

The History of the Homosexual Rights Movement in Houston

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A COMMUNITY OF HEROES: THE HOMOSEXUAL RIGHTS  
MOVEMENT IN HOUSTON

In Memory of Patrick Walker

One of the Heroes, Who Showed Me the Meaning of Caring

and

In Honor of James Kinchloe

My Best Friend, Who Taught Me About Loving Relationships

*Walk together Children,  
Don't you get weary,  
there's a great camp meeting in the  
Promised Land* (Walker cited in Morris, 1984, p. 186)

The focus of this paper is the documentation of the continuing struggle for human dignity, fought by a maturing gay and lesbian community in Houston. I do not attempt to document all of the events which occurred during this social rights movement. Consequently the discussion is limited to four topics: the creation of a community; the impact of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) on this community; a critique of New Social Movement (NSM) theory as an explanation of the rise of a gay and lesbian rights movement; and a proposal emphasizing the importance of going beyond this established culture to address the issue of state oppression.

It is important to note that the rise in political activism in the lesbian and gay community has focused on the struggle for the right of gay and lesbian people to live openly, free from the harrassment by both a critical society and an oppressive government. The purpose of the activists, by and large, has not been to change the system, which would be more in line with Marxist ideology, but to attack the attempts by their

detractors, whose purpose has been to suppress the free expression of a gay and lesbian culture. The history of political involvement by gays and lesbians is not at odds with NSM theory but is complementary. Political involvement was in defense of an emerging cultural identity and community. What gay and lesbian people have wanted, "is to be left alone" (Harrington, 1990).

### The Creation of a Community

*Before a social movement comes into existence, a set of prerequisites must be in place. An identifiable social group with considerable political awareness must be presumed before a movement is conceivable" (Adam, 1987, p. 1).*

Consistent with the concepts of social change outlined in NSM theory, the development of a strong, and organized community with its unique cultural identity cannot be underestimated as a necessary ingredient for the rise of a gay and lesbian rights movement in Houston. Additionally, the concept of "free spaces" is important to the understanding of this phenomenon. These "free spaces" are defined as places in which an oppressed group can gather, organize, and formulate



ideas of fundamental change, free from the influence of the "elite" (Harry Boyte and Sara Evans, cited in Fisher, Kling, 1987). These safe spaces in the form of early gay and lesbian institutions became the fertile ground from which an entirely new and rich culture would grow, evolving into an integral part of Houston's political and social environment.

With the conclusion of World War II, the gay and lesbian community faced an oppressive society with the rise of McCarthyism in America (Adam, 1987). In 1949, Newsweek called homosexuals "sex murderers," and "Following the murder of a gay man in 1954, Miami newspapers 'demand(ed) that the homosexuals be punished for tempting 'normals' to commit such deeds' "(Adam. p. 59). Without an organized community, lesbians and gays had little recourse, but to attempt to hide their sexual orientation, even from themselves, in this hostile environment.

In this post World War II era, to be exposed in Houston as being gay or lesbian was risky. It could result in social ostracism, loss of employment, and even life imprisonment. If a bar was raided, though bar raids did not become prevalent until the 70s to 80s, the names of those who were arrested was published in the local newspapers (Hill, 1990). Few individuals could afford this type of exposure and resorted in using alias first names only (Hill). "People didn't have names. Though,

most weren't fooling anyone. They were responding largely out of guilt" (Hill). This internalized oppression resulted in a social structure in which being gay became an "outdoor sport," with street cruising as the norm for finding sexual intimacy (Hill). "One could have anonymous sex and return home to the wife and kids" (Hill).

Until 1972, engaging in gay sex was a felony in Texas (Hill, 1990). "I have met people who were sentenced to life for multiple convictions. I interviewed two men who had received three convictions for homosexual activities, and had been in prison for 25 years as a result" (Hill). If one was lucky, when caught by police having sex in one's car or in a public space, they would be arrested for public nudity (Hill).

In an attempt to avoid police harrassment or arrests, an elaborate system of deception was created. "Tea Dances" were common in what bars did exist (Hill, 1990). Dancing was illegal on Sundays, consequently when such activity did occur, usually weekly, a "lookout" was posted. When the police came, a bell was rung, and all the participants would move tables onto the dance floor. The occupants would then begin to act "straight" (Hill). Terms such as "tea dances," "doing the bird circuit," or "working the water front" all became code words in this underground culture (Hill).

In the process of hiding from the state, society, and one's self, many lost their dignity. Feelings of guilt and shame were common. *This is an extremely important concept in understanding both, the gay and lesbian culture, and their political response to oppression.* "Gays and lesbians are shame based" (DiJacklin, 1990). Ray Hill personalized these feelings during his interview: "The first gay person I met without guilt scared me to death. We met in Galveston at splash day in 1960. He was very comfortable and relaxed about his gayness" (Hill, 1990). Additionally, prior to the rise of a lesbian and gay movement the feeling of being the "only one" was the rule (Hill). These oppressive conditions, described above, became a "time bomb" for social change.

The rise of the civil rights movement by ethnic minorities, the anti-war movement by students questioning middle class values, and the birth of feminism by women's groups, created an environment conducive to the formation of a militant homosexual population (Remmington, 1983). The gay and lesbian community in the 1970s learned well the lessons of the Black movement (Remmington). This was a period in which, as in the 1960s, "Black became beautiful ... gay would become good" (p. 3). This ideology of "self empowerment," borrowed from the Black community, became fundamental to the creation and survival of the gay and lesbian movement.



The 1970s were a period in which homosexuals in Houston were able to attain a high degree of community development (Remmington, 1983). The gay and lesbian community had established an elaborate social system, published its own newspapers and magazines, established churches, and created a sophisticated political organization.

Bars, such as the Pink Elephant, serving homosexuals have existed in Houston since the 1920s, though, as previously mentioned, the threat of police raids forced many individuals to center their social lives in the protection of private homes until the late 1960s (Remmington, 1983). As the community protest grew, so did the number of homosexual taverns. "It took a little time for activists in Houston to realize that homosexuals in the city met and socialized predominantly in bars, and that the bars had the same potential function as the Black churches" (Remmington, p. 13). In 1968, 26 such establishments were listed in a local bar guide (Remmington). These "free spaces" played an important role in the formation of a gay and lesbian culture, and this cultural identity was essential to the creation of the social rights movement which occurred.

Communications were a vital part of the creation of a gay and lesbian culture/community and the bars provided a means of distribution for the homosexual press (Remmington, 1983).

These publications have traditionally been distributed free in local bars. The first such publication was Nuntius, which lasted from 1970 until 1977 (Remmington).

Other community papers included, Pointblank Times, founded in 1975 to address the feminist/lesbian issues and Upfront founded in 1978 by Gary Van Ooteghem (Remmington, 1983). Both papers failed due to the lack a financial support. By 1981, however, Houston had two newspapers which have survived to the present, This Week in Texas (TWT) founded in April, 1976 and the Montrose Voice, founded in 1981 (Remmington).

In the late 1960s Ray Hill was a single voice in Houston publicly declaring himself to be gay. In 1967, Channel 13 news stationed a van outside the Old Plantation bar on West Gray (Hill, 1990). The news crew filmed the patrons leaving the establishment with a hidden camera and planned to air a program entitled "Houston Galveston: Sodom and Gommora" (Hill). When Hill discovered this fact, he contacted Ray Miller, then news director of Channel 2, to discuss the possibility of Hill receiving equal time. Not to be upstaged by the competition, Miller granted this request. The show was aired at 1:00 a.m. with Hill debating a Baptist preacher, a psychologist, and a police officer (Hill). After handily winning the debate in the first 15 minutes of the program against the



preacher and the psychologist, "I accepted the surrender of the third" (Hill). The next 45 minutes were spent propagandizing. After the program, "I was met by four mothers with their gay sons to help them deal with their situation" (Hill).

Hill and two other individuals, Rita Wanstrom and David Patterson, formed the Promethean Society, in 1968 (Remmington, 1983). This was the first homosexual political organization in Houston (Remmington). In 1970 two other organizations were founded, Integrity, and The Gay Liberation Front at the University of Houston (Remmington). Billy Walder, Chuck Berger, Bob Osborne, and Randy Thomas created the Houston Gay Political Coalition in 1973 which, despite its limited support in the community, did publicly present important concerns of homosexuals before the City Council (Remmington).

