

CHAPTER 1

"Queen Victoria is dead and the puritans long gone."

In the late sixties, only one individual in Houston, Ray Hill, publicly declared his homosexuality and actively campaigned for gay civil rights. Ray Hill tried to add balance to the public's prevailing notion of the homosexual as a sick social deviant. In 1968 with Rita Wanstrom and David Patterson, he formed the Promethean Society, the first homosexual organization established in Houston. At a national level, the same individuals participated in the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO) which, like the Promethean Society, ceased to function in 1970, both weakened by internal conflict and lack of support.¹

However, if the Promethean Society halted its activities, Ray Hill certainly did not. He would remain central to the development of the Houston homosexual community. A product of the sixties and of confrontation politics, Hill's outspoken style endeared him to few. The same was true of his career — Hill was a burglar. On February 26, 1970, the police, while answering a burglar alarm at the Austin Company on Buffalo Speedway, found Ray Hill hiding beneath a stairway. Hill

received 20 eight year prison terms to be served simultaneously. However, his sentence was reduced and on his release, Hill resumed his flamboyant style of activism.²

The same year as Hill's arrest, two brand new groups, the Gay Liberation Front and Integrity, emerged in Houston. The Gay Liberation Front, founded on the University of Houston campus, was a response to the events in New York of the preceding year, the famous Stonewall riot and its aftermath. The Gay Liberation Front's rhetoric included a heady dose of radicalism. Their statement of purpose read:

We, the brothers and sisters of the Houston Gay Liberation Front declare ourselves a political group. We are liberating ourselves from oppression and supression, both of which comes from oppressive social forces. We are gay, getting our heads together, loving one another. We will be free.³

Their demands included the restructuring of the judicial system in favor of people's courts and the abolition of the nuclear family on the grounds it perpetuated discrimination. Moreover, the Front condemned organized religion for aiding in the genocide of the gay people. They also sought an immediate end to all police harassment, a demand that would be central to the aims of each and every homosexual organization in Houston over the next ten years.⁴ Yet, it was the Front's very radicalism that led to its short life. Its narrow political base limited the potential support.⁵ The Gay Liberation Front folded in 1973, and the University of Houston remained without an active

homosexual group until 1975, when the university granted the Gay Activist Alliance official recognition.⁶

The Gay Liberation Front did not disappear without having first created controversy. In June, 1971, it hosted a gay pride conference, which featured as the main speaker the prominent gay activist and founder of the Washington Mattachine Society, Frank Kameny.⁷ Kameny, a Harvard Ph.D., pointed out that Queen Victoria was dead, the Puritans long gone, and now was the time to move toward a more balanced notion of morality.⁸

The radical nature of these campus activities attracted the attention of Republican State Representative A. S. Bowers of Houston who conducted a personal investigation into the spending of funds by the Student Association. Bowers expressed shock that the student senate had financed a homosexual conference and a lobby effort to repeal state abortion laws. The investigation was specifically directed at the funding of such organizations as the Gay Liberation Front, Women's Liberation and the Student Mobilization Committee, an anti-war group.⁹ Bowers wished to determine whether these allocations of monies had violated section 4 of the House Appropriations Bill, which prohibited senate funds being spent on political activities. If they did not, he planned to introduce legislation that would outlaw future such allocations. Maria Jiminez, the President of the Student

Association, claimed that the Gay Liberation Front was not a political organization. Another student remarked, "We're back in the early 1950's. Leave it to Houston politicians to instigate a McCarthy type witch hunt."¹⁰

Although the Gay Liberation Front's lifespan was to be short, Integrity, the second group to emerge in 1970, has survived as a viable organization until the present day. Integrity grew out of a collection of people who met at Holy Rosary Church on Travis each Sunday. They did not call for the radical re-structuring of society as had the Gay Liberation Front. Integrity's realism was a vital factor in their ability to survive. They established a gay speaker's bureau and participated in the early V.D. screening programs set up by the City Health Department, directed essentially at homosexuals.¹¹

In 1973, the Houston Gay Political Coalition joined Integrity on the political scene. Led by Billy Walker, Chuck Berger, Bob Osborne, and Randy Thomas, the new caucus had been spawned by the Montrose Gaze, a community center that had opened its doors on October 23, 1972.¹² Located at 504 Fairview, the two and half story building, formerly the Hope Mission for Alcoholic Women, "was to provide basic services such as legal council, parent education groups, recreational facilities, a switchboard, counselling and other services not available to our community."¹³ The center was established before its time, drawing

little support from the homosexuals themselves or the bars that catered to homosexuals.

Nevertheless, the Houston Gay Political Coalition appeared before City Council on two occasions in May, 1973. They demanded an end to job discrimination and police harassment, the creation of a citizens' liaison panel with the Houston Police Department, the recognition of the gay minority by the Human Relations Council, and a proclamation designating the week of June 24-30 Gay Pride Week.¹⁴

Mayor Louis Welch refused to act, and at the second meeting he walked out on the pretext that he had to greet visiting Japanese mayors.¹⁵

The coalition then challenged the individual members of the City Council. One Councilperson, Frank Mann, responded, "You're abnormal. You need to see a psychiatrist instead of City Council."¹⁶

Integrity, too, continued its political activities. In May, 1973, it sent out a letter to legislators, attempting to solicit their views on the right of privacy, in effect, the right of consenting adults of the same sex to have sex in the privacy of their own homes. Although the information was to remain confidential, few replied.¹⁷

Integrity had more luck with Fred Hofheinz, one of the major mayoral candidates in 1973. Hofheinz, in search of votes to dislodge the ultra-conservatives that had dominated Houston city politics, responded to an invitation to appear before members of Integrity to

ascertain his views on issues vital to homosexuals. At a meeting that lasted over an hour, Hofheinz agreed to many of the demands, an end to police harassment, equal hiring and promotion policies for city jobs, the creation of liaison between the Houston Police Department and homosexuals, and special instruction at the police academy to increase sensitivity toward homosexuals and other minorities.¹⁸ Agreement was one matter, action another. The other candidates were not as forthcoming as Hofheinz. Bud Hadfield did not respond and an aide to Dick Gottlieb telephoned, "to say that they did not feel qualified to speak on that topic."¹⁹

Just prior to the election, "People's Choice", a new organization, issued a newsletter. The group aimed, "to meet those needs of the gay community in the Houston area not presently being served and to do so in a non-judgemental, non-threatening, and non-exclusionary manner."²⁰ Many of the functions they proposed were already operating or had failed through lack of support. Others were doomed immediately because they were simply too ambitious. Bars remained the focus for homosexual activities. Although a fledgling sense of community had begun to appear, it was well served by Integrity and the Montrose Gaze. In fact, the Montrose Gaze continued to struggle financially, suggesting that another group such as "People's Choice" competing for limited resources might have indeed resulted in the demise of more than one group.

Although "People's Choice"s assessment of the majority culture might have been correct, it, "tends to eclude, discourage, and punish individuals expressing and physically manifesting love for members of their own sex," its goals were less well thought out.²¹ Like their newsletter, the group was short lived.

"People's Choice" proved to be fairly representative of many of the early homosexual organizations, and not only those in Houston. Laud Humphreys in Out of the Closets (1972) addressed the failure of many of these early groups. Their demise, he suggested,

illustrates the futility of attempting to impose old organizational forms upon nascent social movements...Subject to rip-offs, embezzlement, panic, and ideological conflict, these marginal groups are doubly jeopardized by the lack of sanctions and rewards that might combine to shore them up.²²

He was quite right in his assessment, but one other critical factor cannot be ignored -- the lack of support for these organizations from the very people they were meant to serve, the homosexuals. For the majority of homosexuals, the expression of one's sexuality remained confined to the bars and small groups of friends. Repression was a way of life. Hard core activists, secure with their whole identities, were able to make that step from private social to public political. Yet they were the minority. What they failed to recognize was that they had left the majority behind by demanding too much too soon. It was this

overambition that killed People's Choice, the Houston Gay Political Coalition, Montrose Gaze and the Gay Liberation Front. Integrity escaped the same destiny, basically because its activities and aims were more pragmatic, and, because they addressed more immediate issues. However, all these groups tested the water, and, therefore, made it that much easier for succeeding organizations in Houston to be more effective. Each attempt added to the level of political maturity displayed by homosexuals in the process of attaining their goals. More sophisticated leaders would appear, weaned and inspired by the previous actions of less successful activists, and, more importantly, learning from their mistakes.²³

Pokey Anderson was a member of that second generation of activists that had learnt from the first generation. She had learned political activism in the women's movement in college in St. Petersburg, Florida. 'Coming out' in 1972, it was a natural progression to expand her horizons and become involved with gay rights issues. She moved to Houston that same year and joined the Lesbian Task Force in the city.²⁴ From her involvement with the Task Force, she heard about the Montrose Gaze and Integrity, visiting both to learn more about them. Not impressed by the anarchial organization of the Gaze center, she forged stronger links with Integrity. These connections would be vital, especially in the wake of State Representative Craig Washington's

support for Senate Bill 127 in Austin in 1975.²⁵

On May 28, 1975, Senate Bill 127 reached the floor of the Texas House of Representatives. Basically an effort at legal housekeeping, the Bill proposed certain reforms to tidy up the state criminal code. The new penal code had only been adopted the previous year, the first comprehensive reform of the original Texas code adopted in 1856. Included in Section 16 of the Senate Bill was the call for the repeal of Article 21.06 of the penal code. Unbeknown to his colleagues, State Representative Craig Washington of Houston had unobtrusively slipped this specific repeal into Section 16 in committee. Article 21.06 stated that it was a class C misdemeanor to engage in intercourse with someone of the same sex, punishable by a fine of up to \$200.²⁶

Politicians had specifically avoided the issue of repeal for fear of being branded homosexuals themselves. Washington, who felt it was a question of principle, met the challenge directly: "If anyone thinks this applies to me, I invite them into the restrooms."²⁷ yet, he had already acknowledged the fate of Section 16 of Senate Bill 127. "I know you are going to vote it down but I think you're doing something that is morally wrong."²⁸ Earlier State Representative Richard Geiger had asked if the Bill included exemption for homosexuals, which provoked enough laughter in the chamber for House Speaker Billy Clayton to call for order. State Representative Joe Spurlock (Fort Worth) and

State Representative Robert Davis (Irving) proposed a joint amendment to exclude homosexual behavior. Craig Washington moved to table the amendment. A record vote was requested. The motion to table was lost by 16 yeas, 112 nays, and 22 not voting. In turn, a record vote was requested on the adoption of the Spurlock-Davis amendment. It was adopted with 117 yeas, 14 nays, and 19 not voting.²⁹ Washington was noticeably angered by the ribald behavior of the chamber and he drew sympathetic comment from one of his own supporters, State Representative Mickey Leland, "Effort is its own reward."³⁰ In time to come, Leland himself would seek the support of Houston homosexuals in his 1978 bid for the United States Congress.

