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# Freedom Indivisible: Gays and Lesbians in the African American Civil Rights Movement

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FREEDOM INDIVISIBLE: GAYS AND LESBIANS IN THE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

by

Jared E. Leighton

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Patrick D. Jones

Lincoln, Nebraska

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FREEDOM INDIVISIBLE: GAYS AND LESBIANS IN THE  
AFRICAN AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Jared E. Leighton, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2013

Adviser: Patrick D. Jones

This work documents the role of sixty gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals in the African American civil rights movement in the pre-Stonewall era. It examines the extent of their involvement from the grassroots to the highest echelons of leadership. Because many lesbians and gays were not out during their time in the movement, and in some cases had not yet identified as lesbian or gay, this work also analyzes how the civil rights movement, and in a number of cases women's liberation, contributed to their identity formation and coming out. This work also contributes to our understanding of opposition to the civil rights movement by examining the ways in which forces opposed to racial equality used the real or perceived sexual orientation of activists against the civil rights movement. Given the primacy of religion in the civil rights movement, this work also looks at the ways religious conviction did and did not motivate lesbians and gays in the movement. It also assesses the long-term influence of religion in their lives as many of these activists went on to women's liberation and gay liberation and various denominations responded to these movements. Finally, this dissertation reveals how activists in the civil rights movement used the consciousness and strategies

they acquired during their time in the civil rights movement in subsequent efforts for LGBT equality.

This work employs oral history, archival records, existing secondary literature, and other sources to add a new piece to our understanding of the long civil rights movement. These sources encourage us to think more broadly about the intersections of various freedom struggles and more deeply about major issues in the civil rights movement. Finally, assessing the role of these activists should help us better evaluate the long-term impact of the civil rights movement. Beyond inspiring other movements, the African American civil rights movement was the training ground for many activists in other struggles. Efforts for black civil rights helped lay the foundation for gay and lesbian liberation.

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## INTRODUCTION - "HIDDEN LIVES"

In his memoir *Walking With the Wind*, John Lewis writes,

Many movements besides civil rights were taking shape, and several of those movements found both their roots and their future leaders in Mississippi that summer [...] The atmosphere of openness and breaking down barriers that we developed that summer extended far beyond issues of race. They extended into everything from sexuality to gender roles, from communal living to identification with working classes. And they live on today. I have no doubt that the Mississippi Summer Project, in the end, led to the liberating of America, the opening up of our society. The peace movement, the women's movement, the gay movement – they all have roots that can be traced back to Mississippi in the summer of '64."<sup>1</sup>

Congressman Lewis is astute in recognizing the interconnectedness of movements for social justice and identified a number of causes that were allied with and inspired by the black freedom struggle. However, historians have yet to establish clear connections between the black civil rights movement and many other movements. More specifically, the link from the African American civil rights movement to the homophile and gay liberation movements remains a tenuous one, often based on assertion rather than evidence. There are scattered sources mentioning gays and lesbians with backgrounds in the civil rights movement. But, even then, many authors provide little detail to give texture to the experiences of gays and lesbians in the black freedom struggle and often neglect to explain how it affected their later activism. A project which establishes strong connections between the two movements by bringing together these scattered sources, seeking out those whose stories are not on the record, and providing these narratives with greater analytical depth remains a necessity.

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<sup>1</sup> John Lewis with Michael D'Orso, *Walking With the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 273. This title is drawn from my interview with Margaret Rose Gladney.

## Civil Rights Movement Historiography

Very few sources in the historiography of the African American civil rights movement make mention of sexual orientation. Because the movement was focused on issues of racial justice, the early historiography followed suit with a strict focus on race. When the first historical works on the Civil Rights Era began to appear in the 1970s, many scholars wrote biographies or traditional legal and institutional histories. Social history exerted little force on the field until the 1980s when there appeared increasing emphasis on women, local people, lesser-known volunteers, as well as issues like labor and religion.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1990s, historians increasingly traced the roots of the civil rights movement to an earlier era, examined armed resistance, revised the declension narrative of Black Power, and looked to the civil rights movement in the North. More recently, scholars have emphasized how Cold War Era calculations were instrumental in pushing the U.S. towards greater protection of civil rights for African Americans. Similarly, they have also looked increasingly at the global dimensions of the civil rights and Black Power movements. Historians of the era have also taken increasingly to assessing the long-term consequences of the civil rights movement, including shortcomings in remedying segregation, poverty and persistent white supremacy.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *The Journal of Southern History* 66:4 (Nov., 2000), 822-28.

<sup>3</sup> Christina Greene, "What's Sex Got to Do With It: Gender and the New Black Freedom Movement Scholarship," *Feminist Studies* 32:1 (Spring, 2006), 164.

In 2000, Charles W. Eagles presented an assessment of the historiography of the civil rights movement in the *Journal of Southern History* which included recommendations for many areas of future investigation. One absence he noted was the lack of work on sex and sexuality in the movement. Eagles suggested further research on interracial sex and its effects on the movement and the role of gays and lesbians in the movement beyond Allard Lowenstein, Bayard Rustin and Aaron Henry. He noted, “While Sara Evans linked the movement to women’s liberation, no one has examined the possible connections between the black struggle and the gay rights movement.”<sup>4</sup>

Since then, the role of gays and lesbians continues to appear only rarely. Bayard Rustin continues to be the focal point of much of the discussion. In *Parting the Waters* (1988), Taylor Branch explored the role of Rustin in the civil rights movement, especially his influence on Martin Luther King, Jr. He drew attention to Rustin’s arrest in 1953 on “morals charges” and how that incident was used against him, especially by Adam Clayton Powell.<sup>5</sup> But, it was not until Jervis Anderson’s biography *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen* (1997) that he was placed as a central figure in the civil rights movement. This was followed by Daniel Levine’s biography *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* in 2000 and John D’Emilio’s *Lost Prophet* in 2003.<sup>6</sup> That same year, Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise published an edited collection of Rustin’s writing, *Time on Two Crosses*, which included seven

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<sup>4</sup> Eagles, 841-842.

<sup>5</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 172-173, 196-197, 314.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000); John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004; first published by The Free Press, 2003).

pieces on gay rights. Moreover, PBS aired a documentary about Rustin, *Brother Outsider*.<sup>7</sup> Rustin has also been the subject of a few Ph.D. dissertations.<sup>8</sup> When the role of gays in the civil rights movement is mentioned, it is usually regarding the importance of Bayard Rustin. As a result, William van Deburg wrote, these works “all but assure that this long-overlooked member of the movement’s inner circle will escape historiographical obscurity.”<sup>9</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage was right to question whether Rustin can be considered a “lost prophet” any longer.<sup>10</sup> While Rustin was an important figure and will be prominently featured in this work, it is important that this history of gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement go “Beyond Bayard.”

Aaron Henry, a black bisexual man who was central to the local movement in Clarksdale as well as the statewide efforts of the NAACP and Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, has also been given increased attention. Much of this is due to the trend in the historiography towards grassroots leadership in local black communities, especially the work of John Dittmer and Charles Payne.<sup>11</sup> In the literature on Aaron Henry, though, only John Howard analyzes the role of his sexual

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<sup>7</sup> Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise, *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (San Francisco: Cleis Press, 2003); Nancy Kates and Bennett Singer, dirs., *Brother Outsider: The Life of Bayard Rustin* (South Burlington, VT: California Newsreel, 2002), premiered on PBS, January 20, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Elliott Collins, “Bayard Rustin: A Civil Rights Biography,” Ph.D. diss., New York University, 2000; Anthony Terrance Wiley, “Angelic Troublemakers: Religion and Anarchism in Henry David Thoreau, Dorothy Day, and Bayard Rustin,” Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> William L. Van Deburg, “Review of Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin,” *American Historical Review* 110:1 (Feb., 2005), 183-184.