As a result of the ridicule Craig Washington received in the Texas State Legislature over his proposed repeal of Article 21.06<sup>1</sup>, Keith McGee, Pokey Anderson, Jerry Miller, and Hugh Crell announced the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus (GLPC)<sup>2</sup> on June 30, 1975 (Anderson, 1990). Ray Hill was also present at the news conference representing himself. Hill is quoted as saying "Up until now, I was the only faggot with a face and name in town" (Remmington, 1982, p. 32). Gary Van Ooteghem, the Harris County Comptroller of the

Treasury, soon became the organization's first president after being fired from his job with the county as a result of his political activism (Remmington). Though there were other spinoff political organizations such as Citizens for Human Equality (CHE), the GLPC remained the prominent gay and lesbian political organization in Houston.

There was a great deal of optimism in the early days of the organization. Hill (1990) stated in his interview that in 1975 "we believed that it would take five years to accomplish our objectives, and then there would be no need for the caucus." The GLPC did experience early political success. In 1975 the organization contacted 21 candidates to question them concerning their views toward homosexual rights. Only three candidates did not respond to the questionnaire (Remmington, 1983). Don Hrachovy, a future President of the GLPC who would later die of AIDS, reported in December 1976 that since the GLPC's inception in 1975, it had experienced a 68% success rate in the election of candidates they believed would be supportive of the gay and lesbian community (Remmington).

The Texas Bar Association announced in 1977 that Anita Bryant had been selected to perform at their state convention (Remmington, 1983). Anita Bryant had gained national recognition for her public involvement in the repeal of the gay

and lesbian employment protection ordinance in Dade County Florida. She soon became a symbol to the gay and lesbian community of intolerance to their emerging culture. This mobilized the community in a way that had never previously occurred. On June 16, a crowd of homosexuals and their supporters marched from The Depository Two, a local gay bar at 401 McGowen, to the downtown Library (Remmington). "The march was very risky. We had planned on 1200 participants. In five minutes 6800 people drove by and decided to join. 10 minutes made the difference in 1200 and 8000 people" (Hill, 1990). The protest added enormous energy to the movement. As an additional comment, I was present that evening and remember the "empowerment" that I personally experienced. We were a community, and I was no longer "the only one."

By the end of the decade the GLPC had "passed from political puberty to political adolescence" (Remmington, 1983, p. 64). The Caucus had used its 14,000-name mailing list, issued 50,000 endorsement cards, and donated \$11,000 to Eleanor Tinsley's campaign against Frank Mann, a long-term "thorn in the side" of the community. Mann had referred to homosexuals as "odd wads" in his campaign, an affront to gays and lesbians in their fight for acceptance (Remmington). The effort paid off and Mann was the first incumbent



councilmember to lose an election since 1960 (Remmington). Kathy Whitmire, a candidate with strong ties to the community, was elected to a second term as city controller. Lance Lalor, John Goodner, Ben Reyes, Judson Robinson, and Ernest McGowen, all GLPC endorsed candidates, had won their respective races (Remmington). Additionally the homosexual community had a permanent liaison with the police department (Remmington). Anderson (1990) expressed the feelings in the community well:

The high point in the movement was the election of Eleanor Tinsley over Frank Mann. The feeling was that everything we touched would turn to gold, and there was no limit to what could be accomplished.

Gays and lesbians had not only experienced political success, but had created an elaborate cultural identity and community. Wilde and Stein bookshop was opened in 1977. There was the Wilde and Stein radio show on KPFT dedicated to homosexual issues. A community center, Montrose Activity Center, was founded in 1978. The Diana Foundation, a social organization, had existed since 1953. The Astro Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf, Lambda Center for Alcoholics, and the Montrose Sports Association were founded as an alternative to

the bars. Bill Scott had established the Montrose Counseling Center, in 1978, to meet the mental health needs of homosexuals. There were bars, a medical clinic, and shops (Remington, 1983). The width of the community is best expressed in a quote by Jim Veteto, the sales manager of TWT:

We have gay owned stores, gay real estate people, gay title companies, gay car dealers. We call it the gay connection ... I eat, sleep, live and work gay. I sometimes go weeks without seeing a heterosexual. I enjoy being gay and I know I am not alone. We have a force in Houston that ties us together (p. 20).

This network, the sense of community, became essential to the very survival of gays and lesbians in the decade to come.

#### The Community Comes of Age

As the gay and lesbian community in Houston entered the decade of the 80s the level of pride, energy, and talent was enormous resulting from the successes of the previous decade. The GLPC had grown to a paid membership of 603 and a mailing list of 8022<sup>3</sup> (Canetti, May 04, 1980), Kathy Whitmire was elected mayor, and the community found itself at the height of its political influence. In the early 1980s, however,



there were still problems with police raids on local bars, and the Paez shooting by a Houston police officer further strained community relations.

TWT ("61 Arrested," 1980) reported that on June 20, 1980 61 persons were arrested at Mary's bar, a Houston gay institution. A witness is quoted as saying "the vice were shoving people against the wall" (p. 9). This was the third year in a row that a gay bar was raided prior to Gay Pride Week. Andy Mills, the manager at Mary's, was quoted as saying "one policeman used 'Gestapo tactics' and the arrested patrons were crowded into vans with no ventilation" (Meckel, 1980) Ron Stone on KPRC television reported "At a place called Mary's police made a big raid early this morning and it has damaged relations with the police and the gay community" ("Mary's Raid," 1980).

This was not the last raid conducted against the homosexual community. Raids occurred prior to subsequent election days. The week of September 18-24, 1981 TWT ("Week of Montrose," 1981) reported: this week "was full of raids, arrests, shootings and election-time harassment. Traditionally, election years are known for police crackdowns." These raids, conducted against this symbol of the gay and lesbian community, the bars, gave rise to increased political participation by homosexuals.

Relations with the police did not improve, but deteriorated with the shooting of Fred Paez, a gay activist, on June 28, 1980 ("GPC Secretary," 1980). Off-duty police officer, K.M. McCoy shot at close range Paez in the head at approximately 2:30 am in a warehouse parking lot ("GPC Secretary"). The influence of the gay and lesbian community assisted in prompting a full investigation of the shooting called for by councilmember Lance Lalor and U.S. Representative Mickey Leland, both with political ties to the community ("Investigation Probes," 1980). Members in the community such as Lee Harrington, president of the GLPC, questioned the police position that it was an accidental shooting ("Investigation Probes").

In response to the Paez shooting 1000 persons marched in protest (Canetti, 1980, July 23). During the trial The Houston Post reported (Flood, 1981, Sept. 2) that Cain, another police officer on the scene of the shooting, testified that he and McCoy had finished most of three six packs of beer. He claimed that they were not intoxicated. McCoy was found not guilty of negligent homicide (Flood, 1981, Sept. 05).

A high point in the political influence of the gay and lesbian community came with the election of Kathy Whitmire as mayor of Houston. On September 17, 1981 The Houston Post ("Gay Caucus backing," 1981) reported that the GLPC had

endorsed Whitmire as mayor. Sheriff Jack Heard, her opponent in the run-off election, attempted to use Whitmire's association with the gay and lesbian community as an issue during the campaign ("Whitmire Wins," 1981). Despite this "gay baiting" Whitmire won the election with 62% of the vote ("Kathy Whitmire Elected," 1981).

The GLPC endorsed candidates swept the election ("Council Wins," 1981). TWT ("Greanias," 1981) reported that Dr. Richard Murray, political analyst at the University of Houston, remarked on KPRC that the heavy turnout in Montrose had turned the tide in District C, electing George Greanias to his first term in office.

The political strength of the gay and lesbian community became well known in Houston. Barrs and Downing reported in The Houston Post (1981) on the GLPC's political influence. The article was entitled "Well-organized gays gaining political clout," and contained discussions with Clintine Cashion, a political organizer for Whitmire. In the article Cashion was reported as questioning if Whitmire could have won the election without the GLPC. "The important thing was not how many votes they got out for Kathy, but how hard they worked for her, and how do you measure that?" How quickly the mayor would forget this contribution by the gay and lesbian community.



In the election of 1983 the GLPC maintained its reputation as an influential political organization. In the November election mayor Whitmire was re-elected to a second term in office. To exemplify the importance of the gay and lesbian vote, on January 07, 1984, the mayor participated with a newly formed organization calling itself The Community Political Action Committee (C-PAC) on a tour of the local gay and lesbian bars ("Houston Mayor," 1984). The tour was billed as a "low-profile way for the mayor to thank her supporters in the gay community who helped her in the November election" (Obrie, 1984). Hill in his interview noted the absence of the GLPC from the tour of the bars (1990). Hill explained that C-PAC was created due to a feud resulting from the GLPC's endorsement of Nikki Van Hightower over Anthony Hall in the city election. C-PAC supported Anthony Hall.