Craig Washington was outraged at the ridicule he had experienced at the hands of certain members of the Texas House. Pokey Anderson and a collection of Integrity friends were equally angered when they received a transcript of the debate. Soon after, the group, in Anderson's apartment on Maryland Street in Montrose, laid plans for the creation of the Gay Political Caucus. The name, they borrowed from the Women's Political Caucus, which was already screening candidates in Houston.³¹

On June 30, representatives from Houston's media attended a press conference. Four leading homosexuals, Ray Hill, Pokey Anderson, Jerry Miller, and Reverend Robert Falls announced the formation of the Gay

Political Caucus (GPC). Jerry Miller represented Integrity, Houston's most effective homosexual organization to date. Reverend Robert Falls, the first pastor of the newly founded homosexual Metropolitan Community Church, represented the alternative religious community. Pokey Anderson represented Houston lesbians, and Ray Hill, recently out of prison, represented no one in particular, but helped by lending his name recognition to the event. Even in 1975, few activists in Houston would go public for fear of their jobs and apartments.³²

The fledgling GPC announced that it would be sending out a questionnaire to candidates in the upcoming city elections. Major issues included the repeal of Article 21.06, the introduction of new state legislation outlawing discrimination against homosexuals in jobs, and the right of homosexual couples to file joint income tax.³³ Ray Hill commented in his usual outspoken manner. "Up until now, I was the only faggot with a face and name in town."³⁴ Miller, less volatile, astutely pointed out the increasing political maturity of homosexuals. "In the sixties, if you were gay, you were a political radical. The community is more broad based now."³⁵

Gary van Ooteghem, the Harris County Comptroller of the Treasury, was not acquainted with the people who had called the press conference, and was, in fact, in Washington D.C. at the time, meeting with Leonard Matlovich. Matlovich, a sergeant in the Air Force who had been awarded

the Bronze Star, the purple Heart and toured Vietnam three times, had voluntarily declared his homosexuality to his supervising officer at Langley Air Base in Hampton, Virginia. He resisted discharge under an exclusion clause that allowed outstanding homosexuals to remain within the Air Force.³⁶ Van Ooteghem admired Matlovich's stand, later remarking, "Leonard Matlovich was my role model, and I hope I can be someone else's."³⁷

On his return to Houston, van Ooteghem informed his boss, County Treasurer Harsell Gray, that he would be appearing before a public session of the County Commissioners' Court to urge them to adopt regulations to protect the civil rights of homosexuals. Gray countered stating that appointed personnel were not allowed to engage in political activities during business hours.³⁸ Gray demanded that van Ooteghem sign a letter acknowledging these instructions. Van Ooteghem refused the request and was fired. Van Ooteghem later claimed that Gray's stated reason for his firing was sheer pretext. The fact of the matter was that Gray would not tolerate highly paid homosexuals on his staff for fear of his budget being cut.³⁹

The next day, August 1, 1975, van Ooteghem addressed a packed Commissioners' Court. He quickly pointed out the inherent inertia and conservatism of Harris County, arguing that it was far behind the rest of the country on the question of civil rights. He continued,

After making several inquiries, I have found no record of any one person, group, committee or commission in the hierarchy of Harris County that has gone on record as initiating or establishing a county policy prohibiting job discrimination of minorities. In place of Harris County taking any positive position on this problem of job discrimination of minorities within local government, you have allowed the federal government - by use of the 1964 and 1968 civil rights acts - to pull you screaming and kicking into the 20th Century.⁴⁰

He admitted his own homosexuality and proposed a civil rights resolution that he urged the commissioners to adopt. Van Ooteghem knew he had sacrificed a well-paying, secure job, and that adverse publicity would make it hard for him to find another. On August 29, he filed suit against the county for unfair dismissal.

Not surprisingly, van Ooteghem received enormous publicity from the Houston media. It was this coverage that brought him to the attention of Pokey Anderson and her colleagues. Anderson called van Ooteghem to arrange a meeting, and the GPC took its first tentative steps toward becoming a viable political entity. The GPC had been fairly inactive since its inception at the press conference and van Ooteghem's publicity added momentum to the organization, triggering further support from Houston's homosexuals. In fact, van Ooteghem became GPC's first president in September, a position he held until February, 1977. In this period, he and other activists constructed a solid framework for the newborn bi-partisan caucus.⁴¹

In November, 1975, the GPC again endorsed Fred Hofheinz as they had

two years previously. No response to a GPC questionnaire was forthcoming from the other major mayoral candidates, Frank Briscoe and Dick Gottlieb. In all, the GPC contacted 21 candidates to secure their views on civil rights for homosexuals and only three did not respond, a distinct improvement from the reaction the Integrity letter had received two years earlier. Because of their favorable replies, Judson Robinson, Jr., Homer Ford, Helen Hopkins, and Jim Whitmire were endorsed for City Council Districts B, C, D, and E. Tragically, Jim Whitmire was soon to die, but it was his endorsement that led to a fruitful relationship between homosexuals and his wife, Kathryn, better known as Kathy. Fred Hofheinz won a second term and, although at this stage the homosexual vote was far from critical, a brief honeymoon prevailed between Houston's homosexuals and the city's Police Department.⁴²

That honeymoon soon ended. On July 16, 1976, the police arrested 36 people at the Exile Bar on Bell Street. Ray Hill appeared before City Council five days later to protest the harassment, although he held no official position within the GPC. It was this type of performance that alienated other activists, and yet, Hill's actions were not without benefits. The Houston Police Department knew that any unjustified or even justified move against homosexuals in the city would be closely monitored and angrily protested. The Montrose Star, a homosexual community newspaper, reported two possible reasons for the raid, the

visit of Los Angeles' Police Chief, Ed Davis, a reknowned homophobe, or the Supreme Court's recent ruling on the Virginia case of Doe v Commonwealth , which upheld the state's sodomy law as constitutional.⁴³ More plausibly, the raid was just a continuation of established police policy.

The year did not pass without further anger. On December 20, in the early hours of the morning, the police shot and killed Gary Wayne Stock, a bartender at the Inside/Outside, a tavern that catered to homosexuals. He allegedly ran a red light and fled the scene at high speed. The police shot him, supposedly in self defense.⁴⁴ The increasing antagonism between the city's police and minorities climaxed in September, 1979, with the arrival of the Civil Rights Commission, its purpose to investigate accusations of abuse and brutality.⁴⁵

In between the Exile raid in July and the death of Stock in December, Pokey Anderson, with the full support of the Gay Political Caucus, mounted, on short notice, a determined campaign for the Neighborhood Development Commissioner. Milton Lowery, the incumbent Commissioner for the Montrose/4th Ward area, had stood down and endorsed his chosen successor, Betty Graham White. However, Lowery discovered White's conservative affiliations, and quickly looked around for another candidate with a liberal background and name recognition in the Montrose area. A reluctant Pokey Anderson finally agreed to stand as a write-in

candidate. The filing deadline had passed. Endorsed by Lowery, the GPC and Jim and Kathy Whitmire, Anderson pursued an aggressive campaign but could not crack the citadel of black votes in the Fourth Ward that had already been promised to White. Despite the natural disadvantages of a write-in candidacy, Anderson polled 41% of the vote, a creditable performance and one that augured well for the homosexual community in the future.⁴⁶

In December, the GPC had succeeded in securing some funding from homosexual businessmen. Don Hrachovy, an activist within the GPC and a future president, reported more good news the same month. Since the GPC's inception in 1975, it had endorsed twenty eight candidates and nineteen had won their contests, a success rate of 68%. Hrachovy remarked, "this record is especially impressive when one considers that several opponents have attempted to cultivate homophobic sentiment in the district."⁴⁷ He seemed to be referring to the recent state representative race for the 79th District, in which incumbent, Ron Waters, a staunch supporter of civil rights for homosexuals, had been smeared by his opponent's campaign literature.

Meanwhile, the GPC continued to mature. In February, 1977, Don Hrachovy became president, replacing Gary van Ooteghem, who remained active in the organization in a position admirably entitled 'founding president.' It was this collective leadership that set out to "combat

discrimination both within and without the gay community against persons as a result of their race, religion, sex or handicapped status."⁴⁸

Policy objectives included voter education, voter registration and candidate screening. A description of the GPC's political philosophy appeared to be aimed at the outspoken antics of Ray Hill. "Our approach is that we are reasonable people making legitimate complaints. We dress and speak like the people whose help we are seeking. Confrontation is avoided."⁴⁹ There was no love lost between the Founding President and Ray Hill. Van Ooteghem had continuously criticized Hill for speaking out, claiming he represented the GPC, when, in fact, he held no official position within the caucus. In van Ooteghem's mind, Hill represented the street people, and that, he grudgingly admitted was a legitimate function.⁵⁰

Perhaps, conscious that he held no official position within the gay community, and because of his genuine concern for civil rights, Hill announced at a press conference on May 4, 1977, the creation of the Houston Human Rights League. The League was to be a forum for homosexuals to air their problems and grievances. Attending the press conference with Hill was Jeri Ann Harvey, the recent successor to Reverend Robert Falls at MCC-Houston.⁵¹ A day later, as an official representative of his newly established organization, Hill met with Assistant Police Chief Tommy Mitchell. Hill was seeking an open and

candid line of communication with the Houston Police Department, non-enforcement of the state sodomy law and the city ordinance prohibiting cross-dressing. Mitchell was not forthcoming. Public opinion would not have sanctioned such drastic changes in official police policy.⁵²

Hill's actions quickly faded in importance when the Texas Bar Association announced that they had extended an invitation to Anita Bryant to perform country and patriotic songs at their annual dinner at the downtown Hyatt on June 16. Anita Bryant had achieved national name recognition as an Oklahoma beauty queen and for her leadership in a campaign to repeal an ordinance in Dade County, Florida, that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual preference. Her crusade was successful. The voters of Dade County repealed the ordinance by a two to one majority. Consequently, Anita Bryant quickly assumed bete noir status for many American homosexuals.

