile activists and writers used analogies between the two forms of oppression to sensitize potential supporters to their plight as well as to criticize or satirize their antagonists. A reader of the *Santa Monica Independent* cited in *ONE* in 1958 implied that the paper’s use of

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<sup>58</sup> *ONE* 8, no. 2 (February 1960), 26-7. Columnist Dr. Baker, to whom H.S.’s letter was addressed, noted that many readers had shared similar criticisms to her use of the term “discrimination” which had prompted the letter.

homophobic language aligned them with ignorant racists: “I have been disturbed by references in your paper concerning ‘queers’ and ‘fairies.’ I assume that you have some idea as to how unpleasant the terms Kike, Nigger, Mick, Chink, Wop, and Greaser are to Jews, Negroes, Irishmen, Chinese, Italians or Mexicans. Such terms have disappeared from most publications except for a few race hate sheets . . . Presumably it would be as difficult to convince you of the truth of what I say in the following sentences as it would be to convince a white man from Mississippi that Negroes do not smell.”<sup>59</sup> A discussion of coverage of homosexuality within popular American magazines compared homophobic articles to racist nursery rhymes, which reinforce stereotypes by “harping on the old themes of hate and ignorance, and keeping alive and white-hot the prejudices of those who read them.”<sup>60</sup> The writer emphasized the significance of anti-homosexual prejudice within popular culture and media by comparing it to the “assumption that Negroes are innately inferior,” encouraging white homophile readers to take it seriously and speak out against it. Reporting on an anti-homosexual crackdown in Miami, Florida in 1956, Lyn Pedersen criticized scaremongering about homosexuals as sexual threats to children by comparing it to sexualized fears of black men: “That some few (like many heterosexuals) offend with minors, is no valid ground for general attacks on homosexuals. This is as foolish as the Southern canard that every Negro is a rapist. It’s time the two lies were laid together.”<sup>61</sup>

Some early homophile advocates attempted to justify these comparisons by postulating a fundamental illiberal, prejudicial temperament underlying negative attitudes

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<sup>59</sup> Cited in *ONE* 6, no. 8 (August 1958), 18.

<sup>60</sup> *ONE* 1, no. 6 (June 1953), 12.

<sup>61</sup> Lyn Pedersen, “Miami’s New Type Witchhunt,” *ONE* 4, no. 3 (March/April 1956), 12.

towards racial, sexual, and other minorities. *ONE* reported approvingly on a discussion at a 1954 forum in Miami on homosexuality in which psychology professor Dr. Jack Kapschan, when asked whether prejudice against homosexuality was related to intolerance, replied, “Yes, research has proven that prejudice is generally against a number of minority groups, not just homosexuality. The authoritarian personality that condemns persons for their homosexual behavior is much more of a threat to society than the homosexual himself . . . Prejudice against the homosexual makes an especially good scapegoat for the authoritarian personality.”<sup>62</sup> One reader argued for a need for “someone to look down on” as a fundamental feature of human psychology underlying all forms of prejudice: “This trait in humans is no joke. Ask the Negro who has been beaten, tarred and feathered. Ask the Jew whose parents were gassed by the Nazis.”<sup>63</sup> In an article reprinted in *The Ladder* in 1964, novelist Iris Murdoch claimed, “It is clear at once, if we consider the hostility which the mere idea of homosexuality often encounters, that many people dislike and fear homosexuals, in a way similar to the way in which people dislike or fear black men or Jews, without being able to understand why. A psychological explanation of these irrational fears, if it can be given, would be helpful, and this is a point at which scientific study can usefully contribute.”<sup>64</sup> These sentiments legitimized the grievances felt by those targeted with anti-homosexual prejudice by locating its source alongside in a common well of prejudice and bigotry that also spawned racism and anti-Semitism.

Other homophiles believed that anti-homosexual discrimination resulted from the

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<sup>62</sup> “Who’s Sick?” *ONE* 2, no. 2 (February 1954), 5.

<sup>63</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 4 (April 1963), 4.

<sup>64</sup> Iris Murdoch, “The Moral Decision about Homosexuality,” *The Ladder* 9, no. 3 (December 1964), 20.



actions of homosexuals themselves, while still others who attributed it to the attitudes of the heterosexual majority. Yet all justified their perspectives on the basis of analogies with African Americans. As a 1955 *ONE* article titled “The Fifth Freedom” argued, “The delinquent behavior of certain members of a minority can influence public opinion against the entire group. When a group acquires an unfavorable name because of some of its members, Society automatically assumes that the entire group is to be feared and ostracised as an unwanted entity . . . Persecution of minority groups evolves from such fears, as anti-Negro, Asiatic, and Puerto Rican movements in the United States.”<sup>65</sup> Ward Summer agreed in a 1956 *Mattachine Review* article, maintaining that homosexuals, like African Americans and other minorities, are responsible for changing “the bad reputation we have given ourselves” by behaving honestly and honorably, thus altering the negative opinions of heterosexuals.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, A.T. from Seattle, Washington argued in a 1957 letter to *The Ladder* that “acceptance comes about naturally” for “the homosexual who earnestly tries puts forth an effort to live in a society as a decent citizen, living up to the standards that she or he expects from others.” However, she notes, “We have to face the fact that some of our homosexual kin do get out of line, not to mention the lack of morals and ideals... These actions of one individual cast a shadow on the lot of any minority group . . . whether it be homosexuals, Jews, Negroes, or other minority groups.”<sup>67</sup>

By contrast, Donald Webster Cory insisted in *The Homosexual in America* that the heterosexual majority bore responsibility for their anti-homosexual animus. His analysis of oppression derived in part from his reading of sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s *The*

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<sup>65</sup> Carle, “The Fifth Freedom,” *ONE* 3, no. 10 (October 1955), 25.

<sup>66</sup> Ward Summer, “The Problem of Hypocrisy: Does it Affect Homosexuals?” *Mattachine Review* 2, no. 2 (April 1956), 34-6.

<sup>67</sup> *The Ladder* 1, no. 4, January 1957), 11.

*American Dilemma: The Negro Problem in Modern Democracy*.<sup>68</sup> Cory's gloss on Myrdal lays out the analogy between sexuality and race as explicitly as possible:

A sociologist writing on racial minorities—and again the parallel is inescapable—has stated that there are no minority problems. There are only majority problems. There is no Negro problem except that created by whites; no Jewish problem except that created by Gentiles. To which I add: and no homosexual problem except that created by the heterosexual society.<sup>69</sup>

Similarly, a reader from Baltimore remarked in 1957, “I believe that our situation is very similar in its broader aspects to that of the Negro. Society keeps the Negro in abject squalor and then takes that imposed condition as proof that the Negro is inferior. We will never know what the Negro is really worth until he is given equality of status and opportunity. The same is true of the homosexual, I am convinced.”<sup>70</sup> While no consensus existed among homophiles in the 1950s as to the proper way to analyze and attribute responsibility for social prejudice against homosexuals, the fact that all who weighed in on the question referred to their understandings of anti-black racism to make their arguments indicates the extent to which the analogy between race and sexuality structured the thought of early homophiles.

In keeping with their comparisons between anti-black and anti-homosexual discrimination, *ONE Magazine* sometimes published news briefs pertaining to the mistreatment of African Americans by the criminal legal system. However, these items appeared not to elicit sympathy on the basis of indignation against racism as such, but to

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<sup>68</sup> David K. Johnson, “Donald Webster Cory.” *Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered History in America*, ed. Marc Stein (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> Cory, *The Homosexual in America*, 228.

<sup>70</sup> *ONE* 5, no. 6 (June-July 1957), 31.

illuminate facets of homosexual oppression by its implicit analogy with racism. For instance, in April of 1960, it reprinted a statement by a white woman in Houston, Texas whose son had been found dead, after which seven black teenagers were accused of murder on flimsy evidence. Attempting to redirect the wave of racially charged rage facing the suspects, she declared, “People who are oppressed and deprived by society hit back. Finding my son’s murderer will not keep alive some child who now lives—more murders will be bred by the conditions which bred his murderer. As long as we foster the sickness of slums and segregation, we shall all be inflicted by it.”<sup>71</sup> Readers of *ONE* steeped in the sexuality/race analogy would have readily understood how the story inferred that anti-homosexual prejudice, not the behavior of homosexuals, constituted the real crime. Similarly, alongside frequent reports on the disproportionate legal punishments handed down to men convicted of sex with other men or boys, a 1955 news brief noted the execution of a black man for the alleged rape of a white woman contrasted against a white man who received a two-year sentence for raping thirteen-year-old black girl.<sup>72</sup> The similarities between judicial harshness against African American and homosexual defendants offered evidence of the arbitrary bias behind crackdowns against same-sex sex while strengthening the analogy between sexual orientation and race.

These parallels reflected the beginnings of a pan-minority consciousness rooted in shared legal and social oppression. From early on, some homophiles had begun to articulate the basis of a political understanding of homosexuality that saw it not merely as analogous to race as a minority status, but as sharing a common basis of oppression that necessitated a common struggle. Harry Hay’s initial “Bachelor’s Anonymous” concept,

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<sup>71</sup> *ONE* 8, no. 4 (April 1960), 15.

<sup>72</sup> *ONE* 3, no. 11 (November 1955), 8.

which included “making common cause with other minorities” against police brutality and other shared problems, laid the foundation for a solidarity-oriented approach to minority identity. In a 1954 editorial passionately defending individual freedom irrespective of social mores, Lyn Pedersen concluded, “It should be barely necessary to state that I am interested in defending my right to be as different as I damn please. And somewhere, I’ve picked up the notion that I can’t protect my own rights in that quarter without fighting for everyone else’s.”<sup>73</sup> R.H. Crowther argued in a 1954 article titled “Democracy” that “the homosexual minority can play a very creditable role in the evolution of human rights and in the fulfillment of the democratic ideal” because “its individual members have been compelled, like the members of many other minorities, to visualize the full nature of human rights perhaps more clearly than those who are complacently entrenched in traditional conceptions and majority attitudes.”<sup>74</sup> As a writer for *The Ladder* pointed out in a 1957 review of the Chicago Mattachine Society’s “Your Legal Rights” booklet, “Many private citizens, through ignorance and fear, fail to avail themselves of those laws created to protect individuals from harassment and persecution by society or its agents. This state of affairs is particularly prevalent among minority groups whose social ostracism frequently makes them feel a personal guilt or inferior status before the law. It is essential that these groups be apprised of their legal rights and learn to replace fear with a true knowledge of legal procedure for their own protections.”<sup>75</sup> A decade later, this moderate sentiment would evolve into active collaborations between homophile organizations and other minority groups in campaigns

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<sup>73</sup> *ONE* 2, no. 3 (March 1954), 6.

<sup>74</sup> R.H. Crowther, “Democracy,” *ONE* 2, no. 6 (June 1954), 9.

<sup>75</sup> *The Ladder* 1, no. 11 (August 1957), 9.

against police harassment. In the 1950s, however, homophile publications had begun to lay the groundwork for future collaborations through reporting that analogized anti-homosexual and anti-black oppression in the legal system.

Convinced as they were of the shared roots and moral equivalence of racial and sexual prejudice, early homophile activists often reacted with indignation when supporters of African American civil rights failed to affirm the validity of the sexuality/race analogy by publicly defending them against anti-homosexual persecution. When the American Civil Liberties Union passed a resolution in 1957 declining to take a position on laws targeting homosexuality, *ONE* retorted, “Would it be within the province of the Union to evaluate the social validity of laws aimed at the suppression or elimination of Negroes, Jews, or Jehovah’s Witnesses? Of course it would. Then why not homosexuals?”<sup>76</sup> A fiery 1959 editorial castigated liberals and civil rights leaders that “still refuse to admit (as they do for other minorities) that there is any civil rights question involved in the general treatment of homosexuals in America.” While “the attainment of full civil liberties for Negroes” seems “assured,” less popular causes offer a litmus test for the genuinely dedicated:

It takes a ‘touchy subject’ like homosexuality to separate the honest freedom fighters from those liberal poseurs who merely follow popular intellectual currents. When the rights of a racial minority are infringed nowadays, champions of freedom and civil rights seem happily plentiful. But we often wonder why it gets so lonely on the civil liberties front when homosexuality is at issue . . . Why do those who espouse freedom for all minorities, the rights to be different and the

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<sup>76</sup> Dal McIntire, “Tangents: News and Views,” *ONE* 5, no. 4 (April 1957), 13.

right to make one's own moral judgments in the face of strong public disapproval, so often forget their high principles at the very mention of homosexuality, and turn their heads when homosexuals are blackmailed, forced to resign from jobs, slandered or illegally arrested?<sup>77</sup>

Implicit throughout these editorials is the assumption that any principled civil libertarian should recognize the analogy between racial and sexual identities and stand equally firmly against persecution on the basis of either.