The political tide was clearly moving in favor of the gay and lesbian community. As an estimated crowd of 10,000 to 12,000 people watched the Gay and Lesbian Pride parade in 1984 (Jack Valinski, with the Gay and Lesbian Pride Week Committee, estimated the crowd to be closer to 60,000) ("City's Gay Pride," 1984) few predicted the extent to which the upcoming political events would change the direction of gay and lesbian politics in Houston for the rest of the decade.

Loosing Ground: A Political War Against the Gay and Lesbian Community

In appreciation for the political support from C-PAC, Councilmember Anthony Hall proposed in December of 1983 to add sexual orientation to the list of protections against discrimination in city employment (Reavis, 1984). The city already had an established policy of not discriminating against gays and lesbians, therefore the measure would not have resulted in changes to the city hiring practices (Reavis). The measure was largely a symbolic gesture to the gay and lesbian community, institutionalizing the legal acceptance of this community by the city. Hall brought the issue before Council and, with little discussion, the matter was referred to the city legal department for review (Reavis). Jerry Smith, the city attorney and a Whitmire appointee, drafted the ordinance (Hill, 1990). Hill stated that it is worth noting that Smith, a right wing Republican, wrote the legislation in such a way that it resulted in considerable confusion within the community. He added, "a vote for gay and lesbian employment protection, would be a vote against it, and vice versa."

When the GLPC leadership became aware of the proposed ordinance, a decision was made not to actively support the amendment (Hill, 1990). "There were concerns within the leadership of the Caucus that the timing was not correct for a



gay and lesbian rights ordinance in Houston" (Hill). Their lack of active support for the amendment, however, soon became an embarrassment to the GLPC. Members began to question why a gay and lesbian organization would not actively support a law written for their own protection (Hill). Reluctantly the Caucus dispatched Sue Lovell to City Hall to get the necessary votes.

Whitmire had informed the community that the support of nine councilmembers would be needed for a safe passage of the ordinance (Hill, 1990). She added that it would be important to receive the support of John Goodner (Hill). The GLPC reported back to the mayor that they had eight firm votes, omitting the fact that they had not received the endorsement of Goodner (Hill). In June of 1984 the mayor placed the item on the City Council agenda (Hill).

The day before the City Council was to vote on the proposed amendment, John Goodner ran an ad in the local papers (Reavis 1984). The headlines read "City Council May Make 'Homosexuality' Equal to Race, Religion and Color" (Reavis, p. 124). The advertisement was quoted as saying: "Do we want our children, always susceptible in their search for role models, to be influenced by a city government that openly condones, all but encourages, homosexuality" (p. 124). The newspaper ad served its purpose in drawing public attention to the issue.

As an odd assortment of more than 400 observers looked on, including various black and white church groups, the Ku Klux Klan, and mothers with children, the City Council passed the resolution to include sexual orientation among the list of groups protected against discrimination (Gravois, 1984, June 20). The ordinance was approved by a vote of 8-7. The second vote, which would include protections for gays and lesbians in the city's affirmative action program, passed by a vote of 9-6. As the council voted, the Ku Klux Klan was chanting "Death to homosexuals," while others carried signs with slogans like "Houston, the Sodom of the South" (Reavis, 1984).

Ben Reyes, who had delivered an impassioned speech to the GLPC to receive its endorsement in the previous fall election (Harrington, 1990), called for a referendum on the issue (Gravois, June 20, 1984). On July 20, 1984 a group calling itself The Committee on Public Awareness delivered 63,800 signatures to the city secretary (Grotta, July 21, 1984). This petition drive resulted in the referendum which led Houston into one of the most divisive political fights in its history.

The opposition to the ordinance was broad based and well financed. They outspent the supporters of the legislation by a margin of \$200,000 to \$60,000 ("Opposition Has Outspent," 1985). Those opposed included an odd assortment of groups including: The Committee on Public Awareness,

Campaign for Houston, The Chamber of Commerce, an ad hoc group of Black Baptist ministers, Doctors for Houston, the Committee for Repeal, the Harris County Republican Party, and the Houston Police Patrolmen's Union.

The Committee on Public Awareness, the main organization in opposition to the ordinance, was supported by four councilmembers including John Goodner and Ben Reyes (Gravois, July 04, 1984). Goodner, playing to his conservative constituency used emotionally charged accusations to attack the gay and lesbian culture. He claimed that passage of the amendment would compromise the well being of our children and endanger our public health (Gravois, Dec. 02, 1984). He elaborated that it would result in lesbians and gays being allowed to occupy positions as "recreation supervisors, police officers or other positions in which they could serve as role models for children, and 'this is bad' " (Gravois, July 04, 1984). On December 02, 1984, in another of his emotionally charged deliveries, he was quoted as stating:

All this talk about what homosexuals do behind closed doors is their business is a bunch of bull. What goes on behind those closed doors is very much all of our business. It could very well affect our children (Gravois).



John Goodner, in his extremism, did not stop with his proposed denial of the right to privacy for gay and lesbian citizens.

In a move which enraged the gay and lesbian community, Goodner's organization sponsored an address by Nebraska psychologist Paul Cameron (Loddeke, 1985). In his address Cameron proposed the "quarantining" of all gays to prevent the spread of AIDS (Loddeke). Another group, calling itself Doctors for Houston, joined in the debate along the same lines. In a news conference they expressed their belief that passage of the ordinance would "lead to rampant homosexual activity" ("Doctors Form," 1985). Another member of the organization was quoted as saying that persons with AIDS "should be put away in a sanitarium or someplace else." It became apparent that the opponents to the ordinance would no longer restrain their discussions to employment protection rights but would openly propose the removal of basic civil liberties to gay and lesbian people.

The Houston Post reported that The Chamber of Commerce became involved in the referendum on December 19, 1984 (Gravois). In a later report the Chamber clarified its position (Grotta, Dec. 22, 1984). They were reported as opposing the ordinance, because they believed it would have a "detrimental effect on the city's public image and economic climate." Many of the members of the executive committee of

the Chamber formed an organization called the Committee for Repeal (Gravois, Grotta, Jan. 12, 1985). Leo Linbeck and Walter Mischer guaranteed loans for \$100,000 to the committee (Gravois, Grotta). Contributors to the campaign read like the Who's Who of Houston and included major corporations including MBank Houston, Hughes Tool, United Energy and Robert Cruildshank, a certified public accountant (Gravois, Grotta). It is noteworthy to point out that it was no secret in Houston that the business community was suspicious of Whitmire and her association with groups such as gays and lesbians. The business community looked on this as an opportunity to discredit the mayor publicly.

The leading organization in support of the amendment launched its campaign on December 11, 1984 (Grotta, Dec. 12, 1984). An organization calling itself Citizens for a United Houston was composed of the Houston League of Women Voters, the American Jewish Committee, the Houston Area Women's Center, the American Civil Liberties Union and several area churches (Grotta). The organization had appointed William Oliver as its campaign manager (Grotta). The participating organizations agreed on three main issues:

There should be no discrimination in city employment, individuals have the right to privacy, and "the future of



the city must not be held hostage by intolerance and bigotry" (Grotta)

In a recent interview, Ray Hill discussed at length his opinion of the strategy utilized by the gay and lesbian community in the campaign. He believed the the campaign was mismanaged:

The idea of denying that it was a gay rights referendum was "a bad idea." We should have focused on getting our community out to vote, emphasized "hand-to-hand contact," and communicated the urgency of the issue to gays and lesbians. (Hill, 1990).

With 30% of the eligible voters going to the polls, on January 19, 1985, Houston rejected propositions A and B by a 4:1 margin (Gravois, Grotta, Jan. 20, 1985). This resulted in the biggest setback in the history of gay and lesbian politics in Houston.

The referendum was the worst thing that has ever happened anywhere, or at any time, to a gay and lesbian community. It turned an administration away, candidates turned their backs, divided a community, and

has resulted in the rest of the decade being spent arguing about who is to blame (Gene Harrington, 1990).