<sup>10</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, “The Forgotten Man of the Civil Rights Movement,” *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 41 (Autumn, 2003), 132-133.

<sup>11</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Charles M. Payne, *I’ve Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

orientation on his civil rights activism.<sup>12</sup> This comes as a result of Henry's frequent disavowals of homosexuality. In *The Fire Ever Burning*, a work put together by fellow civil rights activist Constance Curry drawing on two interviews Henry gave in 1965 as well as new material from interviews with his family friends and political associates, Henry often denies that he is gay. But, Curry acknowledges that he likely was and John Dittmer observes in his forward to the book, "Henry was everything but forthcoming, particularly when questions focused on the post-1964 years."<sup>13</sup>

Other gay or lesbian figures have been mentioned to a lesser extent. There are a number of sources which examine the role of Pauli Murray, an early advocate of non-violent direct action in the civil rights movement. However, most of these are unpublished Ph.D. dissertations. Sara Azaransky's *The Dream Is Freedom* provides the best examination of Murray's life and work.<sup>14</sup> While James Baldwin is a very well-known gay literary figure, his role as an activist in the civil rights movement receives less attention in the many biographies of his life. Lorraine Hansberry was also an important figure in the civil rights movement, but in her case, too, there is less mention of her civil rights activism as well as her sexual orientation. Surprisingly, there remains no biography of Hansberry's life and work.

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<sup>12</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 158-166, 171-173.

<sup>13</sup> Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 128; John Dittmer, "Introduction," in Henry with Curry, xv.

<sup>14</sup> Sara Azaransky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). Other sources include Flora Renda Bryant, "An Examination of the Social Activism of Pauli Murray," Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1991; Regina Elizabeth Mooney, "Transgression as Transformation: An Investigation Into the Relationship Between Mystically Religious Experience and Moral Experience in the Lives of Dorothy Day and Pauli Murray," Ph.D. diss., The Claremont Graduate University, 1992; Doreen Marie Drury, "'Experimentation on the Male Side': Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in Pauli Murray's Quest for Love and Identity (1910-1960)," Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 2000; Elaine Sue Caldbeck, "A Religious Life of Pauli Murray: Hope and Struggle," Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 2000.

There are a number of other instances in which gay activists in the African American civil rights movement are mentioned frequently in the historiography, but little is ever said regarding sexual orientation. Jane Stembridge, the daughter of a white Baptist minister who was recruited by Ella Baker and became the first full-time staff member of SNCC, is mentioned in Howard Zinn's *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (1964), Sara Evan's *Personal Politics* (1979), Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle* (1981), and Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters* (1988). But, there is no mention of how her identity as a lesbian affected her life in the movement.<sup>15</sup>

The reason for this might be better understood by looking at *Freedom Summer* (1988) by Doug McAdam. The author acknowledges that the spirit of the black civil rights movement lived on in other causes. He writes, "Though it differed from volunteer to volunteer, that message variously embraced conceptions of the United States, politics, community, human relationships, and sexuality clearly at odds with mainstream values." In his study, McAdam found that "The theme of sexual liberation runs like a subterranean current through the volunteers' letters, journals, and interviews." Further, nearly half the volunteers in his study described Freedom Summer as their first experience with an open sexuality that would eventually characterize, or perhaps caricature, the era. Though, it should be noted that the ultimate expression of the ideology of free love and egalitarian society for

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<sup>15</sup> Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 7, 35, 38, 60, 63; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 36, 53; Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 25-26; Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988), 327, 329-4

many activists in his study was interracial sex, with most sex occurring between white women and black men.<sup>16</sup>

McAdam argues that Freedom Summer radicalized the volunteers, who subsequently found themselves attracted to the counterculture and the ideology of personal liberation, citing various examples. Bettina Aptheker became a leader in the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, which arose in response to efforts by the administration to end civil rights demonstrations on campus. Cathy Cade helped organize a course on “The Sociology of Women” in the summer of 1966 at the New Orleans Free School. Barney Frank went on to become a congressman from Massachusetts and advance causes he supported through official politics.<sup>17</sup> However, the piece that is missing from these three narratives in McAdam’s book is that all were gay and lesbian activists and drew on their experiences working for black civil rights to later support sexual orientation equality.

McAdam worked on his study in the mid-1980s when gays and lesbians felt embattled by a disease the government would not put sufficient resources towards fighting and a Supreme Court that denied them equal protection of the laws. It is likely for these reasons he did not ask about gay and lesbian issues. He wrote, “The issue was too personal and potentially sensitive to ask about explicitly on the questionnaire.” This may have been appropriate for the time and participants may have been unwilling to participate had such questions been asked. Two of 16 women and one of 24 males mentioned same-sex relationships in spite of this, though. McAdam asked all activists whether they were involved in the gay rights

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<sup>16</sup> Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13, 93-95.

<sup>17</sup> McAdam, 167, 180, 216.

movement and 12 of 205 said they were 'very' or 'moderately' involved. Somewhat erroneously, McAdam believed that most gay volunteers would have been active in the gay rights movement and concluded, "very few of the volunteers are gay."<sup>18</sup>

The absence of lesbians and gays in historiography of the civil rights movement of the 1960s is more striking in comparison to an earlier era, the Harlem Renaissance, where their role is a much more studied topic. There has been a great deal written on figures like Countee Cullen, Angelina Weld Grimke, Wallace Thurman, Richard Bruce Nugent, Claude McKay, Bessie Smith, Ma Rainey, Langston Hughes, Alberta Hunter, Ethel Waters, Gladys Bentley, Alain Locke, Nella Larsen, Richmond Barthé and Alelia Walker.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has stated that the Harlem Renaissance was "...surely as gay as it was black, not that it was exclusively either of these."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> McAdam, 220-21.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g., A.B. Christa Schwarz, *Gay Voices of the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Chris Albertson, "1925-1927: Lesbianism in the Life of Bessie Smith," in *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.*, ed. by Jonathan Ned Katz (New York: Avon Books, 1976), 118-27; Chris Albertson, "Taint Nobody's Business If I Do," in *Bluesland*, ed. by Pete Welding and Toby Byron (New York: Penguin Group, 1991), 50-67; Anne Borden, "Heroic 'Hussies' and 'Brilliant Queers': Genderracial Resistance in the Works of Langston Hughes," *African American Review* 28 (Fall 1994): 333-345; Edward Brookes, *The Bessie Smith Companion* (New York: Da Capo Press Inc., 1982); Hazel Carby, "It jus be's dat way sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," *Radical America* 20 (1986): 9-24; Timothy Chin, "'Bullers' and 'Battymen': Contesting Homophobia in Black Popular Culture and Contemporary Caribbean Literature," *Callaloo* 20 (Winter, 1997), 127-141, contains a section analyzing the work of Claude McKay; Eric Garber, "A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. by Martin Duberman et al. (New York: NAL Books, 1989), 318-331; Jonathan Weinberg, "'Boy Crazy': Carl Van Vechten's Queer Collection," *The Yale Journal of Criticism* 7 (1994), 25-49; Seth Clark Silberman, "Lighting the Harlem Renaissance AFire!": Embodying Richard Bruce Nugent's Bohemian Politic," in *The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities*, ed. Delroy Constantine-Simms (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 2000), 254-273; Thomas H. Wirth, *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Margaret Rose Vendryes, "The Lives of Richmond Barthe," in *The Greatest Taboo*, 274-289; William G. Hawkeswood, *One of the Children: Gay Black Men in Harlem* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Michael L. Cobb, "Insolent Racing, Rough Narrative: The Harlem Renaissance's Impolite Queers," *Callaloo* 23:1 (2000), 328-351.