Activists reserved particular vitriol for such “phoney liberals” who had built reputations as racially progressive while ignoring or condoning persecution of homosexuals. In a 1956 article on an anti-gay crackdown in Miami, Lyn Pedersen takes Mayor Aronivitz to task for betraying his background as an anti-racist lawyer:

In 1919 Abe Aronivitz was radical to say ‘Mister’ to a Negro. (Everybody ‘knew’ all Negroes were born sex-criminals.) Today much of that battle is won or winning. Now it is radical to suggest that homosexuals also be ‘called Mister.’ Nearly everybody nowadays, including Mr. Aronovitz, ‘knows’ all homosexuals are sex criminals.

Pedersen draws on the by then common homophile strategy of comparing forms of anti-black and anti-homosexual prejudice, criticizing “yesterday’s liberal” who, by failing to see their equivalence, becomes “tomorrow’s reactionary.” Aronovitz, he maintains, is just another example of those hypocrites who have “championed liberty in one area and been blind to it in another: slaveholding signers of the Declaration of Independence; the liberal

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<sup>77</sup> *ONE* 7, no. 6 (June 1959), 4-5.

but anti-Semitic Voltaire; civil rights defenders who ignore raids on homosexuals . . .”<sup>78</sup>

Few African Americans or civil rights advocates likely shared the *ONE* editorial’s assertion that “full civil liberties for Negroes” were “assured” in 1959, nor Pedersen’s claim that “much of that battle is won or winning.” Still, the notion that in the wake of African American civil rights successes, homosexuals were now the only minority group whose oppression still went uncontested in the United States gained traction among many homophile activists in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Reader “Miss J” wrote in 1957 that homosexuals were the “only one real untouchable left in the social atmosphere of our country,” since “most white Americans, I find, at least out of the South, find the national attitude to Negroes embarrassing at this point, and are becoming downright conscious and outspoken on questions of oppression.”<sup>79</sup> Frank Golovitz’s 1958 article “Gay Beach” recounted a gay man in Texas who remarked, “Homosexuals haven’t even gotten as far as the Negroes. We’ve got to make people admit we’re human first.”<sup>80</sup> In these comments, white homosexuals focused on their own marginalization revealed the extent to which their perceptions of the homophile community as a potential political force were rooted in an assumed whiteness. They praised the efficacy of black civil rights organizing while betraying an unrealistically inflated sense of its success in shifting laws and white attitudes by the late 1950s. Nonetheless, these sometimes skewed perceptions led white homophiles to conclude that they should learn lessons from African American movements to improve their own conditions. K.O. Neal, commenting on a homophobic comedian, asked homophile readers in an April 1963 editorial, “Are we the only minority

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<sup>78</sup> Lyn Pedersen, “Miami’s New Type Witchhunt” *ONE* 4, no. 3 (March-April 1956), 12.

<sup>79</sup> *ONE* 5, no. 5 (May 1957), 18.

<sup>80</sup> Frank Golovitz, “Gay Beach”, *ONE* 6, no. 7 (July 1958), 9.

left in this country that can be made the butt of a public social joke?” If so, homosexuals should emulate other minority struggles: “Nobody tells a joke against a Jew or a Negro—and for a damn good reason. Each minority organized . . . and *fought*.”

Conclusion: From “A Strange Minority” to the “Homosexual Citizen”

This lesson about the power of minorities to organize and fight was not lost on activists in homophile organizations in the 1960s. The late 1950s marked a time of considerable timidity on the part of homophile groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis—what John D’Emilio has called the “retreat to respectability.”<sup>81</sup> The disastrous series of police raids that shut down most New York City gay bars around 1960, and the ineffectual response to it by homophile activists, made an impression on observers who contrasted their seeming powerlessness in the face of repressive government action against their community and the powerful responses by African American communities to segregation, police violence, and legal oppression. Animated by their observations of the black freedom struggle through the 1950s and the lively debates over the nature of the homosexual minority, homophiles in the new decade gradually forged a working consensus that grounded their political subjectivity in the analogy between sexuality and race. The 1960s would usher in a new wave of activists, led by Frank Kameny in Washington, DC, who emphasized themselves as “homosexual citizens,” positioning themselves alongside African Americans with demands for an end to second-class citizenship and a share in the benefits and responsibilities of full

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<sup>81</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*.



participation in the national community.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> On Kameny and the Mattachine Society of Washington's "homosexual citizen" discourse, see Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, and Peacock, "Race, the Homosexual, and the Mattachine Society of Washington, 1961–1970." On the methods by which the state produced homosexuality as a category of exclusion from aspects of citizenship, see Canaday, *The Straight State*.

CHAPTER THREE: THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE MINORITY MODEL,  
1963-1968

From 1963 onwards, homophile activist communities rallied around the analogy between homosexuals and African Americans. A new consensus emerged in which activists declared with increasing assertiveness not only that homosexuals were a minority but that as such they were entitled to fight for their rights as citizens. Inspired by black civil rights successes, newly emboldened activists challenged medical and psychological authorities, adopted discourses and tactics from black movements, and began their first tentative forays into public demonstrations and legislative and electoral initiatives. International homophile observers noted how the emphasis among American activists on minority consciousness reflected the distinct context of race relations and politics in the United States. Many homophiles concluded that, given the success of black freedom movements in achieving their objectives, anti-homosexual prejudice had actually superseded racism as the most virulent form of discrimination in the United States; when members or supporters of other minority groups expressed prejudice or failed to support homophile objectives, they expressed indignation. However, the voices of African American participants in the homophile public sphere attested to the movement's mixed record on challenging persistent racism within lesbian and gay communities. As the conception of homosexuals as an oppressed minority with analogous interests to African Americans began to proliferate more widely, the African American press offered sympathetic coverage to the movement's minoritarian claims earlier than white publications. The first concrete collaboration between the homophile and African

American movements came in struggles against police harassment and violence, where alliances in San Francisco, Chicago, and beyond brought different “minority” communities together. This logic of solidarity laid the groundwork for joint organizing in the gay liberation movement and the electoral coalitions of the 1970s.

“The Invert Must Fight Also”: Black Activism Inspires Newfound Homophile Assertiveness

The 1963 March on Washington marked both a watershed in the African American civil rights movement and a turning point in homophile identification with it.<sup>1</sup> As Elliott Castor of Sarasota, Florida urged readers of *ONE*, “All intelligent homosexuals should have been interested in the Freedom March on Washington by the Negroes. Perhaps the gay people can learn something from them.”<sup>2</sup> Several white members of the Washington, DC chapter of the Mattachine Society joined the march as supporters, though without signs identifying them as homosexual activists. With minority civil rights taking center stage in national consciousness, a new generation of homophile activists would take direct inspiration from the black freedom struggle to articulate their demands and plan unprecedented actions.

In the aftermath of the March on Washington and the passage of the federal Civil Rights Act the following year, increasing numbers of letters to the homophile press

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<sup>1</sup> Gay black civil rights activist Bayard Rustin served as a primary organizer of the 1963 March on Washington; efforts by Senator Strom Thurmond and other civil rights opponents attempted to use Rustin's homosexuality to discredit the march and the movement, but prominent leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and A. Phillip Randolph expressed staunch support for him. If Rustin's sexuality and his role in the movement were known to white homophile activists at the time, I have been unable to find evidence of this. On Rustin, see John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 11 (November 1963), 31.

affirmed the black freedom struggle and urged their movement to emulate it. As “Mrs. R.A.” wrote to *ONE* in April 1964, “I definitely feel that homosexuals should actively fight and contribute toward changing their situation instead of passively accepting it. They are, without a doubt, in the same situation as the Negro, trying to be a part of our free country. The Negro is fighting and slowly, but surely winning, and the invert must fight also.”<sup>3</sup> Another reader from Miami felt similarly: “I am quite in agreement with you that the homosexual must win civil rights as the Negro has and, like the Negro, must in all probability organize and agitate for these rights.”<sup>4</sup> At a 1964 talk to the New York Mattachine Society, sociologist and psychoanalyst Dr. Hendrik M. Ruitenbeek “noted that in the American political system, minority groups exert pressure on the politicians who represent them to make their voices heard. We are at present seeing an upsurge of the Negro minority. Homosexuals too should raise their voices ‘to establish themselves as persons’ and demand their rights.”<sup>5</sup> This language of fighting, agitating, and demanding marked a qualitative shift towards self-assertion and militancy that was beginning to take root in a new generation of homophile groups.

The 1964 East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO) conference heralded this shift towards a new self-confidence and advocacy of assertive action inspired by African American activist successes. As one participant mentioned to a writer from *The Ladder*, “A few years ago, ours was a sweeter, clubbier, less insistent organization. Now there seems to be a militancy about the new groups and new leaders. There’s a different

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<sup>3</sup> *ONE* 12, no. 4 (April 1964), 5.

<sup>4</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 6 (June 1963), 30

<sup>5</sup> *The Ladder* 9, no. 7 (April 1965), 4.

mood.”<sup>6</sup> Signifying this shift were the repeated references to African American civil rights movements made by speaker after speaker. Washington trial lawyer Glenn R. Graves, promoting legal action in the courts, noted that homosexual rights were “slight, poorly advanced, compared with those of other minorities,” because “homosexuals are not yet a full-fledged minority group with institutional status, like the Negro.” David Carliner, chairman of the National Capital Area Civil Liberties Union, saw sodomy law repeal as “a decision comparable to the one which established the Negro’s equality,” but one whose time had come, since there is “no more need to impose uniformity of behavior in sex roles than there is need to impose uniformity of behavior on ethnic groups within our society.”<sup>7</sup> Frank Kameny, whose profile in national homophile circles was rising rapidly, argued for greater assertiveness in legal challenges despite persistent anti-homosexual prejudice by pointing out, “The Negro went to the courts and Southerners still don’t like him. He nevertheless now has his basic rights, and these have been established by the constituted authority of society, even if not by the will of the society around him. The changes in attitude will accommodate themselves to what constituted authority hands down.”<sup>8</sup> While not all of these advocates agreed on the proper strategic approach to promoting equal rights for homosexuals, they all drew inspiration from African American activism and modeled their arguments on discourses around racial justice and civil rights.

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<sup>6</sup> “Report on ECHO 1964 Conference,” *The Ladder* 9, no. 4 (January 1965), 4.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-10.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

“The Homosexual’s Problems are Social and Political”: Entrenching the Analogy and the Minority Paradigm

Another factor supporting changes in attitudes toward homosexuality was growing mainstream acceptance, within and beyond homosexual communities, of the comparison between them and African Americans. By 1963, according to Donald Webster Cory, large numbers of people across lines of sexual orientation had embraced the analogy between homosexuals and racial and other minorities. In an article written to promote the publication of his new book *The Homosexual and His Society*, Cory reflected that one of the major changes he had observed since the publication of his first book twelve years before was “the simultaneous acceptance of the concept of the homosexual as a minority group (a concept widespread both among homosexuals and others in the population) and the growing consciousness of minority-majority group problems in this country.”<sup>9</sup> While Cory may have overstated the degree of acknowledgment the minority model had achieved outside of homosexual communities, shifts in the discourses adopted within homophile publications and among activists support his contention that increasingly broad proportions of gay men and lesbians had begun to think of themselves as members of a minority.