The gay and lesbian movement was shattered. The message that Houston sent to the community was clear, "go back into the closet" (Scott, 1990). The results of a poll which asked: "Are you in favor of or opposed to the efforts to guarantee equal civil rights for homosexual men and women," indicated a sharp decline from a 50% favorable response in 1984 to a 27% favorable response at the time of the referendum in 1985 (Klineberg, Schnur, 1988). Many gays and lesbians left the city, others became angry at each other, while still others responded in a pattern of internalized shame (Scott). This shame is a result of many lesbians and gays accepting the lie sent by society, believing that something is, in fact, wrong with *being* who they are.

The 1985 city election proved to be open season on the gay and lesbian community. Neither the mayor nor any councilmember sought the GLPC endorsement (Kennedy, 1985). A political party, calling themselves the "Straight Slate" in reference to their anti-homosexual position, ran unsuccessfully against Whitmire and the other councilmembers who supported the gay and lesbian rights ordinance (Brockman, 1985). Welch, Whitmire's opponent in the mayor's

race, proposed mandatory testing for AIDS of all health workers and food handlers (Simmon, 1985). To exemplify the mood in the city at that time, Welch, not knowing that the microphone he was using during a television broadcast was live, was heard saying that his proposed solution to the AIDS problem was to "shoot the queers." He claimed that this was a joke (Ely, 1985). By the next day the homosexual community had printed Tee shirts with the slogan "Louie don't shoot."

In this turbulent environment the Caucus opted to retreat and regroup. Annise Parker won the election as president of the GLPC in January of 1986 (Elliott, 1986). Her platform was to maintain a low public profile and focus on the business needs of the organization (Elliot). In an interview with Gene Harrington (1990) he expressed how disastrous he believed this policy to be. He best expressed this opinion by quoting Harvey Milk, an openly gay activist elected to the Board of Supervisors in San Fransisco, as saying "Rights are not won on paper, but for people who are heard."

The real issue was that not one candidate in the 1985 election took a stand on the merits of the proposed ordinance (Harrington, 1990). "Each candidate chose the politics of expediency" (Harrington). As a result no politician in the city wanted to touch AIDS, "that was the real issue, and crime of the



referendum and led Houston to have the worst record in the nation on AIDS" (Harrington).

### The Lesbian Movement

*The ideas for the revolt were there: the importance of the personal; the need to change the quality of human relationships; the belief in participatory democracy; and, the importance of equality (Evans, 1980, p. 125).*

The lesbian and gay movements have been presented as if they were one -- to emphasize the proper contribution that the lesbian community has made to this social rights movement. Their contribution has been enormous. Indeed, the two communities do come together during good times, such as the gay and lesbian pride week celebrations, and during the bad times, such as during the referendum or to help meet the AIDS crisis (Anderson, 1990). It would be deceptive, however, to present these two communities as if they are one without acknowledging the unique needs and contributions of the lesbian community. Though the goals of the two movements are similar, the methods for achieving these goals may differ (Lovell, 1990).

To understand the differences between the two communities and their movements, one must look at the differences in the way boys and girls are raised (Anderson, 1990). Men, for instance, are raised to be more sexual and to be "conquerers." Women on the other hand, are raised to be nurturers (Anderson). As a result of this socialization, women have looked more toward the individual for social change, rather than to the macro social issues (Anderson). "A woman may volunteer to be a buddy (at the AIDS Foundation Houston (AFH)), rather than work for the Ann Richards campaign for Governor" (Anderson). The personal as political, borrowed from the feminist movement, is an important concept in understanding the lesbian movement.

Another difference in the socialization between the genders has led to differences in responses to oppression.

Women are more likely to suffer in silence. Men will fight back saying "I deserve it all." They will chain themselves to buildings, or lay down in the streets. Women (on the other hand) have internalized their rape and child abuse. What we should be saying is "no, I'm angry, and all you guys should help me" (Anderson, 1990).

The emphasis on consciousness raising has given the lesbian community 10 more years, than the gay male population, to address many of the important personal issues involved in growing up in an oppressive society (DiJacklin, 1990). As a matter of fact, "the lesbian community is more of a community within themselves" (DiJacklin). This knowledge, acquired from the lesbian community, has aided gay males to learn to deal with emotions, grief, and forming intimate mature relationships as a result of the AIDS crisis. AIDS has brought the two communities together, "sharing a common grief" (Lovell, 1990).

Many of these differences are a result of the origins of the lesbian movement itself. Many of the lesbian leaders in the early movement have their roots in the feminist organizations. Pokey Anderson was one of those leaders. In 1973, "when I first got involved, I had one foot in the feminist movement and one foot in the gay movement. There was no lesbian movement" (Anderson, 1990).

The "Sexuality and Lesbian Task Force of the National Organization for Women" (NOW) became locally organized and was a fertile ground for the beginnings of a lesbian movement in Houston (Anderson, 1990). Until this point in time there had been lesbians and lesbian bars, but there were no philosophical underpinnings (Anderson). At the first meeting of the task



force over 50 people attended (Anderson). As a result of this group, other organizations were formed such as a softball team, the Ducks; Point Blank Times, a newsletter; "Out and Out Productions," a production company; and later in the 70s "Off the Wall Productions," another dramatic group (Anderson).

Lesbians were not always welcomed in the feminist movement. NOW has a history of kicking lesbians out of the organization (Anderson, 1990). When Rita Mae Brown became outspoken as a lesbian she was asked to leave (Anderson). "NOW was a fertile ground, but they didn't want the exposure of lesbians. With the Equal Rights Amendment being debated lesbians were told they would have to 'wait their turn.' 'Lesbian baiting' was prevalent from the beginning" (Anderson). This attitude persisted despite the enormous contribution that lesbians made in the organization (Anderson).

The personal experiences of lesbians has been different than that of gay white males (Anderson, 1990). Lesbians have experienced discrimination as both women *and* lesbians. As a result of this oppression, the lesbian movement has been more willing to "express the need for coalitions with people of color, the handicapped, and the poor. We don't just want our slice of the pie, we want to change the pie. The issues go beyond gay and lesbian rights" (Anderson).

Women have a broader agenda (Anderson, 1990). One of the most important items on the lesbian agenda are women's health concerns. Scott (1990) questioned how many gay males were familiar with lesbian health problems. He added this lack of knowledge is "sexism." 40,000 women die of breast cancer each year (Anderson). This is more people than died of AIDS in the past year, and should be the next issue that the community addresses (Anderson). AIDS has exposed men to the fact that the health care system in this country does not work, something that the female population has known for some time (Lovell, 1990). "There has been no outcry from the community. Women are more likely to suffer in silence. The men will fight back" (Anderson). If AIDS had been a disease that had hit the lesbian population, would the gay population have responded the way the lesbian community has responded to them? Many of the lesbians interviewed for this paper believe that that would not be the case (Lovell). An example is the way that gay men have responded to pro-choice, an issue important to lesbians. The gay men have not responded to this issue the way that lesbians have responded to the AIDS crisis (Lovell).

The fight for basic civil rights for the lesbian and gay communities are the same. The history of the two movements differ, however, in both their experiences and methodologies. "In the beginning we could have had one gay rights movement

if women didn't feel that they had been pushed aside. They are never in the forefront. It is a societal problem. There is no reason to believe that we would be any different" (Lovell, 1990).

The lesbian community has much to teach gay males, and indeed society in general, about tolerance and a strong belief in the democratic process (Anderson, 1990). It is a community which deserves the respect it is due for its enormous contribution. A contribution which would require a paper of its own to properly document.

### **The Gay Holocaust: the Impact of AIDS on the Gay and Lesbian Culture**

*AIDS is our holocaust. Tens of thousands of our precious men are dying. Soon it will be hundreds of thousands. AIDS is our holocaust and Reagan is our Hitler* (Kramer, 1989, p. 173).

With little notice from the public, on July 04, 1981, an Associated Press report appeared in The Houston Post. The article indicated that a rare form of cancer, Kaposi's sarcoma, was appearing in the New York and California gay populations. Kaposi's sarcoma is one of the opportunistic diseases associated



with AIDS. Houston was not exempt from its effects. By 1986 AIDS became the leading cause of death for men between the ages of 25 and 44 in the Houston area (Legislative Task Force on AIDS, 1989).

Houston's city government became the national example of how an administration should *not* respond to AIDS, resulting in an inexcusable price to be paid by the gay and lesbian community (Harrington, 1990). Despite these obstacles homosexuals in Houston developed a greater sense of community and a more sophisticated communication network (Hill, 1990). By the end of the decade gays and lesbians "shined like a star, an example of compassion in serving our brothers in need" (Scott, 1990).