<sup>20</sup> Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Black Man's Burden," in *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*, ed. by Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 233.



There is some existing work on the connections between gay liberation and black power groups, though much work remains to be done on this subject as well. For example, Cheryl Clarke discusses the historic meeting of the Black Liberation Movement in New York City at the First National Plenary Conference on Self-Determination in December, 1981. At the conference, the group considered the proposal that “Revolutionary nationalists and genuine communists cannot uphold homosexuality in the leadership of the Black Liberation Movement nor uphold it as a correct practice.” Clarke marks this moment as the point at which black liberation activists failed to adopt a broader and more transformative view of human sexuality, which inhibited political collaboration and sabotaged coalitions.<sup>21</sup> A number of authors discuss the split in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in New York in 1969 over the question of whether to donate money to support the Black Panther Party, as well as the broader issue of whether to devote energy to forming alliances and tackling issues outside of gay liberation. Subsequently, the GLF decided to support the Panthers and a number of activists departed to form the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA).

There has been frequent, though brief, mention of the Panthers beliefs about gay liberation. They generally deal with the views of either Eldridge Cleaver or Huey Newton. For example, Steve Estes, in his book *I Am a Man!* (2005), analyzes the ideal of black manhood promulgated by leaders like Cleaver, which excluded

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<sup>21</sup> Cheryl Clarke, “The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community,” in *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays, and the Struggle for Equality*, ed. Eric Brandt (New York: New Press, 1999), 31, 34.

homosexuals, who supposedly suffered from a sickness akin to pedophiles.<sup>22</sup> Alternatively, the collected writings of Huey Newton in *To Die for the People* (1995) include his August, 1970 statement on the women's liberation and gay liberation movements in which he called for black power activists to unite with them in a revolutionary front. Newton said that homosexuals may be the most oppressed and potentially revolutionary group in society and the black freedom struggle needed them as allies.<sup>23</sup> In *Spectacular Blackness* (2010), Amy Abugo Ongiri argues, "The facts that the Black Panther Party was the first, and for many years the only, national African American organization to speak out in favor of gay rights or to make open alliances with an homosexual rights group, and that the organization had many women in positions of power are hidden by the macho mythos that surrounds the party."<sup>24</sup> However, neither Ongiri, nor other historians of the Panthers explore this issue at length.

While there remains work to be done in this area, the post-Stonewall era saw more gays and lesbians open up about their identities making their voices easier to locate in the historical record. Likewise, issues of sexuality became more prominent in American life, including more open discussion of sexual orientation. This period saw the emergence of black (predominantly) gay and lesbian groups, like the Combahee River Collective, a black lesbian feminist group organized in 1974.<sup>25</sup> It

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<sup>22</sup> Steve Estes, *I Am a Man! Race, Manhood, and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 162.

<sup>23</sup> Toni Morrison, ed., *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1995), 152-154.

<sup>24</sup> Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>25</sup> Duchess Harris, "From the Kennedy Commission to the Combahee Collective: Black Feminist Organizing, 1960-1980," in *Sisters in the Struggle: African American Women in the Civil Rights-Black*

also saw the emergence of open alliances between gay and lesbian groups and black civil rights and black power groups. For example, in 1975, lesbian groups like the Alliance of Lesbian Feminists of Atlanta (ALFA) and the Triangle Area Lesbian Feminists in North Carolina became active supporters of the Free Joan Little Campaign.<sup>26</sup> Kevin J. Mumford's recent article in the *Journal of American History*, "The Trouble with Gay Rights" shows how race was crucial to both arguments against gay rights and justifications for supporting gay rights as well as how race divided the Gay Liberation Movement in Philadelphia after 1969.<sup>27</sup>

There is also some existing work that addresses other aspects of sexuality in the civil rights movement. For example, Fay Botham's *Almighty God Created the Races* (2009) focuses on interracial sex and marriage and devotes significant attention to the *Loving v. Virginia* (1967) decision.<sup>28</sup> Danielle McGuire's *At the Dark End of the Street* (2010) has drawn attention to the ways in which the African American civil rights movement was rooted in the struggle of black women against sexual violence.<sup>29</sup> Hopefully, these works will encourage scholars to think more about the intersection between civil rights movement and the history of sexuality.

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*Power Movement* ed. by Bettye Collier-Thomas and V.P. Franklin (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 292-295.

<sup>26</sup> Genna Rae McNeil, "Joanne Is You and Joanne Is Me': A Consideration of African American Women and the 'Free Joan Little' Movement, 1974-75," in Collier-Thomas and Franklin, 273.

<sup>27</sup> Kevin J. Mumford, "The Trouble With Gay Rights: Race and the Politics of Sexual Orientation in Philadelphia, 1969-1982," *The Journal of American History* 98:1 (June, 2011), 51.

<sup>28</sup> Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage & American Law* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance—A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

## LGBT Historiography

Reading through general histories of the struggle for gay liberation, there often appear references to the inspiration provided by the struggle for black equality. However, most works say little beyond this to connect the two movements. In *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, one of the first and foremost works on LGBT social movement history, John D’Emilio argues, “Inspired by the example of civil rights activists, it [the gay movement] abandoned the accommodationist approach of the 1950s.” Later, he mentions the role of “Ernestine Eckstein,” a black woman who joined the NAACP at Indiana University in the late 1950s, became involved with CORE in New York after graduation, then joined the Daughters of Bilitis in 1965. Unfortunately, other than noting the inspiration the civil rights movement provided and citing “Ernestine Eckstein” as a connection between black and gay rights, D’Emilio establishes few links between the two movements.<sup>30</sup>

Barry D. Adam’s *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* follows the same path. When the author reaches the early 1960s, he states, “The pioneering efforts of black people in the American South in challenging the established political order were to galvanize a disparate set of aggrieved social groups through the 1960s.”<sup>31</sup> Adam later finds, “Like the Mattachine’s early roots in American communism, modern feminism and gay liberation emerged from antecedents that provided them

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<sup>30</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 150, 172-3.

<sup>31</sup> Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987), 68.

with both political foundations and political rejection.”<sup>32</sup> This statement seems to imply that gays and lesbians were part of the civil rights movement, but not fully accepted into the cause. However, Adam offers no examples to elucidate or support this claim.

In *Before Stonewall*, Vern L. Bullough makes a similar observation. He writes, “Also aiding the gay movement was the demand of other groups for equal civil rights and the elimination of discrimination. These movements followed the leadership of those involved in gaining civil rights for blacks, a movement that helped pave the way for demands for changes by other groups, including homosexuals [...] The passage of civil rights and anti-discrimination legislation again served as a model for the gay community.”<sup>33</sup> He also points out that Frank Kameny took the example of the black civil rights movement and decided to recast homosexuality into a civil liberties issue. Kameny adopted the slogan “Gay Is Good” after being inspired by Stokely Carmichael’s empowerment chant “Black Is Beautiful.”<sup>34</sup> But again, no direct connection is offered.