As the minority group paradigm gained traction in the homophile movement and beyond, more activists began to accept Cory’s arguments, based on Myrdal’s analysis of race and minority relations, that the problems of homosexuals stemmed not from themselves, but from social discrimination. As activist Barbara Gittings later recalled, “In the 60s there was distinct change in the temper and the tempo of the gay movement,

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<sup>9</sup> Donald Webster Cory, “From the First to the Second Cory Report,” *ONE* 11, no. 10 (October 1963), 8.

partly as a result of the black civil rights movement militancy. We began to get more militant in the gay movement. We began to see that the problem of homosexuality is not really gay people's problem; it's a problem of the social attitudes of the people around us. And we had to change their attitudes, and that in turn would help us with our self-image."<sup>10</sup>

This newfound confidence emboldened homophiles to speak out against psychologists and researchers, whereas previously they had tended to politely defer to the aura of professional expertise. A 1965 article in *The Ladder* broke with the Daughters of Bilitis's policy of encouraging lesbians to adapt to acceptable social roles by comparing the role of psychologists in reinforcing racial as well as sexual and gender oppression: "A lesbian living in a patriarchal male-dominated society like ours, who goes to a psychotherapist to be told she must be 'cured' and force herself into the straitjacket of the Feminine Role, is like a Mississippi Negro who might be told by a therapist that he has to adjust himself into the 'Nigger' role society has cut out for him."<sup>11</sup> When The Janus Society, a Philadelphia homophile organization, sponsored a talk by homophobic psychiatrist Samuel B. Hadden in April 1965, members from several groups attended and took the previously taboo step of assertively challenging him. As an attendee from the New York chapter of the DOB reported, when Hadden "riled his listeners" by "suggesting that homosexuals' feelings of discrimination are exaggerated," an activist in the audience "won applause when he responded that those remarks sounded suspiciously like arguments we have been hearing for years from the segregationist South about the

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<sup>10</sup> Barbara Gittings interview in Greta Schiller, director, *Before Stonewall*. DVD. (New York: First Run Features, 1984).

<sup>11</sup> L.E.E., "The Invisible Woman—Some Notes on Subversion," *The Ladder* 9, no. 9 (June 1965), 8.

Negro.”<sup>12</sup> Homophiles had advanced such comparisons between anti-black and anti-homosexual prejudice within their own publications for years. But in this new climate of militancy, they began to assert the analogy not only within internal debates but in criticisms of institutions that claimed authority over public discussions of homosexuality, soliciting legitimacy by associating their own experiences with the racial oppression of African Americans.

This willingness to challenge professional authority dovetailed with homophile reliance on political models from the African American experience in an extended debate between Frank Kameny and Florence Conrad in the pages of *The Ladder* in 1965. The Daughters of Bilitis, in imitation of the Mattachine Society, had since their founding in 1955 listed as part of their organizational purpose “participation in research projects by duly authorized and responsible psychologists, sociologists and other such experts directed towards further knowledge of the homosexual.” But in a provocative article titled “Does Research into Homosexuality Matter?” Kameny argued that, as a valid minority, scientific research held nothing but academic interest for homosexuals: after all, “the Negro is not engrossed in questions about the origins of his skin color, nor the Jew in questions of the possibility of his conversion to Christianity.” The movement should promote the homosexual’s “right to remain as he is, and proceed to do all that is possible to make for him—as a homosexual (similarly, in other contexts, as a Negro and as a Jew)—as happy a life, useful to self and to society, as is possible.”<sup>13</sup>

But counter-arguments could also deploy comparisons between African

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<sup>12</sup> “Special Report: Faith and Fury,” *The Ladder* 9, no. 8 (May 1965), 20-21.

<sup>13</sup> Franklin E. Kameny, “Does Research into Homosexuality Matter?” *The Ladder* 9, no. 8 (May 1965), 18-19.



Americans and homosexuals. In a response titled “Research is Here to Stay,” *Ladder* contributor Florence Conrad wondered “where the Negro civil rights movement would be today, militant or not, if research into racial differences had not long ago supported the Negro’s claim to equality of treatment? And where would WE be today without Kinsey’s two classic volumes on sexual behavior?”<sup>14</sup> In a subsequent issue, Kameny offered his rebuttal by disputing the relevance of research results to African American political progress: “As long as homosexuality is not sickness, research on causation is of no more relevance than is research into whether black skin is caused by (say) gene 743 on chromosome 18, or gene 327 on chromosome 17, of interest to the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, or Martin Luther King. The homosexual’s problems are political and social—not in essence psychological.”<sup>15</sup>

What is striking in this exchange is that, despite their stark disagreement over the importance of research to social movements, Kameny and Conrad each represent the black freedom struggle as their model and source of authority for homosexual organizing. Ultimately, Kameny’s rejection of the paradigm of sickness would prove more persuasive to homophile activists in the new era of militancy, because, as he replied to Conrad, “Whatever definitions of sickness one may use, sick people are NOT EQUAL to well people in any practical, meaningful sense.” Equality between homosexuals and heterosexuals, modeled on the legal and social equality between races posited and pursued by African American civil rights activists, required downplaying or dismissing of any competing analogy that could threaten the political legitimacy of homosexuals as a minority group.

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<sup>14</sup> Florence Conrad, “Research is Here to Stay, *The Ladder* 9/10, no. 10 and 11 (July/August 1965), 16.

<sup>15</sup> Franklin E. Kameny, “Emphasis on research has had its day,” *The Ladder* 10, no. 1 (October 1965), 24.

### The Homophile-as-Minority Model in Transnational Perspective

While the domestic political achievements of “the American Negro” provided its primary model and inspiration, the homophile movement in the United States did not develop in isolation from transnational currents. As Craig Loftin notes in his discussion of international correspondence between readers of homophile publications, “In the 1950s, American gay men and lesbians did not invent gay activism but rather adapted an existing international movement to the particular social and political climate of the McCarthy era.” While homosexuals around the world encountered religious and family-based regulation, state-driven persecution of homosexuality as experienced by activists engaged in international dialogues took place most prominently in English-speaking countries. As a result, the homophile activism that would eventually develop in the United States, as well as in Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia, correspondingly reflected a style of “collective, organized resistance” that contrasted with the activities of the established homophile organizations active in countries with less state repression of homosexuality.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to the repressive domestic political context noted by Loftin in comparison with transnational trends, the prominence of the black freedom struggle as the primary template for minority-led social movements in the United States also profoundly shaped the contours of American homophile activism. Homophile activists from other countries noted and commented on this distinct national context at the time. As Professor G. Th. Kempe of Utrecht, Holland remarked in a 1953 speech to the International Committee for Sex Equality, “It is hardly surprising that minority problems

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<sup>16</sup> Craig Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2012), 63-82.

should attract so much attention [in the United States]. How could it be otherwise, in a country where the Negro question is one of the most burning social problems, in which every member of the national community is involved.”<sup>17</sup>

A 1964-5 debate between *ONE Magazine* and the French organization Arcadie illuminates the distinction drawn by Loftin between homophile organizing in English-speaking countries with high levels of state repression against homosexuality in contrast to other countries with more liberal legal climates. The diverging perspectives also highlighted the centrality of the sexuality/race analogy to American homophile minority self-conceptions. A writer for Arcadie’s magazine described the United States as a “badly integrated society” and accused American homophile groups of promoting separatism and a ghetto mentality. By contrast, Arcadie asserted, “We don’t want anyone to imagine that we have any desire to be considered a ‘minority group,’ for this we are not. We are not even a ‘group’ at all. We are citizens who happen to have in common certain sexual preferences and certain problems of an emotional and personal nature, all of which are grossly exaggerated by popular prejudices.”<sup>18</sup>

In reply, Marcel Martin of *ONE Magazine* clarified that a minority only comes into self-awareness as such “when it dares to demand equality with others living in the same environment.” Like Cory, he attributed the failure of minority groups to integrate to the legal, social, and economic barriers created by the majority “for the very purpose of preventing the integration of that minority.” In contrast to the French homophiles of Arcadie, who considered themselves merely citizens with a few shared preferences and problems, homophiles in the United States “are not citizens at all,” and only pass as

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<sup>17</sup> Prof. G. Th. Kempe, “The Homophile in Society,” *ONE* 3, no. 2 (February 1955), 13.

<sup>18</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 1 (January 1965), 7.

citizens “to the extent that we succeed in pretending to be heterosexuals.” Because many homosexuals are able to do this, they often “succeed in living and functioning as an integrated part of society,” though at a cost. “He is not unlike the white ‘Negro’ who tries to cross the color line,” Martin concludes; “both can pass if they are willing to pay the price.”<sup>19</sup> The combination of state discrimination against homosexuals and the context of American race relations structure the self-understanding of American homophile as a minority group seeking justice through full citizenship.

“Gay People Have Learned a Lesson From the Colored People”: Adopting Black Freedom Tactics

As more observers inside and beyond homosexual communities came to accept the minority paradigm and the analogy between sexuality and race in the 1960s, homophile writers began to focus less on conceptual comparisons between the minority condition of African Americans and homosexuals and more on tactical proposals based on observations of black civil rights successes. In 1960, after a series of raids that shut down nearly all of the gay bars in New York City, Dal McIntire wondered whether “in imitation of Southern Negro students,” patrons could “systematically force the officials to recognize homosexual rights or close every bar in New York City. Whenever a gay bar is closed, the patrons should immediately, but peacefully and with model behavior, take their patronage to the next bar down the street, and the next and the next . . . But just as with the Negro students, homosexuals will have to be fairly brave to try such a

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 9-11.

program.”<sup>20</sup> *ONE* reported approvingly in 1963 on how a local conservative newspaper’s “ridiculous frothy-mouthed articles against homosexuals has brought forth a sensible move by gay people—they are boycotting any business that advertises in that paper, and writing and phoning the business and telling them that. Looks like gay people have learned a lesson from the colored people in the south that got that bus company where the hair was short.”<sup>21</sup>

A 1964 editorial by Marcel Martin reflected on the increasing acceptance of the minority model in order to propose a shift in strategy towards building collective gay economic power:

Inspired by the successes and startling progress recently made by the colored population of this country, it has suddenly become popular among the leaders of the homophile movement to try to advance our own cause by referring to ourselves as a minority entitled to the same rights and privileges which legislators and society at large are struggling to grant to other minorities. In doing so we are apparently trying to get on the band wagon, in the hope that the very word “minority” will touch the heart-strings of our fellowmen who will then hasten to make amends and grant us the rights and privileges we seek. If, however, we really believe this then we have forgotten that man is famous for his inhumanity to man and that he rarely grants to his fellowmen anything which he is not forced to grant either by public opinion or, more frequently, economic pressure.<sup>22</sup>

Martin goes on to recount how Jews, and more recently African Americans, have

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<sup>20</sup> Dal McIntire, “Tangents: News and Views.” *ONE* 8, no. 5 (May 1960), 18-19.

<sup>21</sup> Sal McIntire, “Tangents: News and Views,” *ONE* 11, no. 4 (April 1963), 15-16.

<sup>22</sup> Marcel Martin, “Editorial.” *ONE* 12, no. 9 (September 1964),

commanded community respect and political rights through banding together for economic success, asking his readers, “Why can the homosexual not also learn and profit from these lessons?”

Homophiles following developments in the black freedom struggle expanded their proposals from economic measures to include legal and legislative ideas. In a 1960 letter to *ONE* co-editor James Kepner, Harry Hay took his cue from African American civil rights successes to suggest working towards legislative changes for homosexuals: “Now that the Gideon’s Army of Integration for the Negro people seems well launched with all the necessary ordnance of self-sustenance, I propose it is time for the Homophile minority to begin aspects of more social action, preliminary to political action—i.e., the laying of the necessary groundwork for fomenting a successful American Wolfenden Bill.”<sup>23</sup> Reader Leonardo from Atlanta, Georgia proposed a joint strategy of boycotts and legal challenges modeled on African American civil rights successes: “May I suggest that our group should take a page from the Negro’s notebook in the fight for legal recognition—namely, the use of the economic boycott . . . We must in some way, through competent legal counsel, bring about a change in the laws (again just as the Negroes did through the NAACP and their battery of lawyers). Once we have legal recognition, I believe social acceptance will follow.”<sup>24</sup> Although many of these proposals would take years to come to fruition, their timing and the language through which homophiles articulated them clearly indicate the central role of the analogy between homosexuals and

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<sup>23</sup> Harry Hay to Jim Kepner, November 10, 1960. Box 1, Folder 70, Harry Hay Papers. The “Wolfenden Bill” refers to proposed legislation decriminalizing private adult homosexual behavior in the United Kingdom, arising in response to the 1957 “Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution” chaired by Lord Wolfenden. The legislation was eventually passed as the Sexual Offenses Act in 1967.