It is not possible to separate AIDS from the gay and lesbian culture and politics. "AIDS and gay are intertwined" (Harrington, 1990). Sue Lovell (1990) states the issue well. "We are AIDS defined. The (gay and lesbian) movement is only 20 years old, and for 10 of those years we have been dealing with AIDS.". Though the health crisis has primarily affected gay males, lesbians have been affected as well due to their association with gays (Huckaby, 1990). In response to AIDS they "wanted to take away our rights which we have fought for. They wanted to quarantine us. Society looks at lesbians as

part of the gay community, they would never have tried to separate us out (Lovell).

It would be a mistake to assume that AIDS activists and gay and lesbian activists are the same (Bell, 1990). Many people have become involved in the community because of AIDS, but this does not mean that they have made the connection between AIDS and their sexual orientation in a political context (Lovell, 1990).

Additionally, many believe that it is a mistake to attempt to separate AIDS from gay and lesbian politics. Harrington is one of those individuals. First, it "implies that something is wrong with being gay." Second, it is "denying statistical reality." Third, "it does not work" (1990). This approach has resulted in the AIDS Alliance having no official representative of the gay and lesbian community on its board, and the state legislature writing a homophobic piece of legislation in response to AIDS (Harrington). Additionally, "de-gayng has not meant more money" (Harrington). In the process of denying the connection between AIDS and the gay and lesbian community, Harrington adds, "you don't get compassion, you only lose your selfworth."

The scope of the problem is enormous. AIDS is a growing health concern in this country, leading to what some believe is the greatest health crisis in this century. More Americans have

been diagnosed with AIDS than died in Viet Nam (Yeide, 1987). The Center for Disease Control now reports over 143,286 confirmed cases of AIDS in the United States (HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 1990). This is a dramatic increase over the number of cases reported at this time last year. 40,960 new cases have been reported in the last 12 months alone (HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report).

These numbers are misleading, because it only represents cases of "full-blown" AIDS. If we accept that there are nine cases of AIDS Related Complex (ARC) (Kramer, 1989) for each case of AIDS, then the number of ill from HIV infection becomes a staggering 1,432,860. This still does not represent the total number of people *infected* with the virus.

Many health officials believe that there is substantial under-reporting of the number of cases. In Houston, for instance, there are 4,582 confirmed cases, but health officials believe that the actual number of ill is 7,658 (SoRelle, 1990). Houston is projecting a 600 percent increase in the number of diagnosed cases in the next five years (SoRelle). With 80 percent of the local cases affecting homosexual males, the impact this disease has had on this community becomes apparent (Houston Department of Health and Human Services, 1989).



The effect of AIDS on the community has been catastrophic. AIDS devastated the idealism of the community, required gays to refocus on their lifestyle, some members would need to redefine what it meant to be gay, most had to change their behavior, and it placed the community in a position of high visibility in public discussion of individual's most intimate acts (Scott, 1990). But the community did change.

The lifestyle changes that AIDS has required have been numerous. The community has become more health conscious as a result of AIDS (Dickie, 1990). There has been a rise in the number of persons joining 12 step groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, and Overeaters Anonymous (Dickie). This has led to the rapid growth in gay and lesbian participation in these organizations, all with gay and lesbian chapters. Others, however, have buried themselves still deeper in drugs and alcohol (Bell, 1990).

AIDS has required that the community step back and look at many of its activities. Because of the method of contagion, it has required changes in one's sexual behavior. The facts became clear, the very act of certain intimate sexual activities had the potential to kill. This struck at the core of what it meant to be gay for some individuals. The gay culture was one of the leaders in the sexual revolution which swept

across America and Europe in the 70s. "Growing up as gay men we received negative messages about our sexuality" (Dickie, 1990). Many gays affirmed their identity through their sexual prowess. Then AIDS came back as a harmful result of this search for oneself (Dickie).

Reacting in an established pattern, some responded to the crisis with shame and guilt. "HIV infection puts one more thing on top of the shame and fear (internalized by the community)" (DiJacklin, 1990). The reality, however, is that to be gay or lesbian is a whole different mind set (Bell, 1990). To be gay or lesbian means a great deal more than one's sexuality. It is a culture that "builds bonds and loving relationships" (Harrington, 1990).

Relationships have also changed due to the impact of this health crisis. AIDS has "forced us to become intimate" (Bradley, 1990). "People are focusing on relationship concerns. Turning to romance and dating. We are moving out of adolescence into mature emotional relationships. If a cure for AIDS was found, would we go back to the way we were? I don't think we would" (Dickie, 1990).

One cannot leave the discussion of the personal impact that AIDS has had on the community without a discussion of grief. Grief has become a "constant companion" of gays and lesbians (Hill, 1990). At the Candlelight March and Tribute in

downtown Houston on October 7, 1990, Steven Bradley communicated the degree of loss in the community.

It is no more tragic for a child in the beginning of its life to die than it is for an adult to have their life ended in mid stream. This disease has no single identity. AIDS is not gay or straight; black, white, or latino; male or female. It has no boundaries. And I'm afraid. Time is so precious. I don't want to see any more quilts with my friends' names on them. I feel we all have AIDS, some of us have it in our bodies and some of you have it in your hearts, like my two friends standing with me, all of us have AIDS in our life (Bradley, 1990, 07 Oct.).

Not only did AIDS effect individual lives, but it also changed the social rights movement as well. The premature death of the leaders to AIDS has been an enormous loss to the movement (Harrington, 1990). Leaders like Tom Odett, founder of the Montrose Clinic; Ken Vance, Member of the Board of Directors of the Montrose Counseling Center; Michael McAdory, founding member of the AFH; Michael Wilson, former President of the AFH; Jim Beecher, former President of the AFH; Don Elgin, social worker and Director of AIDS Programs at the Montrose Counseling Center; Gary Treese, social worker and



activist; Fred Richardson, social worker at the Montrose Counseling Center, Gary Bourigard, Social Service Director of the AFH; Don Hrachovy, former president of the GLPC; Bruce Cook, President of the PWA Coalition; and this is far from a comprehensive list (Dickie, DiJacklin, Hill, Harrington, 1990). The depth of the talent lost to this disease is immeasurable; yet it is just the beginning. Bell expresses this concern as well: "I have looked around a room and thought, one-half of these guys will not be here in five years" (1990).

Another impact that AIDS has had on the political movement has been the depletion of funds. AIDS has diverted a tremendous amount of resources and energy away from the political causes in the community (Harrington, 1990).

The gay and lesbian community has not only changed in response to AIDS, but the larger society's perception of this community has changed as well. "AIDS has gotten heterosexuals talking about gay and lesbian issues. With AIDS moving into the straight community, it has forced churches and governments to look at homosexual issues. Before there wasn't a need" (Huckaby, 1990). AIDS, and the gay and lesbian response to the crisis, has also helped the credibility of the community (Lovell, 1990). "We are seen in a different light, as a caring community. Our perception in society was that they

thought we were wimps. What we showed them is that we were incredibly strong. We even surprised ourselves" (Lovell).

Finally, AIDS resulted in a maturation process for the community (Hill, 1990). "The 80s were a period of serious commitment to the sick. There is no comparison in the personal sacrifice by individuals since the underground railroad" (Hill). As a result of this caring, the community developed a major infra-structure like no other community in the city of Houston (Harrington, 1990).

In response to the crisis, Houston's gay and lesbian community formed early grassroots organizations. Dr. Peter Mansell was the first doctor in Houston to alert the community to the dangers of AIDS in 1981 (Scott, 1990). It should be noted that AIDS had no name at that point in time. No one even knew that it was a virus. Young healthy men were simply dying of rare diseases for no apparent reason. Peter Mansell, Didier Piot, Guy Nuel, Micheal McAdory an early person with AIDS (PWA), and members of the staff of MD Anderson Hospital, began to meet weekly at 1:30 Tuesday afternoons to discuss the issue (Scott).

As a result of this early communication, Debra Danburg, Guy Nuel, Michael Wilson, Didier Piot, and Michael McAdory formed the Kaposi's Sarcoma Committee of Houston, the first AIDS organization in the city (Scott, 1990). The organization

later became known as the AFH. It became apparent that the need for social services was enormous (Scott). Bill Scott became head of the organization's social service committee (Scott).