Houston homosexuals swiftly mobilized to protest her visit. The negative reaction was such that the Texas Bar cancelled the invitation, although 28,500 pamphlets with her picture had been circulated to members. Blake Tart, the Chairman of the Convention, claimed that the major factor in the cancellation was the threat of possible violence. However, a sounder reason appeared to be that of Jim McNabb, the Bar Director, who feared that seat sales would be down. Bob Green, Bryant's

husband and business manager, asserted that the cancellation was part of a nationwide effort to sabotage her career.⁵³

A few days later, Gibson Gayle, the President of the State Bar, admitted that someone had made a mistake and a second invitation was issued to Bryant, but to sing only. Bryant, meanwhile, had refused to debate Gary van Ooteghem on the topic of homosexuality. A spokesperson for Bryant said her business was singing not debating.⁵⁴ On June 16, the night of the dinner, 3,000 homosexuals and their supporters gathered in the parking lot of the Depository Bar at 401 McGovern and marched by candlelight to the Houston Public Library downtown, where the crowd was addressed by David Goodstein, the publisher of the Advocate, a nationwide homosexual newspaper, Reverend Troy Perry, the founder of the Metropolitan Community Churches and Liz Torres, an actress.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Anita Bryant received a standing ovation. Only ten attorneys, wearing black armbands walked out. Anti-Bryant leaders had estimated that two hundred would protest her invitation. Frank W. Stenger, a Dallas attorney, called her views archaic, while Aglaia D. Mauzy, former wife of Dallas State Senator, Oscar Mauzy, remarked, "As a lawyer, I have a duty to express my dissatisfaction with her views. They are analgous to those Hitler used to persecute the Jews."^{56U}

Larry Bagneris, a future GPC president, called the demonstration, "the first major political act that we, as gay people, took on in

Houston."⁵⁷ Anita Bryant galvanized Houston's homosexuals because she personified the repression many homosexuals had secretly felt but never expressed. Her visit provoked many homosexuals to 'come out of the closet' and join organizations that catered to their needs. Bryant's efforts to stem homosexual protest only added momentum and determination to the movement. Ray Hill commented: "She really did us a favour by coming out against us. After Anita spoke here, things started coming together like they never had before."⁵⁸

The city elections in November surprisingly revealed that the Gay Political Caucus had made further progress than the Caucus itself had thought. In addition to a detailed questionnaire, a political screening committee, made up of six members, interviewed the candidates, before recommending their choices to the general membership for final decisions. The questions posed solicited the candidates views, not only on issues central to the homosexual but to other minorities too. The GPC endorsed Noble Ginther, Jr., a liberal businessman-attorney, for the mayor's position and Kathy Whitmire for the position of City Controller. Jim McConn, a major candidate in the mayoral race, hinted that he wanted the GPC endorsement. As a guest on KULF radio, he stated, "I don't intend to address the gay community, but I will say that no one in a McConn administration would last if they went and harassed the gay community."⁵⁹ McConn apparently believed it politically unwise for

'straight' Houston to think he was courting the gay vote. Obviously, however, he recognized its power and influence and wanted it. Ginther failed to make the run-off and the GPC quickly endorsed McConn. Frank Briscoe, McConn's opponent in the run-off was a stern conservative. A letter that the GPC sent to its members read, "Do you like Anita Bryant? If you do, then you're going to love Mayor Frank Briscoe."⁶⁰ McConn won, however, marking the start of an uneasy relationship between himself and the city's homosexuals.

For the GPC, the City Controller's race proved to be more significant. Kathy Whitmire, who had accompanied her husband in 1975 in his quest for the GPC endorsement in the City Council District C race, was elected, despite the fact that her opponent, Steve Jones, attempted to make her GPC endorsement one of the major issues of the campaign. Up until then, the GPC endorsements had been carefully timed to prevent opponents from exploiting them for political advantage. Whitmire's success and Jones' defeat signalled to the GPC and politicians in general that the endorsement was no longer a political liability. A candidate publicly endorsed by the GPC could win a major city office. Thus 1977 was a watershed year in GPC politics.⁶¹

Whitmire's victory also seemed to confirm the results of a Gallup poll published by the Houston Post over three days in July. Gallup reported that 56% believed homosexuals should have equal rights in terms

of job opportunity, 33% thought they should not, and 66% as against 24% believed homosexuality was now more prevalent than in the past. On the issue of legalizing homosexual relations between two consenting adults, the poll split equally, 43% both ways. Clearly, the poll did not indicate a mandate for homosexuals to do what they pleased, but it was far from a total condemnation. The poll illustrated that there was a liberal element with which homosexuals could work, and with which they did work successfully in Houston.⁶²

In February, 1978, a new face challenged the leadership of the Gay Political Caucus. Stephen Shiflett moved to Houston in 1975 and became involved on the periphery of the fledgling gay rights movement, where he met Gary van Ooteghem. In 1976, when he moved to the Marshall Square apartments in the heart of Montrose, he began to meet other leaders socially. He attended GPC meetings and was "a little bored with them...twenty people on the floor...talking about not substantive issues."⁶³ In the fall of 1977, he became fully involved with the organization when he accepted a position on the Media Monitoring Committee, a GPC committee that scrutinized the treatment of homosexuals and related issues in the media. Shiflett asserted, "it was the only committee doing anything significant in the caucus."⁶⁴

Although he recognized the contributions of Gary van Ooteghem and Don Hrachovy, he began to get impatient with the apparent lack of drive

within the GPC. Meanwhile, Hrachovy had to leave Houston because of the demands of his job, which left Jim Cotton as Acting president. Shiflett and the Media Monitoring Committee were not pleased by Cotton's inertia and decided to act. In February Shiflett and his allies, who included Pokey Anderson, forced a special election, overruling General Counsel Robert Schwab, who claimed the election would be in violation of the bylaws. The Media Monitoring Committee created a slate for the election, nominating Greg Bell as their presidential candidate. However, the ambitious and restless Shiflett was unhappy with the choice of Bell. At a recent meeting with a McConn executive assistant, Bell's performance had been lackluster. Supported by van Ooteghem, Shiflett jumped the slate and ran for president himself. In March, 1978, he won.⁶⁵

Shiflett's style was much in the tradition of van Ooteghem, conciliation in a three piece suit. Both applied their business background to homosexual politics. The consequences of Shiflett's leadership were not immediately apparent, but the GPC had become established enough for conflict within to appear. Its members no longer felt that its existence was tenuous enough to warrant compromise. After all, it was only natural that the cleavages within the homosexual community as a whole, male homosexual/lesbian, progressive/conservative, black/white, young/old, should be reflected in the caucus.

Shortly after Shiflett's election, the GPC endorsed a Ray Hill idea, the concept of Town Meeting I. Town Meeting I was an effort at grass roots political involvement and an attempt to instill the notion of community. The first meeting of its type in the United States, and comparable to a state senate convention, anyone who wanted, could attend the massive forum at the Astroarena, paying only a modest admission to cover the \$11,000 cost. Although anyone could attend, only those residing in the Houston Standard Metropolitan Area could vote. Town Meeting I was an effort to channel the enormous energies which existed within Houston's homosexual community.⁶⁶

Organized by Ray Hill, Steve Shiflett, LaDonna Leake and Charles Law, Town Meeting I was controversial. The Harris County Commissioners' Court, the body, to which Gary van Ooteghem had made his speech in 1975, opposed the use of the Astroarena but quickly withdrew their complaint when it was pointed out that their actions could be interpreted as a violation of 1st Amendment rights.⁶⁷ On June 25, almost 4,000 people attended the meeting. The main speaker, Frances "Sissy" Farenthold, twice Texas gubernatorial candidate, and at the time, president of Wells College in New York State, told the crowd, "No one is free unless we are all free."⁶⁸

The meeting tackled and passed a mountain of resolutions, dealing with a variety of issues, including handicapped homosexuals, the

inclusion of women in gay organizations, job and medical discrimination, internal discrimination within the community itself, the creation of a civilian police review board, legal reform (especially section 21.06 of the Texas penal code) discrimination within the military, the injustice of single member districts, public awareness and religious unity.⁶⁹

Shiflett also took the opportunity to thank Mayor McConn for declaring the week of June 19-25, Human Rights Week. Homosexuals, at the time, perceived the declaration as an important development because, "it was our first opportunity to request something of a public official at that level and get it."⁷⁰ But the wording, Human Rights instead of "Gay Pride", as requested by the GPC, cost McConn nothing. He already had an eye on the 1979 elections and a GPC endorsement.