The work of Eric Marcus contains an equally general statement. In *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945-1990, An Oral History*, Marcus writes, “The social and political upheavals that transformed American life in the late 1960s had a stunning impact on the struggle for gay rights. By 1968, the antiwar movement, the women’s movement, the black civil rights movement, the student revolts, and the politics of the New Left had not only energized the nearly

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<sup>32</sup> Adam, 73.

<sup>33</sup> Vern L. Bullough, *Before Stonewall: Activists for Gay and Lesbian Rights in Historical Context* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2002), 7.

<sup>34</sup> Bullough, 212, 214.

fifty gay organizations across the country, but also inspired bitter internal battles over the direction of what was then called the homophile movement.”<sup>35</sup> He also notes, “Press coverage, although still scant and often negative, increased as gay organizations, following the examples of the black civil rights movement, organized public demonstrations.”<sup>36</sup> Marcus includes a few interview subjects like Martha Shelley, Morty Manford, and Tom Cassidy who cite the inspiration of or desire to make connection with the black civil rights movement, but only one person among his vast collection of interviewees participated in both movements.<sup>37</sup>

In Margaret Cruikshank’s *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (1992), she argues that many people who would later identify as gay played active roles in the civil rights movement and other causes. She speculates that without these other protest movements of the 1960s, the gay and lesbian liberation movement of the 1970s would never have emerged. Further, Cruikshank claims many heterosexuals who worked for black civil rights were not prepared to accept homosexuals as their equals and many gays and lesbians kept quiet about their identities in order to be accepted in the movement. While Cruikshank makes a number of accurate points, she identifies only James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin as gay activists for black civil rights. Further, while the book contains many footnotes, her claims about the role of gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement, though accurate, are not supported by any evidence.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights 1945-1990, An Oral History* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 171.

<sup>36</sup> Marcus, 90.

<sup>37</sup> Marcus, 182, 241, 506.

<sup>38</sup> Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9, 62-63, 149-150.

Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney go a bit further than the rest of the LGBT historiography by writing of more activists who were involved in both movements. In *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America*, the authors argue that “...something about the riot at Stonewall--something about the image of homosexuals fighting back after so many years of unchallenged police raids on gay bars across the nation--had stirred an unexpected spirit among many young homosexuals. Until then, many of them had been a part of the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement or the feminist movement.”<sup>39</sup> While this statement is much like those found elsewhere in the historiography, the difference is that Clendinen and Nagourney provide examples of individuals who linked the two movements. They include material from their interviews with: Don Kilhefner, who graduated from Penn State in 1960 and joined the civil rights movement; Steve Endean, a gay white man who “had long been emotionally involved in the civil rights movement”; and Robert Kunst, “a slick, bearded product of the anti-war and civil rights movements.”<sup>40</sup>

The problem, though, is that the work of each of these individuals in the civil rights movement is never explained. The authors offer no indication of how extensively involved each person was in the movement, whether they were open about their sexual orientation, what motivated them to participate, and how it affected their later activism for gay liberation. Clendinen and Nagourney

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<sup>39</sup> Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 25.

<sup>40</sup> Clendinen and Nagourney, 83, 226, 294, 295.

acknowledge their subjects' participation in both movements but do very little to explore it.

### **Gays and Lesbians for Black Civil Rights**

This dissertation hopes to take a deeper look at the connections between the civil rights movement and lesbian and gay liberation by extensively documenting and analyzing the role of those gays and lesbians in the African American civil rights movement throughout the country. This dissertation considers the activism of gays and lesbians in the pre-Stonewall era. It is in this era before Stonewall when there was less openness and more hostility towards gays and lesbians, that there is the greatest need for the recovery of gay and lesbian voices.

In the first chapter, I explain the role of roughly seventy gays and lesbians in the African American civil rights movement. This covers their contributions from the higher echelons of leadership to work at the grassroots and from those who were deeply committed to those who were occasionally involved. These activists had varied roles in the struggle, offering the movement local community support, defending the cause as intellectuals, providing medical care, and more. But, this chapter does more than just say, "They were here." It also explores the numerous motivations for many gays and lesbians to participate in a movement for black civil rights. Even for black gays and lesbians, this cannot be taken for granted as the overwhelming majority of African Americans were not activists in the movement. The second chapter examines the role of the civil rights movement in contributing to activists' identity formation as gay men. The role of gays and lesbians has long been



overlooked in part because almost no one in the movement was “out.” Given the fluidity of sexuality, it is difficult to define a number of these activists as distinctively “gay,” “lesbian” or “bisexual” during their time in the movement as they dealt with an emerging and developing understanding of sexual orientation. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has argued it most succinctly in saying, “If anything, the specificity, materiality, and variety of sexual practices, along with their diverse meanings for individual lives, can be done better justice in a context where the impoverished abstractions that claim to define sexuality can be treated as not authoritative.”<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, this chapter and the one that follows acknowledge these activists’ developing consciousness about their sexual orientation. Moreover, their experiences in the movement did, in a number of instances, contribute to the ways they thought about their sexual identities. This chapter also looks more broadly at social attitudes towards homosexuality from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the 1960s to provide the context in which gay civil rights activists came of age. This is particularly important as the persistently repressive social environment helps to account for why many did not identify as gay or lesbian at the time. At the end of the chapter, I examine the connections among these gay and lesbians in the movement, drawing attention to the lost opportunity for a network of gay liberation activists built upon the network of gay activists in the black civil rights movement.

The transition from black civil rights to women’s liberation to lesbian liberation is the focus of the third chapter. This chapter looks at many of the same issues as the previous one, but, in this case, the focus is lesbian activists. Prior work,

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<sup>41</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), xvi.

especially that of Sara Evans, has explored how second-wave feminism arose out of women's experiences as activists in the African American civil rights movement. Evans herself discusses the role of women like Cathy Cade and Jane Stembridge in both movements but makes only brief mention of sexual orientation. This chapter expands on that work by making the connections from civil rights to feminism to lesbian rights. This is important in expanding the historiography to further explore the consequences of the civil rights movement and the ways in which it served as a training ground for activists in other causes.

The use of surveillance against the black freedom struggle has been the subject of many works including David J. Garrow's *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1981), Kenneth O'Reilly's *'Racial Matters': The FBI's Secret File on Black America* (1989), and Yasuhiro Katagiri's *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission* (2001).<sup>42</sup> In chapter four, I examine the use of surveillance against the movement. Specifically, I look at the ways in which homosexuality was used against civil rights activists. But, this chapter also goes beyond official surveillance and also looks at the ways in which homosexuality was used against the movement in claims and propaganda from white supremacists. I work to explore in greater detail the opposition to the civil rights movement, an area that remains somewhat limited. While concerns about interracial sex were at the forefront of most white supremacists' concerns, homosexuality was also important.

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<sup>42</sup> David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From "Solo" to Memphis* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1981); Kenneth O'Reilly, *'Racial Matters': The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989); Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001).

Chapter five looks at the role religion played in gay and lesbian involvement in the civil rights movement. David L. Chappell makes mention of Bayard Rustin in his study of the role of prophetic religion in the civil rights movement saying, though he was not one of the more religiously-driven people in the movement, his experience as a gay man gave him the understanding that a prophet “must be prepared to be looked upon as queer.”<sup>43</sup> However, the work of Chappell and others offers little sustained discussion of what prophetic Christianity had to say about sexual orientation. So, this chapter looks more closely at how gays and lesbians connected to an often religiously-motivated movement. Some activists felt constrained by the conservative religious voices in the movement while others were gay clergy who believed in both African American and gay rights. Often, though, religion was entirely silent on issues of sexual orientation during this time. However, this chapter explores the long-term role of religion in their activism, specifically how it changed with the rise of gay liberation when many denominations began openly opposing homosexuality.