As the impact of the health crisis grew so did the number of AIDS related organizations. Jay Nelson approached Bering Memorial United Methodist Church to form a support group for PWAs. The group grew rapidly to a weekly attendance of 100. The Bering Community Service Foundation was created as an independent fund raising arm of the church, providing monies for the creation of a dental clinic and day care facility for PWAs. The AFH created a food bank, Stone Soup, for its clients, the Montrose Counseling Center provided counseling services for both PWAs and those suffering from the loss of loved ones. Omega House was organized to care for the dying, because no nursing home would accept PWAs. Act-Up, a national organization, was organized in Houston as an activist political organization to bring attention to the lack of public services provided.

In 1988 another group was formed when six individuals got together in an attempt to put a positive face on HIV (Bradley, 1990). The result was the formation of Body Positive. The group first met in the backyard of The New Counseling Center founded by Bill Scott (Bradley). The concept of the



organization was to provide education, peer counseling, and special presentations (Bradley). The group has been involved in social activities and volunteer assistance such as providing baskets at Christmas and use of a buddy system (Bradley). In the last six months the organization has been promoting the "get tested now" program (Bradley). By 1989, there were 21 community sponsored AIDS related organizations in Houston (TWT, Dec. 15-21, 1989). These new service, political and social organizations became the new "free spaces" for the community. These organizations became safe training grounds for homosexuals in managing, planning, and organizing social change.

Sue Lovell (1990) describes the amazing accomplishments of these grassroots organizations:

We became the experts. When we saw the devastation, we wrote the educational programs, set up social service programs from scratch, developed teams to stay with people dying while dealing with one's own anger at a non-responsive government, and this all happened in nine years (1990).

If it had not been for the gay and lesbian community, there would not have been *any* social services for PWAs. The

cost to the community, however, was enormous. The community had limited resources to meet these growing needs.

The lesbian and gay community has had to provide all the services needed for the growing PWA population. The community has had to provide the housing, food, and beds for PWAs to sleep. A vast number of services have been required, and all have been provided by the gay and lesbian community. We have become symbols of compassion and resilience, but the price has been inexcusable. The city of Houston has not spent one tax dollar on AIDS (Harrington, 1990).

Why has the gay and lesbian community had to expend all its energy in "staying alive" (Harrington, 1990)? Why has the city not responded with compassion, leaving educational efforts and social services to be provided by these grassroots organizations and their limited financial resources? This continual struggle has left those outside the gay and lesbian community, who are attempting to deal with AIDS, with the feeling of hopelessness. Those within the community are beyond this phase (DiJacklin, 1990).

Throughout the crisis the city's response has been minimal. When asked during the interviews "what do you

think of the city's response to the AIDS crisis?" The answer was consistent by all interviewed. "What response?" Houston with the fourth largest number of cases in the nation has *not spent one dollar of tax revenues on AIDS* (Harrington, 1990). This was confirmed in a memo from the Health Director to City Councilmember Ben Reyes (Harrington). Only recently has the city even had an outreach to the gay community, who comprises the greatest risk of exposure to the virus (Lovell, 1990). The present commitment by the city to the gay community is the assignment of *one* AIDS educator (Lovell). "Dogs and cats receive better treatment from the city of Houston than do PWAs" (Harrington).

"The mayor and her assistants have responded by blaming the victims" (Harrington, 1990). An assistant to the mayor, Kay Little, when asked about the lack of response by the city to the needs of PWAs answered, "the city doesn't provide housing for women dying of breast cancer" (Harrington). As Harrington points out, what type of explanation is this? Just because the city does not meet the needs of women, is no justification for not meeting the needs of PWAs or any other group, including women. Besides, the parallel is weak. How many women lose their jobs because they have breast cancer. In a recent survey, 15 percent of the respondents reported they lost their jobs, and 9 percent lost



their housing, due to AIDS discrimination (Legislative Task Force on AIDS, 1989). One-third of the respondents were rejected by their families (Legislative Task Force on AIDS).

From the beginning there has been a lack of leadership resulting in little or no planning by the city to address the AIDS crisis (Falletti, 1990). Haughton was Director of the Health Department who did not think that AIDS was a priority and refused to divert funds from other sources to address the growing problem (Falletti). Kathy Whitmire, mayor of Houston, additionally, did not make AIDS a priority. She did not wish to work with the local organizations (Lovell, 1990). In fact, the AFH asked Whitmire to make a public service announcement, which would not have cost the city any money, and she refused (Lovell). The Mayor had clearly forgotten who had elected her to office (Bell, 1990).

As discussed earlier, the referendum had resulted in the local politicians avoiding the gay and lesbian community. "After the referendum the mayor felt, first, we were a political liability. Second, our issues were a political liability. Third, we couldn't offer anything in return. Therefore she decided to look for other issues" (Harrington, 1990). In a token effort to appease the community Whitmire formed the Mayor's AIDS Task Force (Scott, 1990). Scott was a member, but resigned, "because no funding existed to do anything" (Scott). Scott

described the extent of the mayor's single minded political motivation. "At a meeting with the mayor, Michael McAdory told her that she was 'killing people.' The mayor turned red with anger. She exhibited no empathy at all."

After the demise of the Mayor's AIDS Task Force, the city and county came together to form the City County Panel on AIDS (Falletti, 1990). This panel was formed in response to the lack of planning which had resulted in both the city and local AIDS service organizations losing out on both federal and private funding. The city was looking for a method to achieve a coordinated effort to enable it to respond to large and complicated grant applications. This organization accomplished little (Falletti).

The next effort by the city and county, to provide a meaningful AIDS coordinating organization, was the formation of the AIDS Alliance of Greater Houston (Falletti, 1990). The Alliance by-laws requires minorities and women be represented on the Board, but the group most affected, gays and lesbians, are not guaranteed representation (Faletti). The mayor chose to select members to the Alliance, not due to their knowledge on AIDS, but due to their status in the community. Without the expertise Houston has continued to lose out on meaningful planning and funding (Falletti).

In an early blunder, the first project that the Alliance choose to present to the community was an insurance plan (Falletti, 1990). This proposal, led by John McFather, was from "left field." The community was concerned with indigent care and the Alliance response was what amounted to a Preferred Physicians Organization (PPO) to save insurance companies money (Falletti). If there had been adequate representation of the gay and lesbian community the Alliance probably would not have made such a blunder (Falletti). Additionally, there have been concerns expressed as to the lack of lesbian or gay directors within AIDS organization (Harrington, 1990).

The AIDS Equity League was formed in response to these callous positions taken by the Alliance. Harrington (1990) explains their mission. "We have watched while the Alliance has been enept and incompetent. Now is the time to take the reins of power. If we do not, it will be our death. We have everything to gain and nothing to lose."

The city is not responsible for healthcare, but there are three things that the city could have done in response to the epidemic. One, the city could have provided early education. If the city did not have the expertise or the necessary cultural sensitivity, then it could have sub-contracted this out to organizations which did (Falletti, 1990). Second, the city could have provided social services to individuals once they were



sick. As David Fowler (1990) expressed it: "We are not asking for a cure, but to take care of those who are ill." Third, in an effort to reach out to the gay and lesbian community, the mayor could have appointed a homosexual to replace Haughton, after his resignation. This would have accomplished the same thing for the lesbian and gay community, that the mayor achieved with the Black community by selecting Brown to head the Houston Police Department.

After 10 years there is still no planning (Fowler, 1990). After 10 years the mayor still walks out during the unfolding of the AIDS quilt, after she has "done her duty" (Bradley, 1990). After 10 years the mayor is still not standing on her principles. After 10 years the new Director of the Alliance is quoted as saying "The reason they make all those AIDS blankets is because they have all that energy and nothing to do" (Harrington, 1990). After 10 years the city Health Department is still duplicating services provided in the community, while not funding those community based organizations adequately. 10 years into the epidemic "the city is still sitting with empty office space and money being sent back, because they don't know how to use it" (Fowler). 10 years into the epidemic the city is still not providing education where it will make a difference, in the gay community (Harrington). 10 years into the epidemic the gay and lesbian

community is tired, still having to carry the load. "If education prevents AIDS, and the city has done nothing to educate those at greatest risk, then the city (still) has blood on its hands" (Harrington).

AIDS has defined the very culture of the lesbian and gay community, and as has been exemplified the community has heroically responded to the challenge. The problem, however, is structural. "AIDS has affected the movement. It has brought forth a generation of gays (and lesbians) with a need for empowerment. Unless you change the hospital district, then there won't be any beds available" (Harrington, 1990).