The unity engendered by the heady idealism of Town Meeting I quickly dissipated in the wake of controversy surrounding the actions of the media in the Astroarena. It remains unclear what the exact arrangements for the media had been but the Town Meeting I handbook clearly stated there would be media visible seating and media protected seating for those who feared public exposure. If a change of policy had occurred, it was not well publicized, and several participants were horrified at the sight of roaming cameras. Ray Hill, with a strong sense of history, had wanted to maintain a record of the momentous event and appeared to have arbitrarily assigned three photographers to do the

job. Hill's actions antagonized the already fragile relationship that existed between male homosexuals and lesbian feminists.⁷¹

The roots of the lesbian/male homosexual antipathy stretched back into the women's movement, from which many of the leading radical lesbians emerged. The women's movement traditionally directed its anger at men and the lesbian feminists inherited that tradition. In addition, Pokey Anderson pointed out that there was a need for lesbians and male homosexuals, "to interact with each other emotionally far less than male and female heterosexuals. We are first women and men, not gay women and gay men."⁷² In the eyes of many lesbians, male homosexuals continued the repressive practices of their heterosexual counterparts and Ray Hill's actions were interpreted as such. Hill did not see the controversy as a male/female issue but one of the minority controlling the interests of the majority, a situation ironically that Town Meeting I had set out to correct.⁷³

Nevertheless, a group of lesbian feminists established the Ad Hoc Committee For Our Right To Privacy to protect the identities of those that had attended Town Meeting I. The committee claimed that photographs that had appeared in Upfront America had been compromising to several women, but Upfront America claimed that no one had complained directly to them.⁷⁴ In addition, the women asserted that an unidentified woman had entered the Town Meeting I offices on Alabama and

had received negatives on request. Upfront America and Ray Hill responded that the woman was well known, a responsible person with a legitimate need.⁷⁵ In their response, however, neither the woman nor her legitimate need was identified. No matter the truth, the lesbians on July 10 entered the Town Meeting I offices, and having created a diversion, spirited away the pertinent material in a paper bag. Outraged, Upfront America in an editorial opposed their tactics. The lesbian feminists, the editorial claimed, had not exhausted all lines of communication.⁷⁶ Ray Hill, furious, threatened a lawsuit and to release all the other photographs in his possession.⁷⁷ Eventually, Steve Shiflett and Elizabeth Brun of the Ad Hoc Committee met and reached an agreement which established joint access to the material.⁷⁸

The Committee continued on the offensive. The women made a more general criticism of Town Meeting I's organization. They claimed that, "only after a core group was established and a structure set up, was the community invited to become involved."⁷⁹ Based on an anonymous interview and an interview with Tom Doyle, one of the four co-chairs that had structured Town Meeting I, they asserted that the executive committee was stripped of its control after it had voted against the four co-chairs. Consequently, the feminist claimed, "it is in the context of this lack of responsiveness that the picture incident can be

most clearly understood."⁸⁰ The controversy eventually faded but not without destroying the possibility of a Town Meeting II.

Shiflett said that Town Meeting I, "provided a base for a movement unlike any other gay community's history. A lot of communities have grown out of factionalism, street politics, confrontational politics, radical politics, I think, out of anger."⁸¹ He was implying that Houston had not done so. Yet within two years, Shiflett himself had broken away from the GPC, taking with him vital resources. Town Meeting I was heroic in concept but over-ambitious in reality. Although a few of the more realistic resolutions materialized, many never came to fruition. No handicapped organization catering for homosexuals was set up. Internal and external prejudice continued unabated and relations with the Houston Police Department continued to deteriorate. The pragmatic minds that had so far guided the GPC to a respected status temporarily went on holiday and reverted to the heady idealism of the early seventies. Larry Bagneris, who had been part of the protest against Town Meeting I's autocratic organization, called it a milestone in the history of Houston's homosexual community. It was. And, yes, it was unique. But its long term goals floundered and it had only short term effects.

The same day Town Meeting I gathered, the Houston Post ran a significant article. The article claimed that although the stereotypes

still remained, gays in Houston had gained impressive political clout. State Representative Ron Waters stated that it would be difficult if not impossible to win his 79th District seat without gay support. State Senator Jack Ogg concurred but added that the homosexual vote was not as crucial in his own 15th Senatorial District. Mickey Leland, who as a State Representative had supported Craig Washington in his 1975 effort to repeal section 21.06, thanked the GPC for helping him to secure his seat in the United States Congress in 1978.⁸² In the campaign, the names of Ray Hill, Steve Shiflett, and Gary van Ooteghem had appeared as endorsers in Leland's newspaper advertisements.⁸³ Jim McConn was quoted as saying, "I think it (the homosexual community) is becoming a viable political force."⁸⁴

In September, the GPC leadership returned to pragmatic politics. On the weekend of the 23rd and 24th, the steering committee, the GPC officers and its committee chairs, left the city for Lake Somerville to construct a five year plan based on the mandate of Town Meeting I. Objectives included adding ten new community leaders, forging of relations with other minorities in the city, increasing the mailing list to 10,000 within one year and bolstering the paid membership by 1,000 over the same period.⁸⁵ It was also an opportunity for the leaders to get to know one another, especially the new vice president, Larry Bagneris, who had been elected in August.⁸⁶

Meanwhile, on April 4, 1978, Assistant Police Chief Rodney G. McKeehan broke new ground by attending the first GPC meeting of the month. He answered questions for one and a half hours. To the stories of physical and mental abuse at the hands of Houston police officers, McKeehan repeatedly responded by instructing the aggrieved to file written complaints with the HPD Internal Review Board. The HPD could not be held accountable if citizens failed to report incidents. Although there had been meetings in the past between leaders of the homosexual community and upper level police administrators, McKeehan was the first to address an open forum. He stated that if, by chance, he ever became Police Chief, he would not hire homosexuals as police officers, because of the potential disruption it might cause. He pointed out that the HPD had been hiring blacks for only twelve years and women for only three. McKeehan also indicated that there would be no meeting with police Chief Harry Caldwell, because that was his job as liaison officer.⁸⁷ Steve Shiflett, the GPD President, later described Caldwell as a "redneck S.O.B.", who manipulated McKeehan. "He (McKeehan) would help us out when he could. He was a stopgap measure for the police Chief to keep us off his back."⁸⁸ Shiflett maintained that McKeehan's efforts were brushed aside and ignored by Caldwell. The continuing harassment after this meeting would appear to bear out Shiflett's contentions.

However, not all was well, because in June, Steve Shiflett appeared

before City Council to protest that no representative from the homosexual community had been appointed to the newly created Police Advisory Board. Although it was only an advisory committee with no power, it was important to have a homosexual presence, because relations between homosexuals and the Police Department were one of the major problem areas. Shiflett was more direct. "Maybe this committee is simply another apologetic group that will end up a fraud and a community whitewash."⁸⁹ Shiflett also questioned the motivation behind the creation of the Board. "It has also been suggested that, only because the U. S. Civil Rights Commission is in town, was this committee set up."⁹⁰ The Montrose Star reported the Frank Mann retort. "I believe if some of these homosexuals and queers would leave these young people alone and quit trying to brainwash them, then, maybe, they could stay clear of the police."⁹¹ Clearly, Shiflett's appearance had some effect, for in August, when the membership of the committee was increased from fifteen to twenty one, McConn telephoned Shiflett to solicit a name for appointment. McConn agreed to Shiflett's suggestion and appointed Patricia O'Kane. Reverend Charles Larsen, who had assumed the MCC-Houston ministry, was named the alternate.⁹²

In June, the homosexual community held its first Gay Pride Week Parade, a part of the celebration to commemorate the Stonewall riot in New York City which marked the advent of gay rights. The parade in 1979

was the first community concerted effort. The key organizer, Larry Bagneris, felt it was time for homosexuals to move away from protest, which involved a minority, to a celebration that could involve everybody. Younger homosexuals, in the process of 'coming out', had been intimidated by confrontation politics, but a parade and its carnival atmosphere would engender a sense of joy with oneself.⁹³

Besides the psychological advantages of the parade, it also increased homosexual visibility, which, in turn, contributed to expanded membership in many of the homosexual orientated organizations. The parade, undoubtedly a great success, attracted roughly 20,000 people in 1979.⁹⁴ It also gave McConn the opportunity to do something concrete for the homosexual community, one of the few occasions he did. A city ordinance prohibited all parades unless they took place in the downtown area. McConn pushed an ordinance change through City Council.⁹⁵

In August, the GPC was involved with other minorities in a campaign to restructure the city government. Previously, the eight city councillors had been elected citywide, although five represented geographic districts in which they had to live. This system allowed white Houston, the majority, to outvote the minority candidates. Judson Robinson, Jr., a black, was the exception to the rule, but he was acceptable to the white establishment because he was moderate, middle

class and a real estate broker. However, the Justice Department had instructed City Hall, that Houston, because of recent annexations of predominantly white areas, especially Clear Lake City, was in violation of the Voting Rights Act, and that until the situation was rectified, there were to be no further elections. In fact, the annexations had diluted the minority vote by 1.8%.⁹⁶

Mayor McConn wanted a 9-5 plan, 9 district and 5 at large city councillors. The Citizens Coalition for Responsive Government, a group of which GPC was a member, proposed an alternate 16-4 plan, 16 districts and 4 at large representatives. McConn's plan, they claimed, would still create districts with populations as big as Mobile, Alabama or Jackson, Mississippi. In addition, the GPC believed if a 16-4 plan was adopted, then Montrose might possibly be one of the 16 districts and it might be possible to elect an openly homosexual city councillor.⁹⁷

Their hopes were dashed. On August 11, the city adopted the 9-5 format, 47,706 votes in favor, 26,385 against. Montrose voted against the proposal but not significantly, 1564 to 1115. The no vote won in six of the ten precincts, or six out of seven in the hard core homosexual precincts, losing by only two votes in precinct 60.⁹⁸ This was not a convincing performance, but, then, the GPC had had little time to mount an effective campaign, leaving much of the electorate ignorant of the importance of the issue. However, as it turned out, the GPC was

only flexing its muscle for the upcoming city elections in November.