<sup>24</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 1 (January 1965), 30.

African Americans in charting the range of political possibilities imagined by the growing movement.

### Envisioning “The Homosexual Vote”

Discussions of protest tactics, legal and economic measures, and legislative possibilities opened the previously remote prospect of homosexuals as an effective voting bloc. In a rare appearance of nascent activist consciousness in the *Mattachine Review*, Wes Knight argued in a 1956 article, “This minority exists even though it is not on a physical level, such as the Negro.” Accordingly, he speculated, “If we were a socially conscious group, and not independent individuals ignoring the possibilities of uniting, we COULD swing an election.”<sup>25</sup> The first reference to the prospect of homosexuals as a minority voting bloc appeared in *ONE Magazine* in 1957, when “Mr. R.” from New York City wrote, “If union will make the Homosexual strong, then why not unite under one common cause. Equality! If the Jew and the Negro can do it to gain their own ends, then why not the Homosexual . . . If politicians make it part of their platform to seek the vote of various minority groups, then let them also seek our vote.”<sup>26</sup> However, for some observers, the analogy with the black freedom struggle had led them to conclude that homophiles should not focus on developing voting power at this early stage in their liberation. As Didgeon wrote in 1960, “Before the Negro could vote it was necessary that he be free. We have yet to win our freedom; while we should by all means continue to discuss what we are to do with that freedom once we have it, we will do much better to

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<sup>25</sup> Wes Knight, “Homosexuals Examine Their Sense of Values,” *Mattachine Review* 2, no. 3 (June 1956), 25-6.

<sup>26</sup> *ONE* 5, no. 7 (August/September 1957), 30.

concentrate our efforts on obtaining it.”<sup>27</sup>

By the mid-1960s, however, with the dramatic voter registration struggles of civil rights activists in the South and the Voting Rights Act prominent in public consciousness, the homophile movement began to more seriously consider their collective potential power as voters. Not all believed that the analogy with race extended sufficiently far: A.E. Smith argued that using the term “minority” too loosely led to a “myth of the homosexual vote,” and that in contrast to Catholics, Negroes, and Jews, “There is no more sense in talking about ‘The Homosexual Vote’ than there is in talking about ‘The Left Handed Vote.’”<sup>28</sup> Smith concludes that as “a unique and limited” minority, homosexuals must face that “we can never have political power” or operate as an effective voting bloc.<sup>28</sup> But other readers disagreed; as one argued, “What unites Negroes, for example, but the fact of their being Negro and the response of others to that fact? And if the homosexual vote is a ‘myth,’ it is because homosexuals have no political interests in common or because they have failed, as of yet, to be aware of those interests. The Negro and other minority groups also failed to vote as a group until they merged as a self-conscious minority.”<sup>29</sup> At the 1964 ECHO conference, Mattachine Society of New York President J. C. Hodges “offered a lesson from the Negro civil rights movement, which is making its voice heard through work in local political groups,” urging homophiles to vote in blocs on the local level.<sup>30</sup> Activist Steve Ginsberg echoed the sentiment in a 1967 interview, stating that the Los Angeles homophile organization PRIDE “supports gay power by the proper use of the voting power of the homosexual,” but noted that “most

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<sup>27</sup> Didgeon, “Between Consenting Adults”, *ONE* 7, no. 5 (May 1960), 12-14.

<sup>28</sup> A.E. Smith, “The Myth of the Homosexual Vote,” *ONE* 12, no. 1 (October 1964), 6-8

<sup>29</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 1 (January 1965), 13.

<sup>30</sup> “Report on ECHO 1964 Conference,” *The Ladder* 9, no. 4 (January 1965), 9.



homosexuals are not aware of the possibilities and do not register or vote. The Negroes learn that they have the power to get people in or out of office.”<sup>31</sup> As homophiles debated whether they could wield political power as a voting bloc, the extent to which they believed so precisely reflected the extent to which they saw their condition as a homosexual minority as analogous to that of African American voters. And it would be both in imitation of and in coalition with African American voters that homosexuals would first fully emerge as a force within local electoral politics.

#### “The Second Largest Minority”: Taking the Analogy to the Streets

Homophiles inspired by civil rights successes in the early 1960s began appropriating not only tactical proposals but slogans and discourses from the black freedom struggle. After the 1963 March of Washington, Elliott Castor noted, “The Negroes have a song, ‘We Shall Overcome,’ which the homosexuals could adopt also. Perhaps the gay people will indeed overcome some day.”<sup>32</sup> In an editorial in Washington Mattachine’s newsletter two years later, New York activist Dick Leitsch used it to reinforce the commonalities between different minority experiences: “Any oppressed minority is a sore spot on the conscience of the community. While any one man is denied freedom and equality, no man is secure in his freedom nor in his equality . . . Together, we shall overcome.”<sup>33</sup> Gay and lesbian activists would repeatedly conclude appeals for

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<sup>31</sup> “The Phoenix Interview: Steve Ginsberg.” *The Phoenix: Midwest Homophile Voice* (Vol. 2 No. 7, August 1967), 6.

<sup>32</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 11 (November 1963), 31

<sup>33</sup> Dick Leitsch, “We Are Ten,” *The Homosexual Citizen: News of Civil Liberties and Social Rights for Homosexuals* (December 1965).

support to both gay and straight audiences with the phrase in the decades to come.<sup>34</sup>

Beyond homophile publications, the re-energized movement deployed discourses modeled on African American activism in their first public demonstrations. In keeping with the newly militant tenor inspired by civil rights organizations, homophile organizations on the East Coast began to hold pickets in the spring and summer of 1965. From the beginning, the groups framed their appeals towards an audience they expected to be sympathetic towards African American appeals for equality and justice, and aimed to associate their oppression with racism and their demands with civil rights. At a picket outside the White House in April, one protestor from the Mattachine Society of Washington carried a sign reading, “Gov. Wallace Met with Negroes. Our Gov’t Won’t Meet with Us.”<sup>35</sup> On June 26, as twenty-five picketers protested outside the Civil Service Commission building against the exclusion of homosexuals from federal employment, the sign referring to the segregationist Alabama governor reappeared, this time specifically comparing him to Civil Service Commission president William Macy. Another demonstrator’s sign made the analogy between sexuality and race or religion as explicit as possible: “Discrimination Against Homosexuals Is as Immoral as Discrimination Against Negroes and Jews.”<sup>36</sup> After the pickets, an editorial appeared in *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* titled “We’re on the Move Now”; as Michael Long observes, “That famous line was lifted directly from King’s address at the conclusion of the Selma to Montgomery March on March 25, 1965.”<sup>37</sup>

The Independence Day picket on July 4, 1965 in Philadelphia indicated how

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, *GPU News Milwaukee* 4, no. 11 (September 1975), 7.

<sup>35</sup> *The Ladder* 9, no. 8 (May 1965), 22.

<sup>36</sup> *The Ladder* 9, no. 10/11 (July/August 1965), 23.

<sup>37</sup> Long, 124; *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* 10 (June 1965), 2.

profoundly the movement based the validity of their claims on the moral and political legitimacy of the African American civil rights movement. The leaflet handed out by picketers maximizes the argument for equal rights based on analogy with African Americans. In advocating for “government by consent of the governed,” they wrote:

We would not expect, in this country, that laws, refutations, and ordinances would be established, deeply and directly affecting (for example) Negroes or Jews, without consultation with spokesmen for the Negro or Jewish citizenry . . . Spokesmen for the homosexual community have asked—and asked and asked and asked—for meetings with their public officials to discuss laws and regulations affecting them. Almost without exception, such meetings have been refused. This is not government with the consent of the governed.<sup>38</sup>

Likewise, the picketers continued, “Homosexual American citizens” appealing for redress of grievances “have not received the common courtesy of an answer or even of an acknowledgment,” whereas “even in the South, we find officials meeting with representatives of the Negro community there to discuss problems and grievances and to work toward a solution of them.” The homosexual, therefore, “finds himself a member of the only major national minority group which is systematically denied an opportunity to achieve the equality which all other citizens have.”<sup>39</sup> The Annual Reminder, as the yearly Independence Day pickets would become known, continued through the 1960s; when Washington activist Lilli Vincenz filmed newsreel footage of the protest in 1967, she titled the film “The Second Largest Minority.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Reprinted in *The Ladder* 9, no. 12 (September 1965), 7-8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> “Lesbian & Gay History.” *Our Time*, Episode 2. Vito Russo, director. (New York: WNYC,

“The Most Disadvantaged Citizen in America”: Comparing Racial and Sexual Oppression

With African American political successes making headlines from the March on Washington to the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts, white homophiles claimed with increasing confidence that the oppression they experienced as “the second largest minority” actually surpassed that of any other minority group. In an address about legal problems facing the homophile community delivered at ONE’s 1963 Midwinter Institute, Frank Wood declared, “There is no group in the United States today that is more persecuted than the homosexual.” While “isolated cases” of individual persecution at southern universities may persist, “The biggest victories in civil rights have already been won in these areas.”<sup>41</sup> A *ONE* article the same year titled “The New Nazism” maintained, “The social position of the homosexual in American is in many ways worse even than that of the Negro. The homosexual is frequently discriminated against, is bait for the police, and is in danger of losing what few civil rights he may be said to possess. Unlike the Negro, he has no allies who will campaign for him the way many ecclesiastics preached for so long against racial discrimination.”<sup>42</sup> A *ONE* reader from California weighed in, “Society must always have a whipping boy. In the years past, it has been the Jews, then the Catholics, then the Negroes—but these minorities have largely thrown off the yoke of hatred, bigotry, and discrimination; now the homosexual is the scapegoat for the rage and insanity of the ignorant.”<sup>43</sup>

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February 16, 1983).

<sup>41</sup> Frank C. Wood Jr., “The Right to be Free from Unreasonable Search and Seizure,” *ONE* 4, no. 11 (April 1963), 5.

<sup>42</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 5 (May 1963), 10-11.

<sup>43</sup> *ONE* 14, no. 4 (April/May 1966), 31.

Frank Kameny, who had been fired from his federal government job when his employer discovered his homosexuality, claimed on a 1963 television appearance in Chicago, “The exclusion of known homosexuals from virtually all sorts of employment is complete and absolute to a degree undreamed of by the Negro in his worst nightmares.”<sup>44</sup> To *Ladder* editor Barbara Grier, “The homosexual is, without possible challenge, the most disadvantaged citizen in America. We have less civil rights than any other group, except possibly the American Indian; and even less than they, if we dare surface our heads above our sand holes.”<sup>45</sup> In fact, to some homophiles, the persistence of anti-homosexual prejudice as the last broadly acceptable form of bigotry meant that white homosexuals could even inherit the term “racism” to describe the discrimination they experienced. In a speech at a 1965 Los Angeles homophile meeting, a novelist “said that one review in the *LA Times* of his latest work was so insanely written due to blind hatred of homosexuals that it could be viewed as only ‘racist;’ can it be, as he suggests, that since it is no longer respectable to be anti-Negro, etc, we homosexuals are going to inherit the bitter salt of the earth’s ‘racist’ hatred?”<sup>46</sup>

Having imagined themselves as a minority analogous to African Americans and experiencing oppression morally equivalent to racism yet surpassing it in virulence, white homophiles reacted with particular indignation to expressions of prejudice from the minority group whose experiences formed the template for their political identities. In 1964, *ONE* condemned a homophobic article that appeared in a “Negro publication” with particular vehemence: “The editors of *Sepia*, members of a minority themselves, cannot

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<sup>44</sup> “Special Report: Off the Cuff,” *The Ladder* 9, no. 1 (October 1964), 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> Barbara Grier, “The Least of These,” in *The Lavender Herring: Lesbian Essays from The Ladder*. Ed. Barbara Grier and Coletta Reid (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1976).