### **New Social Movement Theory as an Explanation for the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement**

*Empowerment is taking control of your own life*  
(Harrington, 1990).

There have been many attempts to explain the development of social movements in contemporary society and a search for an explanation of the gay and lesbian rights movement has been no exception. The gay and lesbian community has provided a well organized, and rational response to an oppressive society, making Collective Behavior

Theory an inappropriate explanation for the rise of this movement. There is no indication that the community depended on outside resources to finance the movement. Resource Mobilization, therefore, becomes an inadequate explanation. Resource Mobilization, also, down plays culture as a criteria for any movement (Morris, 1984). This paper has stressed that without a gay and lesbian culture, and resultant community, there would not have been the development of a movement in the first place. Pluralism, additionally is inappropriate, because it assumes that all individuals or groups of individuals have equal access to power. The referendum, discussed earlier, has clearly indicated that this is not the case.

Classical Marxism, additionally, lacks as an explanation for the rise of a gay and lesbian movement. As previously mentioned, the purpose of the movement has not been to change the political or economic system. Additionally, the lesbian and gay movement cannot be explained in the working class framework. Gays and lesbians represent all classes.

On the other hand, NSM theory, with its emphasis on building community and a focus on the creation of a cultural identity seems to work well in explaining the rise of this rights movement in Houston. Barbara Epstein discusses the importance of community and cultural identity in NSM theory:



The overriding goals of the movement have been a cultural revolution, within and without: that is, creating a movement that embodies the values of a new society and bringing about fundamental changes in social values, in the way people think about social relations. To most activists in the movement, these goals have been more important than achieving particular policy changes or wresting particular concessions from those in power. The movement has relied on symbolism and ritual to convey its message and has emphasized the creation of community. Many activists within it have regarded the direct action movement as revolutionary, but their understanding of revolution does not revolve around seizing state power, and it gives as much emphasis to changing culture as it does to transforming political and economic structures (1990, p. 36-37).

The history of the gay and lesbian movement, in the context of the "personal as political," is consistent with this explanation. First, the goal of the movement has been to gain social acceptance in a "society which forces gays and lesbians to fight for the right of dignity" (Harrington, 1990). This acceptance has been stressed both internally and externally.

From within the community gays and lesbians have attempted to address internalized homophobia. This shame and guilt has been a major obstacle to moving gay and lesbian rights forward. After the referendum, for instance, the community has been reluctant to *demand* assistance in their fight for human rights and indeed their very lives. "When we were rejected we became afraid to ask for anything. We didn't know what to ask for, and were afraid of the rejection if they said no" (Lovell, 1990).

Part of our homophobia is our lack of asking for more support. Somehow (gays and lesbians tell themselves that) we are not really deserving. That is why those closet doors are so tightly closed. An example is the Names Project mailout. There was a long list of contributors. All the heterosexuals were listed as couples. There was not one same sex couple listed together. If we don't acknowledge our relationships, why should anyone else. The greatest thing I can do is to help bring people out of the closet, to be visible (Bell, 1990).

The response to AIDS has also indicated the depth of homophobia in the community. At first the community attempted to deny the connection between AIDS and gays.

This resulted in a negative message being sent that there must be something wrong with being gay. Therefore, the community has looked outside itself for an answer to the epidemic (Harrington, 1990). It is apparent that, though some progress has been made, there is still much "excess baggage" to be dealt with. Via consciousness raising, empowering individuals to be proud of their culture and their identity, much can and has been accomplished. Consciousness raising is helpful in determining that there are times "when the world, not the individual, is crazy" (Anderson, 1990). Hill (1990) sums up this idea well, "Oppression is not something out there, something that people do to us. It is that which is a personal manifestation of what is out there."

Indeed some believe that homophobia must be dealt with before meaningful social change becomes possible. David Fowler is one of those persons. "The self worth problem is so bad that many believe that they must stay quiet. Nothing will change until they are drawn out. You must feel good about yourself before you may want to make changes. We must deal with homophobia first, before direct action becomes possible" (Fowler, 1990).

Externally, the community has fought for its identity as well. The birth, rise, and maturity of the gay and lesbian political rights organizations has been focused on the legal and



social acceptance of this alternative lifestyle. Examples have been given throughout this paper, such as the formation of the GLPC, the fight for a gay and lesbian employment protection ordinance, and/or representation on the Alliance Board. The greatest outrage, however, has come from the gay and lesbian community when there have been external threats to the cultural institution most important to this community, the bar (Fowler, 1990). As discussed earlier in this paper, when the bars were raided one would see an increase in political activism. When this cultural institution was no longer perceived as being threatened, one sees a decline in political organization.

Second, this internal and external struggle by this emerging culture has relied on symbolism to convey its message. The referendum was largely a symbolic gesture to the gay and lesbian community, since it would not have resulted in any actual changes in city hiring practices. The opposition was largely organized around this symbolic social acceptance of gays and lesbians. Anita Bryant became a symbol of fear to the community of an oppressive society toward a gay and lesbian culture (Hill, 1990). Die-ins, conducted at city hall, have been symbolic gestures to exemplify the lack of city support for AIDS programs (Fowler, 1990).

The goal of these activities has been to change the way that society views gay and lesbian culture, and as a result of this change in attitude, to equitably respond to the social injustice and present health crisis. The focus has been on society, not the state. At best, there have been calls for an equitable representation in the present system.

Another important quality of NSM theory deserving discussion is the emphasis on the fragmentation of movements.

New Social Movement theory emphasizes the diffuse, fragmentary quality of many of the movements of the late twentieth century, their emphasis on particular, limited objectives, their defensive quality. The emphasis on the multiplicity of the constituencies of the various movements, their concern that no one element come to dominate the rest, makes it easy to understand the wariness toward efforts to unify the movement as a whole or even to construct a shared agenda (Epstein, 1990, p. 46).

The lesbian and gay rights movement exemplifies this concept well. First, the very fact that there is a movement which focuses on the sexual orientation of its members, represents limited objectives in the larger context of a human

rights movement. For instance, there has often been differences between this community and the Afro-American community. During the referendum the gay and lesbian community did not receive broad based support from other minorities. Its leaders largely supported the measure, but there was not widespread support of the legislation as a human rights issue among their followers.

Second, there has been a diffusion of organizations within the community itself. There have been numerous political organizations. C-PAC formed as a spin-off of the GLPC due to differences in political ideology. There are organizations for gay atheists; a Hispanic organization to meet the AIDS crisis, Amigos Volunteers in AIDS Education and Services (AVES); and a Hispanic gay and lesbian political organization. The list of specialized gay and lesbian organizations in Houston is extensive (The Guide, 1990, 09 Nov.). Not to mention, the major division which periodically occurs between gays and lesbians.

As of November 9, 1990, TWT listed 122 Houston organizations and helplines in "The Guide." This does not represent the broad base of support in the community, as much as it represents the fragmentation which has taken place within the community itself. It should be noted that part of the reason for this multiplicity is the diversity which exists in



the gay and lesbian community. In fact, it is this diversity which many celebrate. Ray Hill (1990) expresses this position well when he describes the diversity in the community as being "wonderful." Epstein indicates in her article that this is where NSM theory overlap with postmodernism (Epstein, 1990). "Postmodernists celebrate fragmentation and the disappearance of universal values" (p. 49). It is also all these "ism's" that makes it difficult to unify the movement.

The NSM theory is an important explanation to the development of the gay and lesbian rights movement. An emphasis on this theoretical explanation, which focuses on the development of culture and community identity, at the exclusion of social movement theory to address the systemic problems within the society, has the danger of becoming "magical thinking." This is not meant to deny the importance, of addressing internalized homophobia, or "empowering" members of the community. It is meant to point out that we live in a state and society which oppresses gay and lesbian people, and only when focus is maintained on changes in government policy, can real progress be accomplished. This type of change may be happening soon in Houston. "Empowerment is taking control of your own lives and this has just started to happen in last six months" (Harrington, 1990).

## Moving Beyond Cultural Identity To Social Change

*Rights are not won by words on paper, but by people who make their voices heard* (Harvey Milk, cited by Harrington, 1990).