The next month, minorities in the city continued to pressure the Houston establishment with the arrival in Houston of the U. S. Civil Rights Commission. As early as 1978, the GPC and, in particular, Steve Shiflett, had set about collecting information relating to police abuse of homosexuals. A dialogue with McConn in May had produced no results, but Shiflett remained determined to end police persecution. Shiflett contended that the persecution, although not policy in writing, was policy in effect, perpetuated by "good ole boy" notions and partner protection.⁹⁹ Operation Documentation, the name the GPC gave their effort, set out to identify and eliminate or revise certain oppressive laws, to provide elected officials at all levels with official information, proving that discrimination really existed, and to educate homosexuals and the Houstonians as a whole that there was a real problem. Steve Shiflett alleged that higher city and police officials knew of the practices of misconduct and entrapment, but silently condoned them.¹⁰⁰ Other officials, he said, did not agree with these policies but feared the "tyranny of the majority"¹⁰¹ if they spoke out. However, the consequences of the Civil Rights Commission's visit were disappointing. The federal government filed no lawsuit against the Houston Police Department. Larry Bagneris best summed it up. "what they actually did was to slap the HPD on the wrist."¹⁰²

Homosexuals believed, in addition, that the police did not take seriously crimes committed against them. Response time was often greater than twenty minutes. Consequently, on August 28, the formation of the Montrose patrol was announced. In fact, a resolution to establish such an organization had been passed the previous year at Town Meeting I. The patrol, consisting of volunteers only, set out to combat crime in the Montrose area. Assaults occurred frequently, 25 to 30 a month, usually by 'straight youths' looking for a 'queer' to beat up. Ray Hill remarked, "in the absence of professional assistance from the Houston Police Department, we have to protect ourselves."¹⁰³ Caldwell replied that he welcomed assistance from citizens in fighting crime but he would not tolerate a vigilante force.¹⁰⁴ McKeehan's April promise that individual officers, who patrolled the Montrose neighborhood, would begin personal dialogue seemed empty.

In fact, even the Houston Police Department had realized that the crime statistics for Montrose were not healthy. The Houston Chronicle reported on September 14, that Homicide Detective John Donovan had been assigned to work as a liaison with the homosexual community in order to clear up a spate of murders.¹⁰⁵ Donovan's appointment was not a political reaction to Operation Documentation, but a much needed move to stem the rising incidence of crime in Montrose.¹⁰⁶ Donovan attempted to reassure the homosexual community. "We are trying to

communicate to the gay community that our job is to clear murders, irrespective of race, color, or creed."¹⁰⁷ Gary van Ooteghem was still not satisfied. He demanded an end to harassment. "Otherwise, we will be forced to defend ourselves from the Police Department, answering violence with violence, and letting the blood flow if it has to."¹⁰⁸ Caldwell replied, stating that he would not be intimidated from policing any part of town. County District Attorney, John Holmes weakly responded by saying homosexuals had "never come to us and showed us evidence or indication that that's (harassment) occurring."¹⁰⁹ The persistent abuse of homosexuals at the hands of the police established a focus, like Anita Bryant, around which activists could create and solidify a sense of community. The fear of harassment inevitably provoked a greater unity. Larry Bagneris concurred. "If there was anything that really brought the community together, it was the just unnecessary harassment of the Houston Police Department."¹¹⁰ That sense of community was brought to bear by the GPC in the November city elections.

Although McConn was again running, the GPC endorsed Leonel Castillo for mayor. The problems the homosexual community had experienced throughout McConn's two year administration convinced them to seek an alternative. Castillo, recently returned from a position in president Carter's administration, entered the mayor's race against the favored

McConn and City Councilman Louis Macey. The increasing cooperation among the Houston minorities and Castillo's sound record on civil rights secured him the GPC support. However, on November 6, he won only 23.6% of the vote citywide and failed to make the runoff. Yet in Montrose, he polled 53.3% of the vote and won every precinct.¹¹¹

In the runoff, the GPC shifted its endorsement to McConn in order to defeat the arch conservative Louis Macey. The breach between the GPC and McConn was quickly healed. Steve Shiflett helped by making excuses for McConn's performance. "Mayor McConn has been handicapped by civil service laws in the situation that exists between our community and Chief Caldwell."¹¹² Shiflett even claimed that within the range of eligible choices, there was no one better to head the Houston Police Department than Caldwell. The redneck S.O.B. had suddenly become the best alternative. Admittedly, McConn helped himself by stating his opposition to the regulation of sexual acts between consenting adults, his support for the repeal of section 21.06 of the penal code, and his intention to appoint a homosexual in a liaison position as an executive assistant or administrative aide.¹¹³

Despite the numerous McConn promises, nothing helped him more in securing the endorsement than the GPC nightmare vision of Louis Macey as mayor. Macey did, in fact, appear before the GPC screening committee but convinced nobody. He stated that he did not think he would list the

GPC endorsement on his campaign literature, if he managed to secure it. "To get your endorsement certainly wouldn't help me with the people where I'm strongest. I would have a hell of a time explaining it."¹¹⁴ Not helping his position, Macey admitted that he had opposed the 1964 Civil Rights Act and persisted in believing that specialty legislation to guarantee the rights of minorities was unnecessary. Shiflett thought that, "Macey was trying to get us to go along, so to speak, and reap the benefit of our endorsement without a payoff to the gay community."¹¹⁵ The GPC was no longer going to stand for that. Secret endorsements, in light of Whitmire's election success in 1977, were no longer necessary. Bagneris was not so tactful in his assessment of Macey, comparing him to Frank Mann, well known for his homophobic opinions and adding, "I feel there is absolutely no way the Gay Political Caucus can endorse a racist, sexist bigot such as Louis Macey."¹¹⁶ Macey had guaranteed McConn the endorsement, an endorsement, which, from GPC's point of view, was politically wise. McConn beat Macey, winning the core Montrose precincts, where his vote was 7% higher than his vote citywide.¹¹⁷

However, the homosexual community's major effort was directed at the attempt to unseat Frank Mann. Frank Mann, a City Councilman since 1960, had long since become the main antagonist of Houston homosexuals, when in 1975, he had labelled them 'oddwads' in reaction to the annual

spring Montrose block party. In fact, Mann ran campaign advertisement in both the Houston Post and Houston Chronicle which read, "Mann's the Man, the Oddwads don't want."¹¹⁸ In retaliation, campaigning homosexuals with a sense of humor wore 'I'm an Oddwad' t-shirts.

Mann's opponent, Eleanor Tinsley, had served on the Houston school Board, but had failed in her attempt to become the Board's president in 1972. She had also worked on various child welfare boards. She openly solicited the homosexual vote, visiting on occasions bars that catered to homosexuals. In a Montrose Star poll, she stated that she recognized a homosexual community in Houston and would support any ordinance which banned any form of discrimination in city employment, including the police force.¹¹⁹ Mann remarked, "I don't know what her standards or morals and ethics are. She got the support of the queers. I don't know what she told them to get their support."¹²⁰ A group of clergy demanded that Mann apologize for his behavior. Mann typically responded, "maybe, they're a group of clergy at those homosexual churches."¹²¹

Tinsley benefited from Mann's behavior, because not only was she guaranteed the homosexual vote, but she also received dozens of campaign volunteers. In addition, the GPC mobilized its 14,000 name mailing list, pushed 50,000 endorsement cards and spent roughly \$11,000 on promoting Tinsley.¹²² On November 6, Tinsley polled 48.9% of the

vote citywide, but in the seven core Montrose precincts, where the turnout was extremely high, she received 74.7% of the vote, a difference of 25.8%. Mann won 44% of the vote citywide, but managed only a meagre 21.6% in Montrose.¹²⁸ The GPC had flexed its political muscle.

The Houston Post caught the essential atmosphere of the campaign when it reported, "the at-large position 2 race was spicier than the contests for the four other at-large contests because of Mann's comments about gays, whose members were described at different times as 'oddwads', 'queers' and 'chickenhawks.'"¹²⁴ However, nobody was overconfident that Tinsley was going to win in the runoff. The GPC urged its members to vote in the runoff. Turnout was imperative, because the GPC feared the blacks and Hispanics would not vote. Of the Hispanic candidates, Castillo had lost and Ben T. Reyes faced no runoff. The black candidates, Anthony Hall, Ernest McGowen, and Judson Robinson, Jr., had all secured their seats. The minorities had little incentive to go out and vote a second time. A low turnout would undermine Tinsley's position.¹²⁵

On November 20, Tinsley won 54.6% of the vote citywide, including 76.1% of the hardcore Montrose vote. That 76.1% was equal to 3,212 votes or 2% of the vote citywide.¹²⁶ Although this figure was not the difference between the two candidates, the GPC claimed that, in addition to the Montrose vote, its influence was as high as 10%

citywide. And that, of course, was more than the difference. The 50,000 endorsement cards, that it mailed out, guided not only homosexuals but also heterosexuals in their voting. In such a close race, the GPC's measurable 2% contribution and its immeasurable influence outside the Montrose area were both critical to Tinsley's victory.

The races for District C and District 1 at-large City Council seats revealed that the impact of the GPC endorsement was not confined to the mayoral race, or an exceptional race, in which the homosexual community had a very definite stake. For District C, the GPC endorsed Lance Lalor, a former State Representative. In the November 6 election, he polled 40.7% of the vote district wide, but 62.6% of the vote in the 7 hardcore Montrose precincts, a difference of 21.6%. In the runoff, the margin between the district wide vote and the Montrose vote declined to 15.6%. Lalor won the seat, polling 67.4% of the vote district wide and a high 83% of the core Montrose vote.¹²⁷

Even more illustrative of the GPC's influence was the District 1 at-large race, in which the GPC had endorsed the Libertarian candidate, Jeff Daiell. Further down the ballot, the race drew less attention with 47,926 of the 192,263 total voters, not making a decision, or, in other words, 24.9% not marking their ballot. In Montrose, the no vote equalled 18.3% of the 4,896 voters not marking their ballot. The 6.6%

difference revealed a greater participation by the Montrose electorate and might indicate the die-hard GPC vote. Daiell did not make the runoff, polling only 7.6% of the vote citywide. However, in the seven key Montrose precincts, he secured 34.8% of the vote.¹²⁸

Yet, undoubtedly, the homosexual community's greatest reason for celebration had been Tinsley's victory. Mann had been the first incumbent to be defeated since Judson Robinson, Jr., had defeated A. L. "Curly" Miller. Mann, consistent to the end, asserted, "I don't think the queers, oddwads, homos, perverts, whatever you want to call them, had anything to do with her victory."¹²⁹ He added, "their vote amounts to one half of 1% of anything."¹³⁰ Mann had not done his mathematics.