Chapter six begins with the changing relationship of the black freedom struggle to gays and lesbians as they became more open about their identities. Specifically, I examine the connections between gay liberation groups and the Black Panther Party. To a greater degree, I explore the effect the civil rights movement had on the rise of the gay and lesbian movement following the Stonewall Rebellion. I look primarily at the role lesbian and gay activists in the civil rights movement

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<sup>43</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 56. Rustin’s original quote appears in Rustin to Platt, September 3, 1948, Rustin Papers, microfilm, reel 20.

played in this later struggle. Just as their roles in the civil rights movement varied, so too did their roles in gay and lesbian rights. Some took on key positions for long periods of time while others did not get involved at all. I also look more generally at the ways the gay liberation movement drew on the civil rights movement, even for activists who were not involved in the quest for black civil rights.

To complete this study, a variety of sources have been employed. Oral history has been essential to recovering gay and lesbian history, especially in the pre-Stonewall era. Similarly, African American history has been enhanced through the use of oral history interviews. Finding gay and lesbian activists and conducting oral history interviews was crucial to this project. While evidence of their activism can be found in other sources, the role of sexual identity and their personal experiences in the movement, as well as their longer history of activism beyond the civil rights movement can often only be recovered through oral history. An important contribution of this work is bringing new voices into the historical record.

This study works to employ best practices in using oral history evidence. In the same way Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy recovered the history of the lesbian community in Buffalo, New York, in the pre-Stonewall era, this study treats each oral history as a historical document. I have taken into account the position and perspective of each narrator, checked their memory against existing sources when possible, compared various accounts and experiences to each other, and remain alert for attempts to apply existing norms to the past.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Madeline Davis and Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy, "Oral History and the Study of Sexuality in the Lesbian Community: Buffalo, New York, 1940-1960," in *Hidden From History*, eds. Martin Bauml

At other points, I draw on archival records, gay and lesbian and African American periodicals, and newspaper accounts to reconstruct this narrative. The chapter on opposition to the civil rights movement is largely based on records from FBI Freedom of Information Act requests and the files of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission as well as segregationist literature. It attempts to assess how sexual orientation may have been used against the movement. Perspective is certainly accounted for in the use of intelligence agency files and, in many cases, assessing the perspective of these groups is more important than whether they were presenting factual material about the movement.

It is important to note some disparities of race and gender in both the existing historical record and the people I was able to locate.<sup>45</sup> While this work discusses the contributions of sixty gays and lesbians who were involved in the civil rights movement, 35 of them are white, 24 are African American, and one is Asian. Regarding gender, 36 are women and 24 are men. So, with 19 white women, 17 black women, 16 white men, seven black men and one Asian man, our understanding may remain incomplete. In chapters two and three, where I discuss the process of identity formation for these gay men and lesbian women, these gaps become more pronounced. I necessarily rely on the individuals who have shared their stories with me or others. So, for example, in chapter two, I can only discuss four of the seven black gay men, because three of them were never openly gay. As a

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Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: New American Library, 1989), 429-431.

<sup>45</sup> Interview subjects were found in a number of ways. Individual messages were sent to every person listed on the Civil Rights Movement Veterans Website Veterans Roll Call describing the nature of this project and asking for suggestions of people I might interview. I also received further suggestions from people I interviewed, searched for the contact information of people I came across in secondary or archival sources, and sought suggestions from scholars, archivists, and others.

result, the discussion of white gay men in the civil rights movement in that chapter contains greater depth and, because of the disparity in gender, the subsequent chapter on women in the movement offers more detail. It is essential to acknowledge these absences and silences and recognize that important work remains to be done on this subject.

I have no new explanations for how we might account for these disparities and other scholars have put forth strong theories.<sup>46</sup> Thaddeus Russell argues that the civil rights movement required “their constituents adopt the cultural norms of what they believe to be the idealized American citizen--productivity, selflessness, responsibility, sexual restraint, and the restraint of homosexuality in particular.” While he finds homophobia was less pronounced among working-class African Americans prior to the 1950s, the civil rights ideology promoted by the black middle class “made explicit that the price of admission to American society for African Americans would be a surrender to heterosexual norms.” Though, Russell believes that with the decline of the civil rights movement at the end of the 1960s, “the project of normalizing African American sexuality” declined as well.<sup>47</sup> However, Sikivu Hutchinson has recently argued that this ideology remains. She finds, “The intersection between the black civil rights movement legacy and

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<sup>46</sup> In *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History*, John Howard, who is also a white scholar, noted, “The interview demonstrates cultural barriers like those I experienced in enlisting black Mississippians as oral history narrators. Generally speaking, African Americans seemed reluctant to participate in my project, cautious about revealing the names of other persons (regardless of assurances of anonymity), less likely to invite me into their homes, less likely to speak with me at length. For reasons well exemplified by the historical events chronicled here...many African Americans rightly are wary of white middle- and upper-class interlocutors.” While E. Patrick Johnson has collected a large number of southern queer African American oral histories in *Sweet Tea*, the requirement that they be activists in the civil rights movement before 1970 narrows the field of potential subjects.

<sup>47</sup> Thaddeus Russell, “The Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality,” *American Quarterly* 60:1 (Mar., 2008), 101, 108, 113, 123.

religiosity has produced a curious schism. While the African American electorate remains politically liberal, it is socially conservative on so-called values issues like same-sex marriage...” According to Hutchinson, the “patriarchal and heterosexist foundations of the modern civil rights movement have hindered it.” In attempting an explanation for the continued difficulty of locating black lesbian and gay voices, Hutchinson believes, “Rampant homophobia within African American communities, coupled with biblical literalism, make Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) African Americans largely invisible as a cultural or political force. Moreover, the perception among some African Americans that white LGBT activists have opportunistically appropriated the civil rights mantle exacerbates black suspicion of LGBT communities.”<sup>48</sup> Perhaps these explanations may account for the racial disparity in this study.

It is also important to consider the role of region. In *Carryin’ On*, the “first book of Southern lesbian and gay history,” John Howard argues that, though it is tempting to claim a regional distinctiveness, it is difficult to make generalizations about gay and lesbian life in the South. At the same time, Howard does acknowledge numerous surveys which reveal that “it’s more difficult to be queer in the South than almost anywhere else.”<sup>49</sup> In this study, more than 60% of the activists were raised in the North, with 14% either in border areas or areas both North and South. Roughly 25% were native southerners. Almost all of them went South to join the civil rights movement, though some joined civil rights efforts in North. With regard

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<sup>48</sup> Sikivu Hutchinson, *Moral Combat: Black Atheists, Gender Politics, and the Values Wars* (Los Angeles: Infidel Books, 2011), 12-15.

<sup>49</sup> John Howard, ed., *Carryin’ On in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 4-5, 9.

to race, roughly half of southerners or those raised in both regions were black and half were white. However, among northerners, more than 65% were white. So, the demographics lean more towards white, northern lesbian and gay civil rights activists.