Let us review the conditions for gays and lesbians in Houston. As this paper has indicated, there is a long history of societal and state oppression. In the state of Texas for a gay or lesbian to act on their sexual feelings, even between consenting adults in the privacy of their own home, makes them a criminal. 21.06 is still law. "Until we strike down 21.06, we are cut off from the American dream" (Fowler, 1990). A leader in the movement was killed by a police officer, who in turn was acquitted of any wrongdoing. Discrimination is still widespread in employment and housing, for which there exists no legal recourse. Houston sent a loud message to gays and lesbians to stay in the "closet" after the referendum, many responded in shame and guilt. People are still dying of AIDS with little or no assistance from the state or city in social services. The Alliance still does not mandate a representative of the gay and lesbian community on its board, the community most affected by AIDS. There is still no representative of the gay or lesbian community on the city council, when this population represents an

estimated 10 percent of the people in Houston. It is still extremely difficult for a gay or lesbian to adopt a child and child custody battles are common when the sexual orientation of the spouse becomes known. Indigent health care, important to the community due to AIDS, is poor. With these facts in mind, it becomes apparent that the system itself must be changed to address this social injustice. But how does one accomplish this? Direct action has been one response.

In Houston the gay and lesbian community has used direct action as a technique to effect change. The problem has been in generating widespread support in the community to respond in rage to this oppression (Fowler, 1990). Much of the anger has either been medicated away, by well meaning physicians, or internalized (Huckaby, 1990). The march against Anita Bryant was the first example of what can occur by a frightened and motivated community in Houston. In another example of direct action, David Fowler organized the Cure AIDS Now rally during the International Economic Summit, held in Houston in the summer of 1990, to focus attention on the lack of AIDS research (Fowler). It was well organized and resulted in 2200 people attending, but lacked the necessary widespread national media attention (Fowler).

Gene Harrington (1990) expresses the importance of direct action in social change:



Direct action is important. No civil rights have been successful, because of people writing pamphlets. The American Revolution was started by dumping tea into Boston harbor. Civil disobedience is necessary in all movements. All have a framework of the acceptable versus the unacceptable.

Deborah Bell (1990) agrees: "Things don't happen out of the goodness of their heart. Civil rights happened, because Blacks stopped riding the buses. This is why it is important that we continue to return to Austin (and march for our rights)."

One cannot leave the discussion of social activism in the lesbian and gay community, without mentioning the "Names Project" quilt. This project, organized by Cleve Jones in San Francisco and which toured Houston over the Columbus Day weekend in 1990, provides a memorial to those who have died of AIDS. It is one of the more effective social action tools which the community has created. When asked to express his opinion of the "AIDS quilt," Lee Harrington (1990) responded:

Brilliant. It is an avenue for grief, a monument to our loss and achievement. A visible indication to the magnitude of lives and energy which has been lost. A lasting symbol of the way gay life is.

But is direct action an adequate response to bring about meaningful change? As indicated, the problem has been that these events have lacked media exposure and widespread community support. What additionally is required?

Fisher and Kling (1987) give us some insight into an answer to this question. They cite George Rude, who emphasizes the importance of ideology as a necessary ingredient for accomplishing this goal. Rude believes that ideology is necessary for a popular organization to "move beyond existing social and political parameters." I believe, that for significant social change to occur, the gay and lesbian community must adhere to an inclusive ideology emphasizing human dignity and equal rights for all people.

This inclusive ideology was expressed by *all* of those interviewed. The issue is oppression, no matter what form it may take, or against whom it may be directed. Oppression, anywhere, should become a gay and lesbian issue.

I am pro-choice, because the issues are the same. It is over control of my body. I'm not an integrationist, because it will win support of Blacks, but, because I don't want to live in a world with racism. When freedom and equality do not exist, it is a gay and lesbian issue that

must be reformed. What happens in South Africa is important to all gay and lesbian people (Hill, 1990).

The gay and lesbian community leadership has become a model of living by these principles. In the organizational meetings, to formulate the rules for the next march on Washington, the participants expressed the extent of this commitment. The rules call for 20 percent minority participation, and gender parity on all committees (Hill, 1990). "*Inclusiveness is our ideology*" (Hill).

But, is ideology combined with direct action adequate to result in significant social change? Epstein (1990) introduces an additional necessary ingredient, the need for strategy. Epstein discusses the lack of strategy present in much of the direct action movement.

There has been a strong tendency within the direct action movement to think that imagining a better world, and collectively and symbolically acting upon that belief, is either the same thing as strategy or makes strategy unnecessary. This is the kind of magical thinking that leads people to believe that a large enough occupation will in itself lead to the closure of a nuclear plant or arms



facility, and to become disappointed and disillusioned when that does not happen (p. 53).

Additionally, this inclusive ideology, combined with a strategy for change, must appeal to a broad base of support. Epstein (1990), presenting a concept developed by Glotz, discusses the importance of a strategy which appeals to the middle-third of society.

The New Deal ... was possible because large sections of what was then the middle-third of U.S. society came to identify their interests with the right of workers to organize and of poor people generally to better conditions of life. This analysis does not suggest that the middle-third is the initiator of change, but that it holds the swing vote, or in other words, that the tone of political life is determined by the alliances this sector chooses to form (p. 59).

A strategy of significant coalition building seems the most obvious method to achieve this widespread support. The fact of the matter is that approximately 10 percent of the population will never be able to achieve the necessary changes to effect systemic societal reforms. This can only occur with

the formation of coalitions based on the ideological principle previously presented.

Lovell, however, warns of building coalitions without the necessary ideological base. Any coalition building must be "for the common good and goal. Not to elect certain officials. This has been the mistake in Houston. You must have an ideology in common. Without this you will continue to elect people who won't push your agenda" (Lovell, 1990).

The gay and lesbian community has been successful in some coalition building. There are strong ties with the feminist movement and the women's movement, and at times with Blacks (Lovell, 1990). Additionally, there have been some successful ties developed with the labor movement (Hill, 1990).

The future that I hope to see for Houston is the development of lasting and real coalitions, based on an inclusive ideology, which will bring about meaningful change to the social injustice prevalent in this community. The lack of adequate indigent health care for PWAs will be recognized as the need to provide a better and more equitable method for providing health care to all its citizens. The gay and lesbian community will recognize the unacceptable level of infant mortality in Houston's inner city and make it a gay and lesbian issue. The community will support Black South Africans in their fight for liberation. A future in which homosexuals will

recognize that the right of a woman to control her own body is also a gay and lesbian issue, because it is an issue over the right to privacy. I look to a gay and lesbian community in which the rights of the earth and its animals are recognized and respected. I believe in working toward this future, because all of these issues represent a systematic oppression of the *right to a life with dignity*.

### A Look To the Future

*The future looks bright. We have been through the darkness, and we could not possibly be in a worse position as we were the day after the referendum. Progress will be won by constant punching, fighting for the repeal of 21.06, demanding the end to police harassment, presenting a united pressure. If you believe in the righteousness of human rights, you have to have a positive outlook. In the darkest days of the holocaust, they must have known that they would prevail* (Harrington, 1990).

When one considers that Stonewall, a riot in New York City which many consider to be the beginning of the gay and lesbian rights movement, was less than 25 years ago the



accomplishments of this social rights movement have been amazing (Harrington, 1990). Houston has been an active part of this social movement since the beginning. Houston's homosexual community grew from the lone voice of Ray Hill in the 60s, into an influential political organization, exemplifying the best qualities of what a caring community should be. Many thought the referendum would mean the end of the GLPC, but that turned out not to be the case. It is again recognized as an important political force in Houston, with candidates vying for its endorsement. Others predicted that AIDS would destroy the community, but that as well has not been the case. Yet, as we enter the decade of the 90s, 21.06 is still law in Texas, after a brief period of being declared unconstitutional.

It is an ideology of the righteousness of human rights that has been fundamental to the birth and survival of this movement. It is this unifying force which kept the movement alive through the difficult times which it has faced. The history of the fight for human dignity by the gay and lesbian community in Houston has not been an easy one, nor is the fight complete. But it is a history of a fight conducted by a community of heroes.

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Footnotes

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<sup>1</sup>Article 21.06 states it is illegal in the state of Texas for members of the same sex to engage in intercourse.

<sup>2</sup>The original name of the organization was the Gay Political Caucus. The name was later changed to the Gay and Lesbian Political Caucus. To reduce confusion and in respect to the enormous contribution of the lesbian community to the organization since its inception, I have opted to use the later name.

<sup>3</sup>Remmington is previously referenced as stating that the GLPC had a mailing list of 14,000 names. Canetti in her article quotes a mailing list of 8,022. The author recognizes the discrepancy between these statistics.