Tinsley stopped by the Montrose Activity Center, a homosexual social complex on Holman, to thank the euphoric crowd, that had been following the returns there. Vic Samuels, Tinsley's campaign head, remarked to the excited crowd, "You were the backbone of the campaign."¹³¹ The GPC Vice President, Larry Bagneris, summed up the homosexual effort. "We've made phone calls, licked envelopes, put up signs, walked blocks, registered voters, raised money and most of all voted. We've shown Houston, Texas, that no politician can afford to ignore us anymore."¹³²

On December 16, the GPC held a victory celebration at the Teamsters

Hall on the Katy Freeway. All the GPC endorsed candidates, John Goodner, Ben Reyes, Judson Robinson, Jr., Ernest McGowen and Eleanor Tinsley attended, except for Kathy Whitmire, who sent a representative. Although not endorsed by the GPC, Christin Hartung, the second of the two women victors in the November elections, was also present. Before a crowd of 300, all repeated their commitment to basic human rights, and Eleanor Tinsley presented to the GPC a broom shaped flower arrangement with a card saying, "We swept that Mann right out of our lives."¹³³ Ironically, it was at this demonstration of unity that Steve Shiflett decided to announce, unbeknown to the Vice president, that he would be running for a third term as president.¹³⁴

However, the GPC in 1979 had passed from political puberty to political adolescence. Not only had a homosexual been appointed to the Police Advisory Committee, but the GPC had exerted considerable influence in the city elections and was now ensured a sympathetic ear in City Council. In addition, homosexuals had established permanent liaisons with the Houston Police Department Street Patrol and Homicide Divisions.

Perhaps, of more significance, the Texas Human Rights Foundation, that had been created inside the GPC in 1976, spun off as an independent body to concentrate solely on gay rights litigation, specifically article 21.06 of the penal code. Craig Washington's 1975 effort in the

Texas House of Representatives had fairly clearly indicated that it would be impossible to repeal article 21.06 in the state legislature. Therefore, the only viable alternative appeared to be through the courts.

In November, the Texas Human Rights Foundation challenged the constitutionality of section 21.06, filing Baker v Wade in the United States District Court, Northern District of Texas. Henry Wade was the Dallas County District Attorney and Baker, Donald Baker, the Texas Human Rights Foundation's hand-picked plaintiff. Baker, a devout Christian and a solid member of the Dallas community, combined respectability with intellectualism. Well educated and Vice President of the Dallas Gay Political Caucus, he was well versed in the issues at stake, and knew how to handle the press. Baker, the ideal plaintiff, filed suit, claiming section 21.06 violated his right to privacy and equal protection of the law, guaranteed by the 1st, 9th, and 14th Amendments. Baker also asked the court to declare the statute unconstitutional, on the grounds that it resulted from religious influence, and was, therefore, in violation of the establishment clause of the 14th Amendment. The case was not heard until June 15 and 16, 1981.¹³⁵

Meanwhile, Shiflett's December declaration that he intended to run for a third term as GPC President had totally surprised the Vice President, Larry Bagneris. In fact, Bagneris thought that he and

Shiflett had verbally agreed to support each other. Shiflett would support Bagneris in his quest for the GPC Presidency, and, in return, Bagneris would support Shiflett in his bid for the 79th District seat, should it become available.¹³⁶ However, it appeared as if Ron Waters, the incumbent since 1972, would again contend the seat. In the light of Waters' decision, if Shiflett stood down from the GPC Presidency, he would be without an official position with political power, and Shiflett was not ready for that. Instead he ran for a third term.

Shiflett contended that during the summer he had grown to distrust Bagneris, whom he saw building his own power base within the GPC, using his influence with the Democratic party.¹³⁷ What was actually happening, had never happened before in the GPC. The race for the presidency was going to be competitive, a contest between the conservative and progressive elements within the caucus. Whereas, in the past, political differences had been buried for the sake of preserving the unity of a fledgling organization, both wings now believed in the stability and viability of the GPC, a strength that could withstand an internal power struggle.

The conservatives supported Shiflett and his business-like approach to homosexual politics. They were generally older, wealthier, and less visible in the day to day workings of the GPC. In fact, some, because

of their position in the Houston business world, were not even members, but supported the GPC by donations. The conservatives' interests lay primarily in issues that affected the white male homosexual, and they tended to ignore issues that involved other minorities such as blacks and women. They abhorred confrontation politics and believed Larry Bagneris to be very much in the mould of Ray Hill. After all, Bagneris himself was a Creole black and had been raised politically in the civil rights movement of Louisiana. Not surprisingly, racism abounded in the campaign.¹³⁸

The progressives and their candidate, Bagneris, were predominantly Democratic, more visible and less affluent. They did not believe that the GPC focus should be limited to issues relevant only to homosexuals, and consequently, they attacked Shiflett for his unsympathetic stance on other minority questions. They criticized his autocratic style of leadership, although Shiflett maintained that it was exactly this style of leadership that had won respect for the GPC from Houston's political establishment. In addition, Shiflett pointed to the Police Advisory Committee and the GPC mailing list (which had doubled) as indicators of his success.¹³⁹ His campaign literature promised he would lobby for a city ordinance outlawing discrimination on the basis of sexual preference, and that he would work for the establishment of a Montrose medical clinic.¹⁴⁰ The leading figure behind the clinic project,

David Bonuelos, was running for a Board position on the Shiflett ticket. Indeed, Bonuelos won by three votes.¹⁴¹

Bagneris contended that Shiflett had broken tradition by running for a third term, but, in retrospect, it appears as if no such tradition had been set. No previous president had served two full terms. More sensibly, Bagneris stressed coalition politics, the need to include everyone in the GPC, especially women, whose absence from the Caucus had been glaringly obvious. He pointed to his fine organizational abilities, which had brought about a highly successful Gay Pride Week in June of the previous year.¹⁴² He attacked a Shiflett campaign advertisement that showed Shiflett surrounded by Eleanor Tinsley, Kathy Whitmire, Lance Lalor, and Mickey Leland. Bagneris claimed it was deceptive, because none of these leading Houston politicians had, in fact, endorsed Shiflett's candidacy, as the advertisement suggested. Bagneris ran the same photograph with solicited remarks. Leland is quoted as saying, "I have not agreed to endorse or not endorse any candidate for GPC President."¹⁴³ Tinsley's quote read, "I did not know who was in the race when I was asked for the endorsement."¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, Shiflett maintained, "It (the photograph) was taken with the clear understanding that it would be mailed for campaign literature."¹⁴⁵ Bagneris claimed that Shiflett spent over \$5,000 for his re-election. Shiflett admitted to \$4,500. Bagneris said that

he spent \$100.¹⁴⁶

One of the major issues of the campaign had been the possible funding of Steve Shiflett as GPC president. It was intended to create a tax deductible organization which would hire Shiflett as executive director and provide him with a salary. His duties would be negligible, thereby releasing him for GPC work.¹⁴⁷ Bagneris and his allies criticized the idea on the grounds of accountability. Would Shiflett be responsible to the GPC membership or to the obscure figures who were providing him with his salary?¹⁴⁸ They feared the idea of independent funding enough to run a full page advertisement in the Montrose Star. They wanted to know where the money was coming from exactly and who controlled it.¹⁴⁹ Shiflett later contended that it was Bagneris' short-sightedness that killed the notion and alienated many of the GPC's wealthier, if anonymous supporters.¹⁵⁰

It was a spirited, if slightly sordid campaign, which Shiflett won. On February 24, Shiflett polled 254 votes to Bagneris' 200. Lee Harrington, running on the Shiflett ticket, defeated incumbent Secretary, Greer Price, for the Vice President's position. Jenny Willingter was the only candidate on the Bagneris ticket to win, outpolling her opponent for the Secretary's position. Her victory had been the result of the well disciplined vote of the feminist bloc.^{151]}

However, Shiflett's victory had included compromise. To assure himself of the lesbian vote, he had signed a document prior to the election in which he agreed to work toward the establishment of a feminist caucus within the GPC.¹⁵² True to form, after his victory, Shiflett promised to re-unite the activist elements that had been polarized by the election. However, unity did not return to the GPC until Shiflett's resignation in April. Two other events, the resignation of Police Chief Caldwell, and the fight of the 79th District seat nomination complicated the political scene and aggravated post-election wounds that might have otherwise healed.

A week before the GPC elections, Caldwell had resigned to accept an offer to head the security of an oil investment firm. On February 21, McConn nominated Assistant Police Chief B. K. Johnson as his successor. Johnson had support within the Police Department but certainly not from the city's minorities. On February 27, members of the GPC, including Shiflett and Harrington met with Johnson for an hour and a half. Hours later, and after a GPC Board meeting, the Caucus issued a statement:

The Houston GPC Board of Directors is firmly opposed to the confirmation of Police Chief Designate B. K. Johnson because of his recently stated 'violent opposition to homosexuality' and his apparent insensitivity to various other minority groups. The Board has instructed the GPC president to coordinate efforts with other minority representatives who are opposed to Johnson's confirmation and to attempt to ascertain positions of other candidates being considered for the position in regard to gay rights, and the issues of Blacks,

Browns, and other minorities.¹⁵³

In order to secure confirmation for Johnson's appointment, McConn had to carry with him a majority of the City Council. That he did. On March 5, despite opposition from the city's minorities, the City Council confirmed Johnson by 9 votes to 5. Anthony Hall, Ernest McGowan, Judson Robinson, Jr., and Ben T. Reyes, all minority City Councilmen, voted no. They were joined by Eleanor Tinsley, and later by Lance Lalor, who had not been present for the vote. Interestingly, five of the six Council members who opposed the appointment, had been endorsed by the GPC in the previous year's November elections. The coalition between the city's minorities continued to function. Remarkably, Johnson was the first candidate for Police Chief since Herman Short, who had held the position from 1964-1974, not to have received unanimous confirmation from City Council. Caldwell, B. G. "Pappy" Bond and Carrol Lynn had achieved complete support.¹⁵⁴

However, before the City Council vote, the GPC had called for a demonstration to take place on March 3 on the steps of City Hall. What should have provoked a massive response from the homosexual community, produced only a few cold protestors. Accusations that Bagneris, in revenge for his defeat, had sabotaged the effort circulated, but he claimed that the hard core workers of GPC had been alienated by Shiflett's autocratic manner and the recent acrimonious election.