<sup>46</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 4 (April 1965), 16.

be forgiven for such dishonest reporting, quoting of bigots, etc.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, a 1966 homophile critic chastised black playwright Leroi Jones for his caricatures of effeminate white gays: “It is sad when one minority grinds its own ax at the expense of another.”<sup>48</sup>

Accounts of the extent to which this sympathy between white homosexuals and racial minorities existed varied substantially among homophile observers. In a talk at the 1957 Mattachine Society convention, social worker William A. Baker claimed that the homosexual “has a precious gift to society: the ability to understand other minority groups.”<sup>49</sup> Donald Webster Cory acknowledged that “some [white] homosexuals (although the proportion is smaller than among heterosexuals) reflect the antagonistic attitudes toward some ethnic groups,” but contended that “nevertheless, most homosexuals do participate in a greater amount of inter-ethnic mingling than do heterosexuals.”<sup>50</sup> Andrew Bradbury’s 1964 *ONE* article “Race and Sex” praised interracial relationships and reported a higher degree of sympathy by white homosexuals towards African Americans. However, some disagreed; a reader from New York noted, “Contra [Bradbury’s] observations, I have noted a distinct animosity toward Negroes, gay or otherwise, among most of the [white] homosexuals whom I know. This is probably attributable to up-bringing and to the failure to generalize one’s own predicament in a hostile and/or indifferent society to another oppressed segment of the citizenry.”<sup>51</sup>

Black gay men and lesbians whose voices appear in homophile publications also reported mixed perspectives on whether the minority consciousness of white

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<sup>47</sup> *ONE* 12, no. 11 (November 1964), 18.

<sup>48</sup> *ONE* 14, no. 2 (February 1966), 23.

<sup>49</sup> “Mattachine Looks at Life—Life Talks Back,” *The Ladder* 1, no. 12 (September 1957), 9.

<sup>50</sup> *ONE* 1, no. 2, February 1953, 2-11.

<sup>51</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 2 (February 1965), 31.

homosexuals extended to anti-racist beliefs. Ernestine Eckstein, asked in an interview in *The Ladder* if she had encountered racism in the homophile movement, replied, “No, I feel the homophile movement is more open to Negroes than, say, a lot of churches, for example. Unfortunately, I find that there are very few Negroes in the homophile movement. I keep looking for them, but they’re not there.”<sup>52</sup> In the broader social and sexual worlds of gay culture, however, others disagreed about the racial openness of white homophiles. A *ONE* reader from Michigan complained, “Why is it that my ‘brothers’ segregate themselves when cruising? There is one bar, that I like to cruise in, and I always get funny stares, because I am a man of color. We’re all looking for companions, why be hypocritical?”<sup>53</sup> A young black gay man from Atlanta, Georgia wrote to *ONE* with harsh criticism of their claims to minority advocacy while remaining silent in the face of gay racism: “Your magazine is sheer hypocrisy. You claim to represent the world’s most oppressed minorities; however, you don’t practice what you preach. As a student at an all-Negro college I find that throughout the South gay bars are closed to Negroes. Of course, you may argue that these bars are merely obeying the laws of the land or state they are in, but you forget that ONE is one of the first organizations to yell when its particular minority is wronged.”<sup>54</sup> Black interventions into the homophile public sphere drew on the increasingly accepted analogy between homosexuality and race to challenge white racism within gay and lesbian communities.

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<sup>52</sup> “Interview with Ernestine,” *The Ladder* 10, no. 9 (June 1966), 6.

<sup>53</sup> *ONE* 13, no. 1 (January 1965), 31.

<sup>54</sup> *ONE* 11, no. 2 (February 1963), 31.

“Lesbians Also Fight for Integration”: Analogies Between Sexual Orientation and Race in the Black and White Press

Despite racial tensions within gay and lesbian communities, some African American institutions, notably in the African American press, responded sympathetically to the efforts of the homophile movement to position itself within the framework of civil rights activism. No major African American civil rights organizations took a political position on homosexuality or established documented links with homophile groups through the mid-1960s, despite attempts by the latter to encourage collaboration. Nonetheless, the African American press reported on the homophile movement significantly more favorably than the white press, becoming some of the first non-homophile organizations to publicly affirm the connections between racial and sexual minorities. For example, when the Mattachine Society of Washington conducted their historic protest at the White House in the summer of 1965, the only newspaper to cover the event was the *Washington Afro-American*.<sup>55</sup> In the midst of the Chicago Daughters of Bilitis chapter’s struggle to secure an office space in 1964, the *New Crusader* newspaper covered the events with a story titled, “Local Lesbians Also Fight for Integration; Open Office Here,” noting that the DOB promoted “equitable handling of cases involving this minority group.”<sup>56</sup> Chicago DOB president Del Shearer, still somewhat ambivalent about the analogy and a minoritarian approach to lesbian politics, noted that in the article, “The term integration was somewhat over-played.” As historian Timothy Stewart-Winter comments, “Before even local white gay activists had tried to get a public forum to draw

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<sup>55</sup> Johnson, *The Lavender Scare*, 200.

<sup>56</sup> “Local Lesbians Also Fight for Integration; Open Office Here,” *Chicago New Crusader*, July 4 1964.)



the analogy between black and gay activism, the black press articulated this connection.”<sup>57</sup>

Newspapers and magazines in the white-owned popular press proved much slower to acknowledge the connection homophiles attempted to draw between their political aspirations and African American civil rights activism. As late as 1966, *Time Magazine*'s explicitly rejected and mocked activist attempts to draw analogies between sexual orientation and race. An article titled “The Homosexual in America” concluded by terming homosexuality “a pathetic little second-rate substitute for reality, a pitiable flight from life” that deserves “no fake status as minority martyrdom.”<sup>58</sup> Gradually, however, mainstream media articles began to engage with the framework of homosexuals as a minority group with political aspirations comparable to those of racial or religious minorities. A turning point came with the publication of Webster Schott's 1967 *New York Times Magazine* article, “Civil Rights and the Homosexual: A 4-Million Minority Asks for Equal Rights.” While considerably more sympathetic than most mainstream discussions to that point—and affirming homosexuals' status as a rights-seeking minority in the very title—it simultaneously advocated more humane treatment of homosexuals and at the same time efforts to prevent homosexuality by easing heterosexual repression and offering support to people wishing to change their sexual orientation. Despite the title, the article makes no analogies between homosexuals and other minority groups until the final paragraph's comparison of solutions to the “problems” posed by minorities: “If we want integration instead of burning cities, Negroes must live next door. If we want heterosexuals instead of deviates, we must grow them early.” Despite this ambiguous

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<sup>57</sup> Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 65.

<sup>58</sup> “Essay: The Homosexual in America,” *Time*, January 21 1966.

conclusion, Schott's explicit call for "civil rights for homosexuals" and "changes in public policies that discriminate against homosexuals and virtually disfranchise them economically" lent unprecedented legitimacy as a minority with political demands—even as one that the author hoped would be "liberated" out of existence.<sup>59</sup>

### From Black Power to Gay is Good

With the analogy between homosexuality and blackness securing mainstream validation beyond circles of gays, lesbians, and their supporters, militant homophile activists increasingly based strategies for political and cultural change on developments in African American struggles. By the late 1960s, the Black Power movement had emerged as a confrontational counterpoint to traditional civil rights organizing, rejecting integration and Christian nonviolence in favor of autonomous organizing, self-defense, and cultural nationalism. The movement's explicit embrace of pride in blackness and culture inspired gay men and lesbians to emulate black self-affirmation. Riffing off of funk singer James Brown's 1968 Black Power anthem, New York City's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop, founded in 1967 as the first gay bookstore in the United States, placed advertisements in homophile publications reading, "WE SAY IT LOUD—WE'RE GAY & WE'RE PROUD."<sup>60</sup> In one of the most direct borrowings derived from the gay/black analogy, Frank Kameny proposed a resolution that would be adopted at the 1968 convention of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations:

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<sup>59</sup> Webster Schott, "Civil Rights and the Homosexual," *New York Times Magazine*, November 12 1967.

<sup>60</sup> *Cornell SHL News* 1, no. 3 (April 1970).

BECAUSE many individual homosexuals, like many of the members of many other minority groups suffer from diminished self-esteem, doubts and uncertainties as to their personal worth . . .

BECAUSE, therefore, many individual homosexuals, like many members of other minority groups, are in need of psychological sustenance to bolster and support a positive and affirmative attitude toward themselves and their homosexuality . . .

BECAUSE the Negro community has approached similar problems and goals with some success by the adoption of the motto or slogan: *Black is Beautiful*

RESOLVED: that it be hereby adopted as a slogan or motto . . . that

GAY IS GOOD<sup>61</sup>

Kameny later recalled his inspiration for the slogan: “I saw a television program of Stokely Carmichael leading a group of young black students... And they were chanting a slogan, which was coming into popularity at the time, ‘Black is beautiful.’ And I realized that the psychodynamics were identical... You had to have an affirmative statement. That was exactly what we needed.”<sup>62</sup>

This defiantly self-affirming attitude would lay the groundwork for the soon-to-emerge gay liberation movement, which would rapidly overtake older homophile organizations over the course of the following two years. Just two months before the Stonewall Rebellion, Bay Area gay radical Leo Laurence complained, “Only about one percent of the homosexual leaders I’ve interviewed are willing to publicly say ‘I’m gay and I’m proud!’ About the only people with that kind of courage are the new breed of

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<sup>61</sup> Ronald Bayer, *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry: The Politics of Diagnosis* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 90-91.

<sup>62</sup> Franklin E. Kameny interview, “The LGBTQ Civil Rights Movement, 1960-1990: Exploring History and Current Consequences.” May 29 2008. [www.wisc.edu](http://www.wisc.edu) (accessed March 1, 2018).

young gay kids . . . The old-timers are scared that these kids will come in and really create a gay revolution.”<sup>63</sup> Emulating the slogans of Black Power and civil rights drew on the cultural power ascribed to those movements to both inspire and catalyze action within the homophile movements and to legitimize them with the field of other social movements.

“A Combined Group Can Do Much More”: Building Solidarity Between Minorities

In this atmosphere, more homophile activist groups began to orient themselves towards building links of solidarity with other minority groups. Whereas an attitude among some writers linking homosexual political success to support for all marginalized groups remained largely rhetorical in the first decade of the fledgling movement, by the 1960s a new generation of homophile activists would begin to put this sense of solidarity across minority identities into practice. In its statement of purpose, the Mattachine Society of Washington declared, “This organization will cooperate with other minority organizations which are striving for the realization of full civil rights and liberties for all.”<sup>64</sup> Members of the San Francisco gay and transgender street youth group Vanguard wrote in a 1967 issue of their ‘zine, “We do feel that the homosexual group—as a minority faction—has an inherent similarity to other oppressed minorities and a collective interest in other minority rights activities.”<sup>65</sup> James Colton wrote in *The Ladder* in 1968 that the homosexual minority “has only one chance of wielding any kind of

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<sup>63</sup> “Gay Revolution?” *Vector: A Voice for the Homosexual Community* 5, no. 5 (April 1969).

<sup>64</sup> Mattachine Society of Washington, “Mattachine Society of Washington statement of purpose,” Rainbow History Project Digital Collections. <http://rainbowhistory.omeka.net/items/show/4937957> (accessed March 1, 2018).

<sup>65</sup> “Critique,” *Vanguard* 10 (1967), 22.

effective power... We must face the fact that, like it or not, the majority regard us as members of a minority. They force us to form a minority. And because it is a small minority we must augment our strength by finding common cause with other minorities.” For Colton as for so many activists, African American struggles presented the paradigm through which homosexual resistance could be imagined: “The Negro has stopped running scared. He has opted for his own identity. Black is beautiful... They have a world to win. So have homosexuals . . . We are a viable minority. With an identity. Sexual freedom too is a civil right.”<sup>66</sup>

If the strategy of minority politics adapted from the black freedom struggle provided the theoretical background for an ethic of solidarity, shared experiences of police violence provided a concrete basis for building links with African American and other minority groups in many cities. As early as 1965, the editor of *Tangents* had remarked, “Frequent examples of police malpractice come to our attention. Like the Negro in this regard, the homosexual seems to be an easy prey for abuses at the time of his arrest.”<sup>67</sup> Los Angeles gay activist Steve Ginsberg reflected cynically on the prospects for improvement in relations with law enforcement while drawing links between groups targeted on the basis of race and social nonconformity: “Considering what the police have done this year to homosexuals, hippies and Negroes; there will be a long time before there will be any basic change.” But shared victimization demands that homosexuals work in solidarity with other movements: “I think that it will work out best if there is a liaison [sic] worked out between the gay crowd, the hippies, Negroes, Mexican Americans, etc., because many of our problems are basic. A combined group can do

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<sup>66</sup> James Colton, “The Homosexual Identity,” *The Ladder* 12, no. 12 (September 1968), 4-8.