Recognizing the “the closet” and “coming out” are slippery terms, it may be argued that, among activists raised in the North, less than 10 percent remained closeted for their entire lives. Among activists raised in the South, though, it was closer to 30 percent, which tends to affirm Howard’s argument that it is probably more difficult to be gay in the South. Taking into account the role gender, race and region may help to account for the demographic disparities. We know of fewer gay and lesbian civil rights activists who were native southerners and a smaller percentage of them were out. Moreover, a greater proportion of these southerners were African Americans and we know of fewer African American gay and lesbian civil rights activists.

Bearing in mind some of the imperfections of this study, this work still offers a number of new contributions. It will help shape our understanding of key areas of conversation in the historiography of the civil rights movement. It looks at “the long civil rights movement” as activists moved from black civil rights to lesbian and gay liberation, with many lesbians joining the women’s liberation struggle in the interim. Jacqueline Dowd Hall and others have pointed out the declension narrative which defines much of the civil rights movement and Sixties scholarship has “belittle[d] second-wave feminism and other movements that emerged from the



black freedom struggle...”<sup>50</sup> Similarly, John D’Emilio argues that gay activism remains absent from many accounts of the 1960s. He contends that, “By relegating it to the end of the story, to a brief mention of the Stonewall Riots as the country is spinning out of control, we inevitably imprison homosexuality and gay liberation in a narrative of decline. While millions of gay men and lesbians around the world look to 1969 as the dawn of a bright new age, everyone else reads it as part of the ‘bad’ sixties and all that follows.”<sup>51</sup> As an alternative, this dissertation shows the work that lesbians and gays were doing throughout the 1960s as part of the black freedom struggle, rather than relegating them to the end of the decade. Moreover, this work traces their activism beyond the 1960s, as they continued to make significant contributions to social justice in the struggle for gay liberation, revising the declension narrative.

This work seeks to build our understanding of continuity, one of the four aspects of the long civil rights movement scholarship that has come under heavy criticism, most notably from Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, who deem it “a vampire.” They argue that this historical approach “exists outside of time and history, beyond the processes of life and death, and change and development.”<sup>52</sup> However, the point of this work is not to flatten chronological or conceptual differences between movements but to interrogate their intersections, acknowledging the ways they interacted and the activists that were present in both,

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<sup>50</sup> Jacqueline Dowd Hall, “The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past,” *Journal of American History* 91:4 (Mar., 2005), 1254.

<sup>51</sup> John D’Emilio, *The World Turned: Essays on Gay History, Politics and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 24-25.

<sup>52</sup> Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Clarence Lang, “The ‘Long Movement’ as Vampire: Temporal and Spatial Fallacies in Recent Black Freedom Studies,” *The Journal of African American History* 92:2 (Spring, 2007), 265.

rather than claiming they were the same struggle. Cha-Jua and Lang also argue that the most recent wave of scholarship has given us a better understanding of connections between the black freedom struggle in the U.S. and movements abroad. This work accomplishes a similarly worthy objective by analyzing those connections at home. Finally, Cha-Jua and Lang believe the most important contribution of fourth-wave black freedom scholarship is in improving our understanding of the role of women and gender. This work builds on that scholarship by adding the role of sexuality.<sup>53</sup>

This dissertation also offers a somewhat different perspective on social movement history. Many movement activists have long known that the fight against injustice often occurs on numerous fronts as people possess multiple identities and various struggles confront intersecting oppressions and find shared goals. Because scholars are often interested in a single movement, they tend to overlook the fact that activists they discuss were involved in numerous causes. Rather than examining a social movement in isolation, this work considers movements in conversation. By analyzing the connections between two or more struggles and bringing to the forefront individual biographies, one can better see the intersections of social movements and understand how activists viewed those causes as inter-related. This work takes the case of lesbian and gay activists who started in the black civil rights movement. In a similar fashion, this research also draws stronger connections between various opposition forces and looks at the relationship among

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<sup>53</sup> Cha-Jua and Lang, 268-69.

white supremacist, anti-communist, and anti-gay attitudes and groups in American society.

Moreover, it will encourage scholars to consider more deeply the religious character of the movement, which has been central to understanding the tireless motivation of activists. In the case of gay and lesbian activists, this work examines the role of religion in their involvement in efforts to advance black civil rights. It then looks at how their relationship to churches and synagogues changed as various denominations responded to the increasing visibility of feminism and gay liberation.

In the end, these sources help construct a missing piece of the civil rights movement and encourage us to think more broadly about the intersections of various freedom struggles. They also push us to think more deeply about major issues in the civil rights movement, like the role of religion and the nature of white opposition. Finally, assessing the role of these activists should help us better assess the long-term impact of the civil rights movement. Beyond inspiring other movements, the civil rights movement was often the training ground for activists in other struggles. The struggle for black civil rights helped lay the foundation for gay and lesbian liberation.

## CHAPTER ONE - GAYS AND LESBIANS FOR RACIAL JUSTICE: A NEW HISTORY OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT, 1940-1970

Joan Nestle, founder of the Lesbian Herstory Archives, recalls her time in the civil rights movement, saying, "I did voter registration work in Alabama and I saw a working-class black family take on history. But at night, when we would gather and everybody told stories, I couldn't tell my story. And at that moment, keeping the secret of my queerness did not seem the biggest thing to me."<sup>1</sup> Because nearly every gay activist in the movement was closeted or had not come to identify as gay and because their primary concern was advancing the cause of racial justice, the role of gays and lesbians in the black freedom struggle has often gone unrecognized. However, their lack of visibility at that time should not lead us to overlook their contributions today.

Before moving forward to analyze the ways in which gay and lesbian experiences in the African American civil rights movement alters our perceptions of major historiographical issues, their presence in the movement must first be clearly documented. Given the dearth of writing on the subject, it is necessary to devote space simply showing "they were there." While basic in its mission, such a task is not necessarily easy. Given the taboo nature of homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall era, documenting their presence must often rely on more recent oral histories which reflect on the past. When possible, testimony in oral histories will be supported with archival sources. By the close of this chapter, it should be readily apparent that

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 136.

gays and lesbians were involved at nearly every stage of the African American civil rights movement from the mid-1940s to the end of the 1960s.

The purpose of this chapter is not to present a full history of the civil rights movement. Instead, events of varying importance and people at all levels are identified and their contributions to the movement are discussed. Every individual discussed in this chapter was gay, lesbian or bisexual, though a number of them may not identified as such at the time. While I attempt to give an accurate assessment of the contribution of gays and lesbians to black civil rights at each stage of the struggle, I do not extensively discuss the role of heterosexual activists. Therefore, this is not meant to be a comprehensive study of the civil rights movement. It necessarily privileges the role of gays and lesbians because their sexual identities have been left out of most records and their contributions, in many cases, have been ignored. This narrative is meant to supplement other histories of the black freedom struggle and add a new perspective to the movement.

### **The Journey of Reconciliation, 1947**

Of those gay activists in the civil rights movement that have previously been analyzed, Bayard Rustin stands foremost among them. He has come to occupy a more central role in the historiography of the civil rights movement with a number of biographies documenting his life. One of these biographers, Daniel Levine, writes, “Throughout the civil rights movement, Bayard Rustin was always there.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 3.