Moreover, Bagneris was in bed with hepatitis.¹⁵⁵

To aggravate matters further, the 79th District seat for the Texas House Legislature became available, albeit in a rather secretive manner. The day of the filing deadline, the second Monday in February, Ron Waters, the incumbent, withdrew to challenge Jack Ogg in the 15th Senate District. His assistant, Debra Danburg, filed for the newly vacated seat. Shiflett, who had designs on the seat, alleged that Waters and Danburg had conspired together, and organized the late filings, so as not to draw opposition. However, because the incumbent Waters had withdrawn, the deadline was extended for two weeks. Shiflett was angered by the Danburg secretiveness, knowing full well that the next day she would be asking him for his and the GPC's endorsement, which would be critical if she were to win.¹⁵⁶

Shiflett claimed that Danburg continually pestered him for his endorsement because his potential candidacy was a threat to her success. Shiflett reacted, "I made the decision not to like her consciously," and resolved that she was not going, "to manipulate and use the community for her own personal political aggrandizement."¹⁵⁷ His reaction appears somewhat immature for someone who was supposed to be politically astute. Perhaps he felt that he should be in Danburg's position, a potential state representative. After all, he had had political ambitions in that direction, but had chosen a third term as GPC

president, perhaps, because the seat had not been vacant nor did it appear that it would be in the near future. Shiflett claimed to have been deceived by Danburg and Waters. And now that it was vacant, his power base was split, ironically because of the GPC presidential campaign.

Shiflett's anger became rage, when a Danburg campaign advertisement appeared in the Montrose Star, in which eight GPC Board members had endorsed her, before the GPC screening had taken place.¹⁵⁸ Weakly, Renee Rabb and Chuck Hickman, two of the endorsers, replied that they were attempting "to make our community aware of our support, and of where and when the screening and endorsement meetings were to be held."¹⁵⁹ It appeared as if they had violated the GPC tradition of a single collective endorsement. Shiflett called a meeting two days before the screening to express his fury. He wanted to maintain the GPC's focus on primarily homosexual issues, and thereby lost what little feminist support he had. He was also wary of Democratic manipulation within the Caucus, and, of course, Bagneris supported Danburg.¹⁶⁰

On March 26, the GPC met to endorse a candidate for the race. Shiflett, the chair of the meeting because of his position as President, attempted to use that position with help from his supporters in the crowd to bring about a no endorsement decision. He had wanted to secure the endorsement for Peter Armato, the candidate he favored, but knew

that was impossible. A no endorsement was second best.¹⁶¹ Each candidate spoke before the Caucus and answered three questions from the usual questionnaire. The orthodox method of screening candidates had been abandoned in light of Danburg's campaign advertisement, which had compromised members of the GPC Board. Danburg, whose credentials as a candidate were impressive, naturally had the support of the large lesbian/feminist group, present at the meeting.¹⁶² The antagonisms that existed between Shiflett and the women now had a public forum.

The meeting was acrimonious, a melee of accusation and counter-accusation. Shiflett successfully resisted attempts to remove him from the chair but a motion for a dual endorsement of Peter Armato, Shiflett's choice, and Debra Danburg failed by a vote of 124 to 62. A dual endorsement, it was argued, would divide the GPC's strength and split its resources. A motion whether or not to vote on an endorsement of Danburg solely succeeded 137 to 38, and the subsequent vote determined that the GPC would endorse Danburg for 79th District seat of the Texas House of Representatives.¹⁶³ Shiflett attributed his defeat, somewhat predictably, to the vote of the lesbian bloc.¹⁶⁴

Two days later, GPC's Board of Trustees called Shiflett to task for his handling of the meeting, and censured his actions by a 7 to 1 vote. The seven Board members argued that, "the chair of the meeting was in error of the bylaws of this caucus, of the Robert Rules of Order in not

relinquishing his position as chair. We further feel that the chair set and continued to foster a confrontive tone at the meeting."¹⁶⁵ Interestingly, six of the Board members who had lent their name to the Danburg campaign advertisement also voted to censure Shiflett. Moreover, David Bonuelos and Lee Harrington, both of whom had run on the Shiflett ticket in the February elections and had won, voted to censure Shiflett's behavior. Shiflett really had no choice but to resign. On April 2, he did resign, stating his position as president had become less and less tenable.¹⁶⁶

He immediately began to work for the Armato campaign, a political blunder on his own admission, because it sealed his divorce from the GPC. "If, at anytime, someone could accuse me of thinking I was more powerful than the GPC, it was when I chose to go and work for Peter."¹⁶⁷ In the Democratic primary, Danburg defeated Armato soundly, polling 60.1% of the vote. Renee Rabb, a GPC Board member, struck a hopeful note, "It is proof that the gay community, consisting of both men and women, can work together."¹⁶⁸ Rick Graves, Danburg's Campaign Manager, asserted that the victory meant, "lesbians of this community can stand up and walk with the men of this community."¹⁶⁹

Meanwhile, during the summer, Shiflett created a new organization, a new power base, Citizens for Human Equality (CHE). He had taken with

him much of GPC's conservative affluent support. Bagneris was not impressed. "I will refer to it (CHE), as long as I live, as a cocktail group."¹⁷⁰ The animosity between Bagneris and Shiflett continued unabated, if a little more subdued. For GPC that was a tragedy, because, although their styles of leadership were different, and their support came from different areas within the Caucus, they were both able leaders in their own way, and now neither led the GPC.

Shiflett's style of leadership had served the GPC well. It had established and solidified an adolescent organization that, at the time of Shiflett's resignation, had won respect from more orthodox political circles within the city. Its membership believed its durability to be such that it could withstand a public display of its inherent cleavages, male homosexual/lesbian, conservative/progressive. Lee Harrington agreed, when in a letter to the Montrose Star he wrote in an attempt at conciliation after the meeting, "these past six months have been the most emotion-filled GPC has ever experienced, directly related, I believe, to the rapid emergence of power the Houston gay community now enjoys."¹⁷¹ Shiflett's problems had started with his lack of flexibility, especially on minority issues, which originated in his unshakeable belief in his own ability. Harrington express a similar sentiment in the same letter. "We begin to think so highly of ourselves that we become convinced ours is the thinking that ought to

prevail."¹⁷² The problem increased when Shiflett no longer took criticism in his stride, but regarded it as personal censure. He reacted accordingly. Van Ooteghem, a long standing supporter of Shiflett, summed up the controversy and consequences. "He (Shiflett) paid too high a price for it...but the gay community paid a higher price...it lost one of its best leaders."¹⁷³

On Shiflett's resignation, Lee Harrington, as Vice President, became Acting President, before the membership officially elected him unopposed thirty days later. By not challenging Harrington, Bagneris sacrificed his ambitions for the sake of GPC unity. Harrington claimed he could not have won anyway.¹⁷⁴ Bagneris, instead, buried himself by organizing another Gay Pride Week. In February, 1981, Lee Harrington was re-elected unopposed. Bagneris respected the two year tradition he had helped to create. Terry Harris defeated Ray Hill for the position of Vice President, but Hill had secured his first official position within the GPC on the Board of Trustees.¹⁷⁵

Despite the changes in the GPC leadership, the old problems between the homosexual community and the Houston Police Department remained the same. On June 20, 1980, just prior to Gay Pride Week, the police raided Mary's Lounge on Westheimer. Five plainclothes policemen from the Houston Vice Squad and the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, assisted by fourteen law enforcement officers, arrested sixty-one persons, using

what the manager of the bar called 'gestapo tactics.'¹⁷⁶ Ray Hill contended that the raid was meant to intimidate the homosexual community before its annual celebration.¹⁷⁷ Assistant Police Chief Tommy Mitchell stated that the police were responding to calls of complaint from the public, adding, "all of those arrests came as a result of routine enforcement of the laws of the city and state."¹⁷⁸ That the arrests coincided with the beginning of Gay Pride Week was unfortunate.

Congressman Mickey Leland was not impressed or convinced. In a letter to Chief of Police B. K. Johnson, he wrote:

According to the Texas Alcoholic Beverage Commission, there are approximately 4,000 bars in the Houston area. With 4,000 potential violators to concern themselves with, why did the Houston Police Department choose to raid Mary's a well-known "Gay" Bar, on the first day of Gay Pride Week, and on the eve of the Democratic State Convention in San Antonio which found many Gay leaders out of town? Why was it necessary to have approximately twelve officers in riot gear involved in the arrests? Why were fire trucks standing by ready to assist with hoses? Why were many of the sixty one patrons arrested sober,¹⁷⁹ guilty only of being in the wrong place at the wrong time?

Leland answered the questions for himself in his letter. "It is apparent to me that the Houston Police Department was engaged in an obvious attempt to harass and intimidate the Houston Gay Community."¹⁸⁰ The next morning, McConn exerted his influence as mayor and the charges were dropped.¹⁸¹

As Leland had indicated, the GPC leadership was absent at the

Democratic State Convention in San Antonio. The Convention not only indicated the growing partisanship of the GPC, but also bore witness to the growing influence of the homosexual faction within the Democratic Party, an influence that had begun in 1978, when homosexual Democrats, aided by the enthusiasm generated by Town Meeting 1, had managed to send two delegates from the caucus, Steve Shiflett and Larry Bagneris, to the mini-convention in Memphis.¹⁸²

At San Antonio, Senate District 15, which includes Montrose, elected Bagneris to the national convention as an openly homosexual Kennedy delegate. Max Todd took the position as the Carter alternate. In addition, late in the afternoon on June 21, a gay resolution, aimed at section 21.06 of the penal code, came to the floor of the convention. Although the resolution was supported by Fred Hofheinz, former mayor of Houston, Congressman Mickey Leland and the homosexual delegates present, it failed by a vote of 1692 to 2073. However, Senate District 15 voted 91 to 3 in favor.¹⁸³ Despite defeat, open homosexual participation in mainline Democratic Party politics indicated a level of sophistication and organization within the homosexual community that provoked a hesitant respect from party politicians. The whole process helped to legitimize the goals of Houston's homosexuals and increased the influence of their prime political organization, the GPC. The drift away from Gary van Ooteghem's politics had become an integral part of

the GPC.