<sup>67</sup> *Tangents* 1, no. 2 (November 1965), 2.

much more to combat harassment and brutality than an individual group.”<sup>68</sup>

This alliance first materialized in San Francisco, where homophile activists combined with civil rights activists and religious leaders to challenge police violence and harassment. In 1964, a group of ministers concerned about social justice in the city organized a weekend-long meeting with representatives from the local lesbian and gay community, who described the similarities between their experiences and those of racial minorities. As the assembled ministers listened, homophile activist Guy Strait discussed common problems with police harassment faced by African Americans and gays. Although noting, “The homosexual has one advantage over the Negro” by virtue of the fact that “he can hide,” Strait urged his audience to take the legal oppression of homosexuals seriously because they “can no more change their nature than a Negro can change the color of his skin.” Moved by the stories of victimization they heard and influenced by the arguments analogizing sexual and racial discrimination, the ministers formed the Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH), a coalition between homophile activists and local clergy that would play a pivotal role in the emergence of lesbian and gay political power in the city.

At a New Year's dance organized by the CRH in 1965, a brutal police crackdown—including the arrest of members of the clergy who had attended to monitor the event—radicalized the supportive ministers and led to a public outcry. With sympathetic media coverage and considerable support from religious leaders, the Society for Individual Rights, a local homophile activist group, saw their membership more than triple to a thousand members during 1965. Reverend Cecil Williams, an African

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<sup>68</sup> “The Phoenix Interview: Steve Ginsberg.” *The Phoenix: Midwest Homophile Voice* 2, no. 7 (August 1967), 6.

American minister active in civil rights organizing, lent legitimacy to the movement by drawing explicit links between the oppression experienced by African Americans and gays and lesbians.<sup>69</sup> His testimony marks the first known instance of an African American leader publicly validating the analogy between sexual orientation and race. In addition to events in the city, Daughters of Bilitis co-founder Del Martin recalled, black anti-police rebellions helped spark gay and lesbian activists to speak out against the harassment they faced at the hands of law enforcement: “Then Watts happened and we decided this isn’t just our [i.e., white homosexuals]’ problem. So we wanted to branch it out and make it a citizen’s alert and get in all the different civil rights organizations and the different communities like the Hispanics and the Asians and Blacks and so on who we knew would be affected by police arrests and police brutality.”

The result was Citizen’s Alert, a collaborative organization that ran a hotline for reporting instances of police abuse and helped to shift the balance of power in the city against law enforcement impunity. Working together in the new group brought gay and lesbians into contact and cooperation with other minorities, with whom they discovered mutual interests. As Martin noted, “Most of the complaints [were] from people who were victims were Black and Hispanic and lesbians and gays. So, people that we met and coalesced with at that time, we still have a bond with them.”<sup>70</sup> Under pressure from this new minority coalition, an historic meeting took place between government and police officials and representatives from homophile organizations at the 1966 Daughters of Bilitis convention in San Francisco. As *The Ladder* enthusiastically reported, “With the

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<sup>69</sup> A. Cecil Williams, “On Getting and Using Power,” *Vector* 1, no. 2 (January 1965), 4, 8-10.

<sup>70</sup> Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, interview by Nan Alamilla Boyd, transcript of tape recording, 2 December 1992, San Francisco GLBT Historical Society, San Francisco.

advent of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual and the support of clergy and of the United Church of Christ, with the new alliance between the homophile community and other minorities as exemplified in Citizens Alert, with the emergence of a homosexual voting bloc and its endorsement of candidates, with the more militant approach of social action projects such as the National Protest Day held May 21,” the city had been forced to engage with the issues raised by homophile groups.<sup>71</sup>

Meanwhile, gay and lesbian activists in Chicago frustrated with continued police harassment of their communities formed Mattachine Midwest in 1965. Inspired by African American civil rights successes and radicalized by the influence of the New Left and the 1968 Democratic National Convention, the group “took a strong stance against the politics of law and order,” as Timothy Stewart-Winter describes. At an April 1969 conference discussing minority treatment by police in April 1969, Mattachine activist Bill Kelley found strong commonalities between African American and gay experiences at the hands of police and connected with anti-racist activists.<sup>72</sup> In Chicago as in San Francisco and other cities at the end of the decade, white gay and lesbian activists against police harassment sowing the seeds of collaboration with African American organizers that would grow into activist and then electoral alliance in the 1970s. What had begun as an imagined affinity based in modeling homosexual identity and politics on the black freedom struggle was finding expression in concrete solidarity between communities facing similar forms of repression.

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<sup>71</sup> “DOB Puts San Francisco on the Spot,” *The Ladder* 10, no. 11 (August 1966), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 71-87.



## CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in April 1968, homophile activists took the opportunity to reflect on his legacy in reference to their movement. Dr. King had made no public statement on homosexuality during his lifetime beyond a single obscure advice column in the January 1958 issue of *Ebony*, in which he counseled a boy who claimed to “feel about boys the way I ought to feel about girls” to seek help from a psychiatrist.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, some activists who participated alongside King in the African American civil rights movement would translate their experience into a conviction to work toward gay rights. Robert Cromey, a co-founder of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual who had participated actively in the black freedom struggle from Selma to San Francisco, later reflected, “Martin Luther King Jr. and others inspired me to take civil rights for all minorities seriously. From that awareness I saw immediately that gays and lesbians were as oppressed as black Americans . . . For me, it was MLK Jr. to black rights to LGBT rights.”<sup>2</sup>

Craig Rodwell, an activist with the New York Mattachine Society and founder of the Oscar Wilde Bookshop, penned an editorial in his publication *The New York Hymnal* after King’s assassination that articulated the impact of the African American civil rights movement on his community. “Tens of thousands of homosexual Americans, particularly those of us under 30, have come to realize that we, too, like the Negro, have a right to claim our share of the American dream,” he wrote. “Also, like the Negro, we are beginning to assert our dignity and self-respect as witnessed by the rapid growth of the

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “Advice For Living,” *Ebony* (January 1958), 34. For an extended analysis of the column, see Long, *Martin Luther King Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

homophile movement in the past few years.” Rodwell, who grew up into a homophile movement designed around the analogy between sexuality and race, easily articulated the connections he saw between their respective movements: “While Martin Luther King directed his efforts in behalf of the Negro cause, those same ideals and principles he represented are just as applicable to homosexual Americans: For it is the same kind of thinking in society that denies dignity and self-respect to Negroes and homosexuals—a society which feels it must have a scapegoat to justify its own shortcomings.”<sup>3</sup>

In a 2015 article, political scientist Christopher B. Strain discusses the “appropriation” of the legacy of the black freedom struggle as a feature within discourses deployed by immigrant rights, LGBT, and conservative activists in the twenty-first century. Strain identifies three strategies by which these movements have gained “the gravitas, moral authority, and historical status of the black freedom struggle”:

- 1) commiseration, an empathetic camaraderie born of historically comparable discriminations; 2) commensuration, the attachment of civil-rights-movement-like magnitude to a given struggle; and 3) co-optation, the redefining of civil rights as non-racialized or non-black.<sup>4</sup>

Strain discusses contemporary LGBT movements primarily in terms of commensuration, focusing on comparisons made by contemporary activists between African American civil rights achievements and LGBT political goals such as same-sex marriage, hate crimes legislation, and inclusion in the military. But in the 1968 *New York Hymnal* editorial, as indeed throughout the homophile movement of the previous two decades, homophile

<sup>3</sup> Craig Rodwell, “Editorial,” *The New York Hymnal* 1, no. 3 (April 1968), 2.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher B. Strain, “How Immigrants’ Rights, LGBTQ, and Conservative Activists Appropriate Memories of the Black Freedom Struggle,” *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 1, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2015), 231-235.

activists deployed all three strategies in their use of the black freedom struggle. The empathetic camaraderie engendered by similar modes of oppression appeared in Rodwell's recognition of the denial of "dignity and self-respect to Negroes and homosexuals" and the minority coalitions against police violence. But these gestures of commiseration—or solidarity, as I have called them here—also mingled with rhetoric claiming anti-homosexual prejudice as commensurate with racism and co-opting the language of civil rights to apply to a normatively white homosexual subject. Thus from its very inception, the structuring of gay and lesbian movements around the analogy between homosexuality and blackness anticipated the developments, both promising and problematic, of coalitions and conflicts around race that punctuated the next half century of LGBT politics.

Popular historical accounts of the rise of LGBT organizing in the United States recognize the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion in New York City as the birth of, or at least the tipping point towards, a strident nationwide movement for gay and lesbian rights. Indeed, the year following the rioting at Stonewall witnessed a dramatic quantitative increase in gay and lesbian organizations, demonstrations, and publications across the United States. The movement during this pivotal period also experienced a qualitative shift in rhetoric and tactics, marking not so much a stark break as a quickening and intensification of gradual trends towards militancy, unapologetic visibility, and coalition organizing with other minority and radical constituencies. Historians since D'Emilio have excavated the two decades of organizing that preceded the gay liberation explosion of 1969 and beyond, while others such as Stewart-Winter and Hobson have documented the relatively modest

impact that the New York City rebellion exerted on local gay and lesbian organizing in other regions of the country. The discontinuities between the more accommodationist homophile groups and the more radical gay liberation and lesbian feminist groups that followed them are clear and well documented. However, few historians have emphasized the underlying conceptual links that bridged the eras, most prominently the foundational analogy between sexuality and race and the oppressed minority paradigm modeled on African American movements. These key innovations from the early homophile era remained critical to the intellectual foundation of the gay liberation movement and the more moderate LGBT civil rights movement that evolved from it in the 1970s and beyond. An in-depth exploration of the development of the sexuality/race analogy and the minority paradigm in the years after 1969 remains beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the following preliminary observations could indicate directions for future research while suggesting the continued significance of these analogical paradigms to understanding both the successes and setbacks of LGBT movements from the 1970s to the present day.

As gay liberation organizing influenced by the New Left, countercultural youth radicalism, and Black Power movements exploded across the country in 1969 and 1970, activists emphasized the radical potential of the minority model to induce solidarity between all oppressed peoples. In the months after the Stonewall Rebellion, the Youth Committee of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) grew increasingly militant and impatient with the coalition's old guard of more tentative activists. In "A Radical Manifesto" adopted unanimously in August 1969, the Committee elaborated the radical potential of the minority model: "We see the persecution of

homosexuality as part of a general attempt to oppress all minorities and keep them powerless. Our fate is linked with these minorities; if the detention camps are filled tomorrow with blacks, hippies, and other radicals, we will not escape that fate.”<sup>5</sup> In November, youth activists from NACHO distributed 14,000 leaflets at the March on Washington against the Vietnam War. According to Committee Chairman Bob Martin, the leaflet “described homosexuals as members of an oppressed minority group, reminded marchers that they had come to Washington in support of self-determination for minority groups, ascribed anti-homosexual persecution to America's ruling Establishment, and urged radical youths to support the homophile movement.”<sup>6</sup>

As Gay Liberation Front (GLF) chapters spread across the country, the central influence of the black freedom struggle showed in the nascent groups' idolization of the Black Panthers and their insistence on the importance of supporting black struggles. Gay organizations participating in the Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention in 1970 voted to recognize the Black Panther Party as the legitimate vanguard of the forthcoming revolution, indicative of the significance of black freedom organizing to their own political subjectivity.<sup>7</sup> A statement released by Black Panther Party Chairman Huey Newton recognizing the oppression of gays and lesbians and validating gay liberation as a revolutionary struggle elated radical gay organizers, who reprinted it widely and circulated it around the world.