One of the earliest uses of direct action in the early civil rights movement was the Journey of Reconciliation, organized by the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). FOR was an interfaith organization advocating peace through non-violent direct action and Rustin had been heavily involved in the group. He raised a conscientious objection to World War II and spent over a year at the Federal Correctional Institution in Ashland, Kentucky.<sup>3</sup>

In June, 1946, the Supreme Court ruled in *Morgan v. Virginia* that segregation did not apply to interstate travel. Bayard Rustin and fellow activist George Houser began discussing the use of non-violent direct action, at that time a relatively unknown strategy, to test the decision. This Journey of Reconciliation would work to attract national attention to desegregation efforts in a way that isolated local protests could not. Such action would also be unique in that it would follow rather than challenge a law. Moreover, it would give the young Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a group that evolved out of FOR, an opportunity to bring together its local chapters and spread the message of non-violent direct action.<sup>4</sup>

After careful planning by Houser and Rustin, eight white men and eight black men were chosen to participate in the journey. Rustin, a black gay man, and Igal Roodenko, his white gay Jewish roommate, were two of them. Like Rustin, Roodenko was also a conscientious objector to the Second World War and served

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<sup>3</sup> Levine, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Levine, 51-52.

almost 20 months in prison. He was released early in 1947 and almost immediately became involved in the journey.<sup>5</sup>

One group took a Trailways bus and the other group took a Greyhound bus through the upper South, as the Deep South was considered too dangerous. It was also considered too dangerous to have a mixed-gender group, so the journey included only men. Igal Roodenko reflected that the Greyhound buses were cooperative on the journey, but the Trailways buses were much more difficult. It was on a Trailways bus traveling through Chapel Hill that he and Rustin ran afoul of stalwart segregationists. Their fellow riders Joe Felmet, white, and Andy Johnson, black, sat together in the front causing the bus driver to call the police. While the driver went down to the station to go through the formalities, Roodenko and Rustin moved to occupy their seats. Waiting for the driver to return, Rustin struck up a conversation with other passengers and eventually most of them concluded that, yes, discrimination was wrong, but the way their group was protesting was making things worse. The two were subsequently arrested.<sup>6</sup>

Rustin and Roodenko were released on bail and left Chapel Hill to complete their journey. They returned for trial in March, 1948. The judge handed Rustin a 30-day sentence because he was just a manipulated “nigrah” and Roodenko received 90 days as the foolish Yankee instigator. This was later reduced to 30 days on appeal. The judge wanted to give Joe Felmet six months, as he was a white southern boy and “should have known better.” Roodenko ended up working for three weeks

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<sup>5</sup> Levine, 54; Interview with Igal Roodenko, interview by Charlotte Adams, Jacqueline Hall, and Jerry Wingate, April 11, 1974, transcript p. 1, 63-65, Southern Oral History Program, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

<sup>6</sup> Levine, 52; Roodenko interview, 7-10.

on a road gang near Reidsville, North Carolina, fearful that a sledgehammer might “accidentally” fall on his head. Though, Roodenko says in some respects being gay made it easier to do time in prison because he was comfortable with an all-male group.<sup>7</sup>

It would be a while before the contribution of the Journey of Reconciliation to the larger civil rights movement was realized. This groundbreaking action paved the way for the Freedom Rides of 1961, which were modeled on the Journey.<sup>8</sup> These Freedom Rides would produce a stronger and more sustained challenge to segregation. Bayard Rustin and Igal Roodenko helped provide the model for this protest.

### **The *Brown* Decision, 1954**

The modern civil rights movement is often marked with two bookends: one in 1954 with the *Brown* decision and the other in 1968 with the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. These temporal markers have been rigorously questioned and the place of the *Brown* decision in American history has been criticized as a result of persistent segregation. While the American people may not have been able to fulfill the promise of that decision, *Brown* remains a monumental point in history because it reversed decades and decades of segregationist thought and practice. Its effect could be seen in the way it galvanized the nascent civil rights movement.

Anna Pauline Murray, or Pauli, was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on November 20, 1910. Throughout her life, Murray understood herself as “a male-

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<sup>7</sup> Levine, 60; Roodenko interview, 1, 17, 21, 63-64.

<sup>8</sup> Levine, 56.



identified woman who loved other women,” though she was never open about her sexuality. She would become an instrumental figure in a variety of contexts as a civil rights activist, founder of the National Organization of Women and forerunner in advancing gender equity in the Episcopal priesthood. But, one of her most important contributions was in contributing to the case made for desegregating schools in *Brown v. Board of Education*.<sup>9</sup>

Murray graduated from Hunter College in 1936 and became a labor educator at the Workers Education Project (WEP) in 1936 with Ella Baker as her supervisor. In the late 1930s, Murray began learning about creative nonviolence from the Fellowship of Reconciliation and, in 1940, Murray refused to sit on the back of a bus traveling through Virginia. She was arrested in Petersburg for violating segregation laws. Murray utilized civil disobedience to challenge segregationist law and would also use her work as a legal scholar to help strike down these statute entirely.<sup>10</sup>

In 1938, the Supreme Court ruled 6-2 in *Missouri ex rel. Gaines v. Canada* that if a state created an institution for white students, it either had to offer a comparable in-state institution for black students or allow black students into the white institution. Pauli Murray had just been rejected at the University of North Carolina because of separation of the races in public education. She started a letter writing campaign emphasizing the justness of racial equality on the basis of democratic and Christian ideals. This letter writing campaign also initiated Murray’s 30-year

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<sup>9</sup> Sara Azaranzky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (New York: Oxford, 4-6.

<sup>10</sup> Azaransky, 11, 14, 19.

friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt. Though, ultimately, Thurgood Marshall did not end up taking Murray's case because she was not a resident of North Carolina.<sup>11</sup>

After being employed by the Workers Defense League (WDL), Murray increasingly desired to become a civil rights lawyer and, in 1942, entered Howard Law School. Murray and others were troubled by the fact that black men had to live with segregation yet were being conscripted to serve in World War II. After three of her fellow students were denied service at a local restaurant, she and some classmates helped form the Civil Rights Committee as a part of the Howard NAACP. Well before the sit-ins in Greensboro, the group used the "stool-sitting technique" that James Farmer had started at a segregated coffee shop in Chicago the previous year. In April, 1943, and April, 1944, the Civil Rights Committee at Howard held sit-ins and picketed two restaurants in downtown Washington, D.C.<sup>12</sup>

In the late 1940s, Murray once again applied her skills as a scholar and activist to creating a massive 700-page document compiling, summarizing, and analyzing racial statutes, which was published as *States' Laws on Race and Color* (1951). Her in-depth research cataloged not only statutory laws discriminating against African Americans, but people with Native, Chinese and Japanese ancestry. Historian Sara Azaransky calls the compendium an "exhaustively damning rebuke of the thoroughgoing infrastructure of segregation." The American Civil Liberties Union distributed one thousand copies to attorneys and associated groups to use in desegregation cases. Thurgood Marshall identified this document as integral to his preparation to issue the *Brown* decision calling it "the Bible" of segregation laws.

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<sup>11</sup> Azaransky, 17-19.

<sup>12</sup> Azaransky, 25-28.

Murray would later use this court strategy she helped pioneer in the 1950s in the fight against sex discrimination in the 1960s.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Montgomery Bus Boycott, 1955-56**

The Montgomery Bus Boycott was originally a dispute over the way that segregation of buses would occur, but the city's intransigence pushed the Montgomery Improvement Association (MIA) to challenge the system of segregation itself. While the boycott was happening, A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer, William Worthy and Bayard Rustin met in New York to discuss how they should engage the movement. James Farmer suggested that Rustin go South and Randolph agreed. Though they were concerned that Rustin's Communist past as well as his homosexuality might be used against the movement, Rustin was sent a few days before Christmas, 1955, with the idea that he might set up a school in nonviolence.<sup>14</sup> While in Montgomery, Rustin wrote songs to be sung at mass meetings and drafted leaflets. He eventually met with Martin Luther King, Jr. and they had a discussion about nonviolence, a concept King had only passing familiarity with at the time. John D'Emilio argues, "More than anyone else, Rustin brought the message and methods of Gandhi to the United States. He insinuated nonviolence into the heart of the black freedom struggle."<sup>15</sup>

After returning to New York for several weeks, the War Resister's League (WRL) received a request that they send Bayard Rustin back to Montgomery. The

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<sup>13</sup> Azaransky, 38, 68.