Eight days after the Mary's raid, the GPC Secretary, Fred paez, was shot by an off-duty police officer, and died an hour later in the Ben Taub hospital. The police report indicated that paez had made a sexual advance to the police officer in question, Officer K. M. McCoy, a four year veteran. McCoy identified himself as a policeman, and attempted to arrest paez. In the ensuing struggle, the gun accidentally discharged, striking paez in the head.¹⁸⁴

On July 2, over 100 homosexuals met at MCC-Houston to discuss Paez's death and to elect a five member task force to investigate circumstances surrounding the shooting.¹⁸⁵ A few days later, Arthur B. Alphin, a firearms expert, threw doubt on the accidental discharge contention, when he pointed out that a .45 handgun, the type McCoy had fired, used two safety devices, both of which had to be released, before the gun could be fired. In other words, either McCoy had not been trained properly in the use of the .45 or he had used it recklessly.¹⁸⁶ Moreover, paez had written a pamphlet of advice on how to react cooperatively to an arrest situation. In addition, paez was a police buff and familiar with the .45 handgun and its safety mechanisms.¹⁸⁷ McCoy was indicted on a charge of negligent homicide, but acquitted on September 4, 1981. A few days later, he returned to work.¹⁸⁸

The homosexual community expressed extreme displeasure at the verdict, but the whole affair was an indicator of the political progress homosexuals had made. paez's death caused such controversy not only because he had been highly active in the community but also because homosexuals possessed a certain degree of political clout that could no longer be ignored. The death of Gary Wayne Stock, four years earlier, had not provoked the same reaction, nor resulted in the same media attention. However, even if public response to police abuse of homosexuals had sharpened, the affair only confirmed the relative intransigence of the city's police compared to its politicians. The problem rested within the Police Department. The policy of finding a new Police Chief by promoting within produced only leaders that had been nurtured on old prejudices. Under these circumstances, it was impossible for a new Chief to approach the homosexual community with a fresh and objective attitude. The GPC needed to elect a mayor who would change the formation of policy.

In April, 1981, the Houston Chronicle ran an article that read, "the endorsement of the Houston Political Caucus (GPC) now is sought by many candidates and few, if any, officeholders or candidates risk public attacks on the homosexual lifestyle."¹⁸⁹ This was in stark contrast to 1973, when Mayor Louie Welch walked out of the Council Chambers rather than face homosexuals and their requests. In reference to the

Eleanor Tinsley victory in 1979, the article commented, "the very visible support of the Gay Political Caucus in her race apparently harmed her little, if at all, in the eyes of traditional political contributors."¹⁹⁰ In fact, Tinsley garnered approximately \$107,000, the largest amount for a City Council race.¹⁹¹

In August, Newsweek recognized the new power of the homosexual community in Houston.

Later this summer political candidates in Houston will march, one by one, into a dingy office on Main Street to seek the endorsement of one of the city's most powerful political organizations. Those who win the group's support will have their names listed on wallet-sized endorsement cards, 30,000 of which will be sent to a highly confidential computerized mailing list. As the Nov. 3 election approaches, volunteers will pass out 25,000 additional cards at bars, discos, and other nightspots. The tactics are simple and highly effective, and the outcome of this year's mayoral race in Houston—the nation's fifth largest city—may well depend on the blessing of this single, anomalous group: the Houston Gay Political Caucus.¹⁹²

The article continued explaining to uninformed readers how organized homosexuals had achieved such political power. "Given the city's macho image and conservative politics, gay power in Houston seems a rather unlikely phenomenon. But the city's growth and increasing diversity have weakened the power of the traditional political blocs, and the GPC has emerged as one of the best-organized special interest groups in town."¹⁹³ The media had joined the politicians in acknowledging the political savvy of the city's homosexuals in time for the November

elections.

The GPC endorsed Kathy Whitmire in the race for mayor, and the same enthusiasm that had been generated by the Tinsley campaign resurfaced in the Whitmire effort. The GPC mobilized its mailing list and provided volunteers, who pushed endorsement cards, manned phone banks, erected yard signs, and organized block walks. Two attempts to undermine the Whitmire campaign, a mailgram sent to 107,000 people in the Montrose and Southwest areas of the city, and a one page advertisement in the Houston Post, both focused on the homosexual endorsement, backfired, having little or no effect on the voting.¹⁹⁴

Not surprisingly, the Houston Police Patrolmen's Union opposed the Whitmire candidacy, mailing out 540 letters to churches to inform the ministers that Whitmire, in her screening with the Union, had stated that homosexuals should not be discriminated against in any way in the recruitment process. Bob Thomas, the Union's President stated, "somebody should stand up and tell these people it is not alternative lifestyle, but deviant and abnormal behavior."¹⁹⁵ Reverend Ronald Pogue of the Bering Memorial Methodist Church labelled the letters "gutter politics" and indicated their harmful effect. "I've lived in Houston all my life and it is obvious to me the intention of this is to further prejudice and bigotry and divide the community."¹⁹⁶

Despite the attacks of her critics, on November 3, Whitmire polled

34.6% of the vote citywide. In Montrose, she won 72.9% of the vote, a difference of 38.3%. In the runoff against Jack Heard, her margin of victory was so great, 62.5% to Heard's 37.4%, that the GPC could not claim that it had provided the margin for victory. Whitmire had successfully put together a coalition of blacks, hispanics, homosexuals and moderate whites, a trend that had started with Fred Hofheinz's victory in 1973. Interestingly, however, in the seven Montrose precincts, Whitmire had polled 83.2% of the vote in the runoff. In her 1977 runoff for the Controller's position against Steve Jones, she had polled 72.2% of the Montrose vote. It appeared as if the GPC had managed to mobilize a further 10% of Montrose vote.¹⁹⁷ Either more homosexuals had moved into the area, or more heterosexuals were sympathetic to the GPC endorsements, but clearly homosexuals in Montrose had voted as a community.

In the District C City Council race, the GPC endorsed George Greanias, and certainly provided him with vital votes in both the election and the runoff. Greanias' campaign advertisements listed not only the GPC endorsement but endorsements of individual bars that catered to homosexuals.¹⁹⁸ One of his major opponents, Joe Pentony, an old line liberal Democrat and former State Representative, had attempted to secure the GPC endorsement but failed. In the election, Greanias received 11,384 votes district wide, 2,530 more than Pentony.

The Montrose precincts delivered 3,714 to Greanias' total. Therefore, if Pentony had achieved the GPC endorsement, he and not Greanias would have made the runoff against the GPC's old adversary, Dick Gottlieb.¹⁹⁹ The GPC votes were equally critical in the runoff. Gottlieb summed up the nature of the race. "It's the strangest election I ever saw. I was declared the winner by three media outlets and all of a sudden, I'm a loser after two Montrose boxes come in."²⁰⁰ The two boxes belonged to precincts 34 and 38, and delivered to Greanias 1,979 votes, securing him a 825 vote victory.

The discipline of the homosexual community as bloc voters was best illustrated by the race for the Controller's office, vacated by Kathy Whitmire. The two main contenders, Lance Lalor and Leonel Castillo, had both been GPC endorsed candidates at the previous city elections in 1979. However, the GPC endorsed Lalor, and he went on to win 76.6% of the Montrose vote in the election.²⁰¹ Few, if any, maintained a loyalty to Castillo. What mattered was the actual endorsement.

Therefore, in 1981, the Houston homosexual vote, mobilized by the GPC, had proved crucial in George Greanias' victory, had displayed its discipline in the Lalor/Castillo contest, and had helped Whitmire into the mayor's office. Houston homosexuals had achieved much of what they had set out to do. "This is our finest hour. Today Houston voters have elected to the city's highest office a person who publicly takes a stand

that no citizen will be denied their basic human rights. That is all the gay community has ever demanded."²⁰² There remained, however, section 21.06 of the Texas Penal Code. The homosexual community was still awaiting Judge Jerry Buchmeyer's decision, after a creditable prosecuting performance by the Texas Human Rights Foundation earlier in the year in Dallas.²⁰³

Nevertheless, politically, Houston's homosexuals had developed from the lone crusade of Ray Hill, to the overambitious and unorganized efforts of the groups in the early seventies, to the more sophisticated and effective tactics of the Gay Political Caucus. The Caucus itself had matured considerably since its inception in 1975, surviving the predictable cleavages of male homosexual/lesbian and progressive/conservative that existed within the community. The Caucus, too, had won enormous respect from orthodox political figures. Its endorsement was no longer shunned or given in secret, but actively sought by aspiring candidates. The endorsement in 1981 was not a liability but a distinct advantage, because the GPC could deliver a well disciplined and crucial bloc vote. The GPC had become an integral part of a successful liberal coalition that was electing its candidates to city offices. In return, the GPC sought the removal of legal restrictions on homosexuals, in order that the homosexual community might flourish. It had. As the GPC gained greater political acumen,

then the homosexual community and its institutions diversified and progressed toward completeness.²⁰⁴

Two major factors provoked a greater determination on the part of the city's homosexuals to succeed, Anita Bryant's visit to Houston in 1977, and the consistent harassment of the Houston Police Department. Both Anita Bryant and the police were visible agents of prejudice and repression, providing a rallying point, around which the leading homosexual activists, Ray Hill, Lee Harrington, Larry Bagneris and Steve Shiflett, could mobilize greater support from within the community. Their efforts and talents alone would not have been enough. Anita Bryant and the Houston Police Department encouraged greater participation from homosexuals, and added to their sense of community under threat.

Town Meeting I did not have the unifying effect on the community that has often been attributed to it. It was an idealistic celebration with few concrete achievements. The fact that it was never repeated bears witness to its failure. Town Meeting I only exasperated differences that existed within the Houston homosexual community. The community had never been monolithic, nor united in purpose, nor agreed on method, and those differences climaxed during the first stormy months of 1980.

Yet, despite the inherent differences that existed, the GPC

increasingly managed to deliver a disciplined community vote, and a horde of campaign volunteers, to the candidates of its choice. In the past, that vote had proved critical only in some races, but helpful in every race. But what remains so impressive about Houston homosexuals is that, in a relatively short time and after a few false starts, they had organized themselves into an effective political caucus, that was able to direct a bloc vote and provided the basis for community growth and completeness.