By 1971, however, divergent visions about collaboration between movements

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<sup>5</sup> NACHO Youth Committee, “A Radical Manifesto.” August 28, 1969. North American Conference of Homophile Organizations records, Box 1, Folder 19, Coll2011-065, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, CA.

<sup>6</sup> *VECTOR: A Voice for the Homosexual Community* 6, no. 4 (March 1970), 6.

<sup>7</sup> Stein, *City of Brotherly and Sisterly Loves*.

came to a head at an Austin, Texas gay liberation conference. On one side of the conflict stood multi-issue radicals from the GLF, who saw solidarity with other minority groups, and specifically black activists, as a critical priority for the gay movement. Pitted against these radicals were groups such as New York's Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) who, while rhetorically supportive of anti-racist objectives, preferred to emphasize single-issue activism based on the priorities of the white gay men and lesbians who made up the majority of their constituencies.<sup>8</sup> This tension over the goals and limits of solidarity resulted in the formation of a variety of other more moderate activist groups who, like the GAA, eschewed unconditional ideological support for the Black Panthers in favor of limited strategic coalitions with other minority groups in pursuit of shared policy agendas. By the mid-1970s, the majority of GLF groups had folded and the most prominent currents of gay activism aligned with the moderate paradigm of coalition rather than radical framework of solidarity. Nonetheless, despite the divergent rhetoric of these groups, each modeled both their self-conception as a political minority and their tactical and strategic approaches on African American activism.

Yet as radical Gay Liberation Front groups rose and fell and were replaced by less revolutionary activist organizations, lesbian women increasingly pursued autonomous organizing based on different premises. In some cases, lesbian writings broke from earlier homophile traditions and articulated political visions without reference to analogies to African Americans or other minority groups. The central influence of the women's liberation movement—for which a “minority” framework fit more awkwardly than for homosexuals positioned against a clear heterosexual majority—led some lesbian activists

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<sup>8</sup> *GAY* Vol. 2 Issue 50, (May 10, 1971), 8.

to seek alternative paradigms.<sup>9</sup> Yet writers such as Rita Mae Brown who proposed different frameworks and strategies still relied on analogies between racial oppression and lesbian oppression to sharpen their arguments; for example, her 1971 *Ladder* article “Viewing Sexism” referred to the anti-lesbian tyrants of “our sexist culture” as the “Sexual Ku Klux Klan,” and described how men felt threatened by the prospect of women loving each other because of how “each man would lose his personal 'nigger.’”<sup>10</sup> Some lesbians dismissed the minority paradigm as merely reproducing patriarchal politics; as Rita Laporte argued in 1970, “The current minority rights movements in this country, the Black, the Indian, the Chicano, the homosexual, good as they are in themselves, are still no more than old-fashioned male versus male jockeyings for power.”<sup>11</sup>

Other white lesbians found that an examination of African American experiences illuminated the specificity of their oppression. Vern Niven described in *The Ladder* how seeing a television special hosted by Bill Cosby on “Negro history” helped to change her view of the past when combined with reading a women's liberation journal narrating women's history: “It never occurred to me, even after a lifetime working for Lesbian rights (and women's rights) that I was very much in the same position.”<sup>12</sup> When the Daughters of Bilitis opened a center for lesbians in New York in 1971, President Ruth Simpson declared in an opening speech, “I'll start with an analogy of what I think this

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<sup>9</sup> An example of a pivotal lesbian political essay that makes no reference to analogies between sexuality and race or minority models is Rita Mae Brown's classic “The Woman-Identified Woman,” *The Ladder* 14, no. 11/12 (August/September 1970).

<sup>10</sup> *The Ladder* 15, no. 7/8 (April/May 1971), 30-31.

<sup>11</sup> Rita Laporte, “The Undefeatable Force,” *The Ladder* 14, no. 11/12 (August/September 1970), 4.

<sup>12</sup> Vern Niven, “My God It Happened to Me Too!” *The Ladder* 14, no. 11/12 (August/September 1970), 22.

center means. For many years black women went and had their hair straightened, but underneath they knew it was outrageously gay, and not straight at all.” As black lesbian writer S. Diane Bogus recalled years later, Simpson then “stopped, looked over the audience, then asked, 'Is gay proud?' 'Right on!' the audience yelled back. Then she said, 'If we get enough people to say that, then we have no fears for the future.’”<sup>13</sup>

As tensions swelled within gay liberation and gay rights movements over male chauvinism and gendered priorities in the 1970s, analogies with Black Power separatism animated movement debates over gender divisions between lesbians and gay men. In 1971, Chicago Lesbian Liberation published a manifesto explaining, “Why we left Chicago Gay Alliance,” reprinted in the journal *Lavender Women*. The women explained to the gay men with whom they had organized, “We had hoped that you would appreciate this need, analogous to that of blacks during the first stages of their liberation.”<sup>14</sup> When conflicts erupted between gay men and lesbians at a 1975 meeting of the Gay Academic Union in New York City, conference sponsor Jim Levin argued, “In my opinion, separatism will set us back at least five years as it did the Black movement.”<sup>15</sup> White gay men and lesbians believed that they understood the meaning and lessons to be learned from Black separatism, though they drew diametrically opposed conclusions depending on their position within the gendered power relations of gay and lesbian organizing. While some lesbians abandoned collaboration with gay men, others—whose perspectives would become most visible within urban minority coalitions and national gay and lesbian activist organizations—saw the prospect for broad-based inter-minority organizing to

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<sup>13</sup> S. Diane Bogus, “The Reality of the Black Lesbian.” *GPU News Milwaukee* 8, no. 1 (October 1978), 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Lavender Woman* (December 1971).

<sup>15</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* 5, no. 3 (December 1975), 2.



lead to political victories. As *Ladder* editor Gene Damon opined in 1970, “A number of far-reaching sociologists have predicted women's liberation to be the first successful revolutionary force in the world today, and predicted that following this will be freedom for blacks and for homosexuals. We feel this is very probably true, with the specific addition of freedom and full citizenship for all minorities of all types carried along in the sweeping changes. True human civil rights for all.”<sup>16</sup>

Damon's optimism would not have seemed unreasonable to many contemporary observers of homosexuality and minority politics in the United States. By the mid-1970s, considerable evidence indicates that an increasingly widespread sector of the American public acknowledged homosexuals as a minority with interests and rights analogous to those of African Americans or other minority groups. A February 1973 calendar of gay and lesbian-themed events in Milwaukee listed an “Oppressed Minorities Presentation, with representatives from racial, sexual, and ethnic minorities” taking place at the Eastside Community Center.<sup>17</sup> In May 1975, *GPU News* reported that a county clerk in Boulder, Colorado had allowed a same-sex marriage. When asked about her reasoning, she claimed, “I don't profess to be knowledgeable about homosexuality or even understand it. But it's not my business why people get married. No minority group should be discriminated against.”<sup>18</sup> Even the *Boston Globe* agreed, in an editorial about proposed gay rights legislation: “The issue is not whether homosexuality is right or wrong, but whether a minority should have the same legal protection as other citizens . . . It's time

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<sup>16</sup> Gene Damon, “Women's Liberation Catches up to the Ladder.” *The Ladder* 14, no. 11/12 (August/September 1970), 4.

<sup>17</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* 3, no. 4 (February 1973), 16.

<sup>18</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* 4, no. 7 (May 1975), 2.

the lawmakers extended equal protection to this much discriminated-against minority.”<sup>19</sup> By early 1977, the analogy between sexual orientation and race reached what was probably its height of mainstream acceptance. In January of that year, reports historian Fred Fejes, “A national poll showed that the American public saw lesbians and gay men as the minority most discriminated against—more than blacks, Hispanics, and other groups.”<sup>20</sup> While this report vindicated gay and lesbian activists who had fought for decades to promote the notion of homosexuals as an oppressed minority, events later that year would irrevocably change public perceptions of the extent to which homosexuality could and should be seen as a minority status analogous to race.

These shifting public perceptions were matched by political developments, as legislators who embraced the analogy between sexual and racial oppression began to forge successful urban electoral alliances. On local and state levels, a number of prominent black politicians publicly recognized the analogy between gay and lesbian communities and African Americans and other minority groups. Chicago Alderman Clifford Kelley campaigned tirelessly for anti-discrimination legislation to protect gays and lesbians by comparing their experiences to his own as an African American, garnering co-sponsors for the bill from among other black legislators throughout the 1970s.<sup>21</sup> In his campaign for City Supervisor in San Francisco, Harvey Milk campaigned heavily among racial minority groups and organized labor, articulating a vision of marginalized groups collaborating to promote social justice in the city. In 1977, California's Afro-Caribbean Lieutenant Governor Mervyn Dymally gave a speech to the

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<sup>19</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* 4, no. 8 (June 1975), 26.

<sup>20</sup> Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 1.

<sup>21</sup> Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 119-121.

San Francisco Gay Democratic Club at a testimonial dinner honoring Milk's election that could serve as a manifesto for the gay and lesbian movement's aspirations to gain power and legitimacy via analogy and coalition with other minority groups:

It seems undeniable to me that the Gay Liberation Movement represents the advance guard of the human rights movement. This minority group has perhaps been the most misunderstood and the most mistreated of all groups. A victory for Gay Liberation is a victory for all oppressed minorities . . . The Gay Liberation Movement will undoubtedly be latched on to as a rallying point for those who oppose the civil rights gains of blacks, browns, women, the disabled, the economically disenfranchised. The persons most vocal in opposing gay rights are the same who charge reverse discrimination, instead of supporting affirmative action; the same who neglect quality education while invoking the anti-busing rhetoric; the same who protect their economic interests while ignoring the outrageous unemployment of minorities.<sup>22</sup>

Dymally's remarks outline a shared progressive agenda based on a collective response to racial, economic, and sexual oppression, whose victims were diverse but whose beneficiaries were linked by a shared conservative vision.

As progressives such as Kelley, Milk, and Dymally were successfully building urban coalitions rooted in alliances between gay/lesbian and ethnic minority voting blocs, some conservatives were also noticing this convergence of minority interests and strategizing methods to divide and conquer it. By the mid-1970s, some local gay rights

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<sup>22</sup> Mervyn Dymally. "Remarks at the Testimonial Dinner for Supervisor Harvey Milk." San Francisco: San Francisco Gay Democratic Club. Don Kelly Gay Literature and Culture Collection, item no. 11053. Cushing Library, Texas A&M University.

campaigns had attracted negative attention from political or religious conservatives, but none had catalyzed a broader movement. In 1977, however, the queen of an orange juice advertising campaign joined forces with an emerging evangelical political movement to wage an anti-gay campaign that captured the attention of the nation and transformed American politics. In response to an effort by South Florida gay and lesbian activists to convince Miami-Dade County to adopt a gay rights ordinance, Anita Bryant fought an ultimately successful battle to defeat the legislation that tapped in to racial, sexual, and religious tensions that had been simmering for years on the edges of debates around minority politics. Several historians have examined Bryant's 1977 "Save the Children" campaign and its significance to the rise of the religious right as a political force in the United States.<sup>23</sup> Few, however, have analyzed the significance of Bryant's attack on the validity of the analogy between sexual orientation and race as a component of her success in driving a wedge between minority communities to defeat the bill.

Bryant explicitly appealed to religious African Americans to reject the analogy between their own civil rights and the political aspirations of white homosexuals. To counter the term "civil rights," which evoked strong support from other marginalized constituencies, she introduced the language of "special rights" to disaggregate gay rights legislation from legitimate, i.e. racially-based, civil rights law. By terming the campaign "Save Our Children" and emphasizing how homosexuals were different from their families (and thus had to "recruit" rather than reproducing "naturally"), she exploited a weakness in the analogical reasoning: race served as one of the primary identity factors connecting parents to their children, whereas homosexuality frequented marked a line of

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<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Tina Fetner, *How the Religious Right Shaped Gay and Lesbian Activism* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), and Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic*.

difference dividing children from their parents. This ingenious strategy reframed political alignments away from a coalition on the basis of shared minority marginalization towards a coalition on the basis of shared identification between parents and the interests of their children—the discourse that would become known as “family values.”

To be sure, not all African Americans in Dade County agreed with Bryant in her rejection of the analogy. In keeping with the African American press's pattern of more sympathetic coverage of gay and lesbian politics, the Miami weekly *Liberty News* argued in a special report on Bryant's campaign, “The homosexual conflict on the Dade County scene is also a Black issue because it, too, is a human issue.”<sup>24</sup> While not explicitly commenting on the analogy, the *Liberty News* commentator maintained the logic promoted by other urban black political leaders that recognized shared a policy agenda between black and gay communities. However, Bryant's rhetoric ultimately proved appealing to many black voters, and a multi-racial coalition voted down the proposed ordinance by a two to one margin, devastating gay and lesbian activists across the country and energizing the emerging religious right.

Sensing Bryant's success in using attacks on the validity of the analogy between sexual orientation and race to drive a wedge between minority constituencies, conservative and religious political leaders went on the attack. The following year, gay rights initiatives were defeated or repealed in Eugene, Oregon, Wichita, Kansas, and other cities. In September 1978, Howard Phillips, candidate for Democratic Party's nomination for a senatorial seat in Massachusetts, declared at an anti-abortion rally organized by Bryant, “I do not believe homosexuality is a right to be protected but a

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<sup>24</sup> Al Featherston, “Special Report.” *Liberty News*, April 3, 1977.

disability to be overcome.”<sup>25</sup> His statement, coming amidst severe racial tensions in the Boston area relating to school busing plans, was calculated to appeal both to conservative white voters antagonistic to minority rights discourses as well as to religious African Americans offended by the association of black civil rights with defenses of homosexuality. In the climate of broad cultural rebellion against authority in the late 1960s and early 1970s, traditional institutions such as the medical and psychological professions had seen their ability to make authoritative pronouncements about homosexuality contested by gay and lesbian activists. By the late 1970s, however, conservative politicians were crafting alternative languages to delegitimize the narratives proposed by those activists, often with considerable success. As historian Fred Fejes concludes in his study of Bryant's campaign:

While the gay rights movement may have been born in the energies of the minority rights revolution of the 1960s and 1970s, when America confronted its own shameful history of treatment of its marginalized groups, lesbians and gay men were not to be seen as one of those groups who were oppressed. Because of the campaign that started in Miami and was carried on by social and religious conservatives . . . the narrative of minority group oppression—a story that now shaped government laws and policies, media coverage, and overall social attitudes towards blacks, women, and other historically oppressed groups—would stop short of lesbians and gay men in America . . . The lesbian and gay community had achieved visibility, but not legitimacy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *GPU News Milwaukee* 8, no. 1 (October 1978), 6.

<sup>26</sup> Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic*, 227-8.

As California State Senator John Briggs, a Bryant ally who would return to his home state and introduce a controversial initiative banning gay teachers, reportedly claimed, “The sexual counter-revolution began in Dade County, Florida.”<sup>27</sup> Yet the success of this counter-revolution relied not only on the religious appeal of Bryant and Briggs's message, but on their ability to mobilize racial tensions to split the coalitions forged via the analogy between sexual orientation and race as comparable minority statuses. By the summer after Bryant's victory, *JET Magazine* would be running the headline “Black Church Untouched by Gay Rights Crusade,” while the *Bay Area Reporter*, a leading California gay and lesbian newspaper, would assert, “Black Ministers Reject Gay Rights.”<sup>28</sup> While opinions on homosexuality and politics within black communities remained diverse, public reporting within the black press (and perceptions refracted through the lens of the white-dominated gay press) shifted markedly in the late 1970s towards criticism of the sexual orientation/race analogy. This successful use of homosexuality as a wedge issue to divide voters from black and other ethnic minority communities from progressive coalitions, debuted in 1977 as a refutation of the gay and lesbian movement's use of analogies between sexual orientation and race, continues to this day.

Had white gay and lesbian activists paid closer attention to the criticisms of black gays and lesbians, they might have anticipated and been better equipped to respond to the divisiveness engendered by the attacks waged by Bryant and other religious conservatives. Since the early 1970s, Third World caucuses within gay liberation groups had evolved into distinct organizations for gays and lesbians of color in some cities.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>28</sup> “Black Ministers Reject Gay Rights.” *Bay Area Reporter*, July 20, 1978.

Activists from these groups articulated powerful challenges to the presumptive whiteness inherent to the analogy-based minority model and the impact it exerted on the racial politics of gay and lesbian organizing. In a joint 1974 issue of *Fag Rag* and *Gay Sunshine*, two predominantly white-authored gay liberation publications, a gay black man named Leonard Andrews, Jr. active in Third World Gay Revolution levied a particularly insightful critique of the whiteness of gay organizing. The movement, he argued, had been “born out of the political and social insights brought about by a minority of people who are *racially* oppressed, and non-white people do not come to the Gay movement with the same set of assumptions and the same set of conclusions about sexuality and what it means as do white people.” Andrews identified the core of the resentments felt by African Americans at the appropriation of their experiences by gays and lesbians who did not share or deeply understand their oppression:

White homosexuals and white women openly acknowledge their indebtedness to the black movement, usually through irritating and questionable comparisons (and it needs to be pointed out here that much of the hostility that white homosexuals complain about coming from black men and women results not so much from an intolerance of homosexuality, but rather from an irritation at having their struggle used as a bandwagon for white people. White gays walk around saying that “being gay is like being black” as if they had some kind of first-hand knowledge what “being black” is like.) So even though the black movement in some ways led the way for the emergence of the women's and gay movements, black people and other Third World peoples are noticeably absent.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>Leonard Andrews, Jr., “Personal reflections on gay liberation from the third world,” *Fag Rag/Gay*



Despite critiques such as Andrews' that identify appropriation of black struggles and experiences as a source of resentment, white gays and lesbians would continue to interpret their political defeats as homophobic betrayals by a fellow minority group that they believed should have supported their interests. Activist rhetoric after defeats of gay rights initiatives would continue to analogize homophobia with racism; as activist Ellen Bevington declared after the 1978 gay rights ordinance failed at the polls in Eugene, Oregon in May 1978, "What we've tried to do is equivalent to trying to asking the Selma, Alabama voters in 1964 whether blacks should ride in the front of the bus. And if Eugene voters were possibly voting on the same issue today, I wonder if blacks wouldn't be riding in the back of the bus again." Exactly thirty years later, despite decades of criticism and political backlash against the use of superficial comparisons between homosexual and African American experiences, same-sex marriage advocates would use nearly identical rhetoric after the defeat of Proposition 8 in California.

The persistent reappearance of comparisons by gay and lesbian activists between African American movements and their own, from the dawn of the homophile era to the conflict over Proposition 8, indicates how deeply rooted this conceptual linkage remains within LGBT political thought and identity in the United States. From the earliest writings by Duncan and Cory and the first successful activism by Hay, Rowland, and the Mattachines, homosexuals overcame obstacles to organizing by imagining themselves as a minority modeled on the experiences of black and other racial and religious communities. The emerging homophile public sphere explored questions about the

origins of discrimination and strategies and tactics for social change by using African American experiences as a template. While many homosexuals contested their putative minority status or debated its implications, by the mid-1960s the paradigm had proved to be sufficiently catalytic to become hegemonic, and comparisons between African Americans and “the second largest minority” served as a source of inspiration and fount of legitimacy for a new generation of homophile militants. The willingness of the black press to listen to, if not fully endorse, the comparison provided a boon, while developments in civil rights struggles alongside emerging coalitions against police harassment helped secure the validity of the analogy and thus the legitimacy of the gay and lesbian movement that arose through it. Yet even as it inspired collaboration between minority groups that would flourish into political alliances in the 1970s, this analogy between homosexuals and African Americans constructed the gay or lesbian political subject as white, erecting a constitutive barrier between LGBT identities and communities of color. As such, the roots of the contentious debates over whether, or how, “gay is the new black” cut directly to the historical pathway by which sexual orientation became a political category and the basis for a social movement in the United States.

Analyzing the origins and legacy of this analogy may point toward an undertheorized dimension within histories of sexuality and social movements. Academic debates over essentialism and social construction in relation to sexual identities across history have attuned scholars to the importance of interrogating their assumptions about how sexual identities emerge and develop diachronically. However, they have offered less insight into how to navigate the contested contexts within which multiple conflicting identity paradigms coexist simultaneously, as reflected in the debates over the validity of

the minority paradigm based on African American experience within 1950s homophile communities. LGBT historians from D’Emilio onward have successfully charted the development of collective identity as a political minority—a “class for itself,” in his Marxist terminology—among “homosexuals,” an ostensibly pre-existing sociological “class in itself.”<sup>30</sup> Yet even this constructionist account contains a form of “backdoor essentialism” in its assumption that the emerging class for itself (the political homophile) was ultimately coterminous with an objectively constituted and racially uninflected class-in-itself of homosexuals. Documenting the centrality of the sexual orientation/race analogy to the emergence of homophile identity and politics makes clear that gay and lesbian political subjectivity in the United States has always been racially inflected, with whiteness as a constitutive element within its construction. That Harry Hay could refer to homophile minority consciousness in the multiracial Mattachine Society as an audacious step in “white Protestant history” does not merely reflect racial solipsism or the blinders of what would later be termed white privilege. It reflects a more foundational tension between the sociological reality, acknowledged by activists at the time, of homosexual expression among all racial and ethnic groups, and the emerging framework of “homosexuals” as a politically white minority conceived of by analogy with African Americans.

Historians will need to carefully examine the matrix of racialized and gendered power from which a new mode of political subjectivity was born during the homophile era to understand the role of this analogy in making its birth possible. The intersectional analyses advanced by the Combahee River Collective and critical race feminists offer

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<sup>30</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 65.

important tools, urging consideration of multiple interlocking forms of marginalization when analyzing race, gender, sexuality, and social movements.<sup>31</sup> With regards to the analogy between sexual orientation and race, Cathy Cohen has offered a powerful critique of gay activists' adoption of an ethnic model of politics for the way it marginalizes LGBT people of color. By assuming "whiteness as an essential characteristic of normativity," Cohen argues, the ethnic model of politics "privileges from its inception white members of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities, while disadvantaging the people of color in these groups."<sup>32</sup> I hope that the analysis presented in this thesis can support contemporary activists and historians in their efforts to interrogate and dismantle the normative whiteness inherent to the model of ethnic or analogy-based politics whose history I have traced above.

But understanding the significance of whiteness within the emergence of homophile politics is not simply a matter of tracing overlapping forms of oppression and attending to who was excluded. Examining the origins of analogies between sexual orientation and race among gay and lesbian activists and their consequences shows that perennial conflicts around racism within LGBT communities cannot be reduced to simple questions of diversity and inclusion. Rather, the very conceptual framework through which homosexual minority identity and gay and lesbian politics have been articulated since the 1950s has relied on whiteness and a comparative distinction from African American identity for its coherence. This racialization of sexual identity is not incidental

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<sup>31</sup> The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, 1983), 210-218.

<sup>32</sup> Cathy Cohen, "Straight Gay Politics: The Limits of an Ethnic Model of Inclusion," in Ian Shapiro and Will Kymlicka, eds. *Ethnicity and Group Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 572-616.

or a betrayal of some initial race-neutral inclusivity; it inheres to the structure of gay and lesbian politics derived from the sexual orientation/race analogy.

Indeed, it is the contingent process of inclusion, identity formation, and community building—that leap of imagination by which racially privileged homosexuals came to understand the political potential of their sexual identities through the lens of forms of marginalization they did not themselves experience—that provides a key to understanding, in the words of Allan Bérubé, how gay has stayed white, and what kind of white it has stayed.<sup>33</sup> The political critiques articulated by LGBT African Americans and other people of color since the Stonewall Rebellion, from Third World Gay Revolution to the National Black Feminist Organization to queer and trans participants in the Black Lives Matter movement today, have posed radical challenges to the racial analogy-based paradigm of sexual subjectivity that anchored the homophile movement and continues to structure many LGBT political movements today. Contemporary activists inspired by intersectional approaches and these LGBT activists of color will have to reckon with the long history of the analogy between homosexuality and race, including both its impulses towards solidarity as well as its normative whiteness, as we re-envision sexual politics and social movements in the twenty-first century.

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<sup>33</sup> Bérubé, “How Gay Stays White.”

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