<sup>14</sup> Levine, 78-79.

<sup>15</sup> John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

WRL thought Rustin could use his organizing experience to help build a mass movement. FOR was more reluctant to send him, suggesting he was vulnerable to being framed. But, Rustin returned in late February, 1956, to live in a low-end hotel and find vehicles, organize carpools, prepare material for mass meetings, and continue meeting with King to discuss the possibilities of nonviolence.<sup>16</sup>

Rustin attempted to remain a behind-the-scenes worker in the Montgomery movement. But, when asked by the press who he was, he said he was a reporter as well. Journalists checked into this, found out he was not, and Rustin departed.

David Levine concludes, "As a result of what they [Rustin and William Worthy] had done in the past few weeks, the pacifist movement saw in the Montgomery campaign a route for making NVDA a major, even a mass, method for social change."<sup>17</sup>

Because of his inability to work openly in the South, Rustin became instrumental in gathering northern support for the southern civil rights struggle. In March, 1956, he, Ella Baker and Stanley Levison formed In Friendship, an organization dedicated to assisting southern activists who suffered economic retaliation for their work advancing black civil rights.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Sit-Ins of 1960**

The sit-ins of the 1960s were sparked by the action of four students at Greensboro A & T. While this group provided an important catalyst for direct action

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<sup>16</sup> Levine, 80-81.

<sup>17</sup> Levine, 84.

<sup>18</sup> Levine, 84.

against segregation, there had been similar demonstrations in at least sixteen other cities in the previous three years. In fact, Pauli Murray had been involved in sit-ins as early as 1943. However, these protests did not energize people like the Greensboro sit-ins of 1960 did. The Rev. Douglas Moore contacted James Lawson in Nashville. He knew Lawson had been preparing for new protests there and asked Lawson to begin those sit-ins as soon as possible to encourage the spread of demonstrations to other states.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most active students in the Nashville movement was Rodney Powell. Powell was born in 1935 in Philadelphia. By the time he was 10, in 1945, he knew that he was gay. Despite feeling greater oppression as a result of being homosexual, Powell's earliest activism was in promoting racial justice. After attending St. Joseph's as an undergraduate, he decided to attend Meharry Medical School, a black medical college in Nashville, in 1957. Powell had felt alienated from other black people at a predominantly white college and wanted to be a part of a historically black college.<sup>20</sup>

In his sophomore year, Rodney was at the International Center at Fisk where he met a group of students who would emerge as leaders in the student movement, including Diane Nash and Bernard Lafayette. Around the same time, he also met Jim Lawson. Though his schedule at the medical school was demanding, Powell made time to attend training sessions in nonviolent direct action with students from

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<sup>19</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63* (New York: Touchstone, 1988) 271-73.

<sup>20</sup> David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 82-83, 385-86; Rodney Powell, in *Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social, and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America* ed. by Mitchell Gold with Mindy Drucker (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group, 2008), 54-55.

Fisk, Baptist Theological Seminary and Tennessee A & I. Powell had been aware of the use of nonviolent direct action in Gandhi's Salt March and the Montgomery Bus Boycott and gravitated towards Lawson's application of nonviolence in Nashville.<sup>21</sup>

In February, 1960, Powell joined in the sit-ins and stand-ins. He became far more interested in the movement than medicine and emerged as a leader, in part because, as a medical student, he was older than many of the other students. Powell recalls the way in which the protests challenged his commitment to nonviolence. At one point, the group was standing in at a restaurant and a man began violently shoving several girls. He then came up, hit Rodney in the chest, and held him by his collar. With Rodney clearly angry, Reverend C.T. Vivian came over and told him, "Go back to the church and renew yourself to nonviolence." It was at that point Powell realized how close he was to exploding in a rage, which might have discredited the movement. At the same time, Powell was challenged by the medical school, which discouraged student protests. However, Rev. Kelly Miller Smith's church provided the core of community support in the face of beatings, arrests and the bombing of Attorney Z. Alexander Looby's home.<sup>22</sup>

When they were near defeat in the face of violence, Powell also worked with Diane Nash to provide coordination and administrative support when the Nashville Student Movement decided to continue the Freedom Rides that CORE initiated. While he wanted to be a part of the rides, an associate dean told him to remain in

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Rodney Powell, telephone interview by K.G. Bennett, March 29, 2005, Nashville Public Library.

<sup>22</sup> Rodney Powell interview.

Nashville or he would not be allowed to graduate.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, the movement in Nashville was able to desegregate downtown lunch counters and support the Freedom Rides, but it would not be until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that Nashville would be forced to fully desegregate.

### **The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee, 1960**

Jane Stenbridge was born in Cedar Town, Georgia, in 1936, the daughter of a white Baptist minister. Jane spent her childhood in various places throughout the South including Paducah, Kentucky, and Raleigh, North Carolina. From a very young age, perhaps four or five, Jane was a tomboy and had very strong feelings for women. She had a strong reaction against the trappings of southern womanhood, tearing off pinafores, wanting to wear her brother's clothes, and not responding to her parents unless they called her George. This rebellious spirit would remain strong throughout her life.<sup>24</sup>

Because her family moved around a lot, Jane often lived with her grandmother in Johnston, South Carolina, while her parents relocated. The black woman who cooked and cleaned for her grandmother, Jane says, had "a profound influence" on her and "was like a mother figure" in her life. She observes that when she heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Union Theological Seminary, the pull for her to join the movement was not simply a belief in racial justice. Rather, it arose from a personal connection she felt, believing she had to do something to right the wrongs she had seen as a child. Instead of continuing her education at Union

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<sup>23</sup> Rodney Powell interview.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Jane Stenbridge, telephone interview by author, March 4, 2012.

studying Christian ethics, she felt a pressing need to live out her beliefs. She talked with King after his speech, asking what she could do. He put her in touch with Ella Baker and Connie Curry who found a place for Jane in the movement as the first staff member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).<sup>25</sup>

Jane attended the SNCC conference at Shaw University in March, 1960, with a group from UTS. At that conference, the group decided they should start a newsletter and organize a second conference to connect students who were sitting-in across the country. After talking with Baker and Curry, Stenbridge moved to Atlanta and was given a little corner in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) office on Auburn Avenue in which to work. She began writing *The Student Voice* and organizing the second conference. Stenbridge and Bob Moses would later travel to Mississippi to begin creating a SNCC presence in the state."<sup>26</sup>

### **The Freedom Rides of 1961**

The Freedom Rides of 1961 began in May of that year and drew on the example of the Journey of Reconciliation 14 years earlier. CORE trained the first group of Freedom Riders and, thereafter, the movement gained momentum with other local and national groups sending their own activists out on the road. The Freedom Riders intended to push federal officials to enforce the law but undertook

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<sup>25</sup> Stenbridge interview.

<sup>26</sup> Stenbridge interview.



these journeys knowing they would come under attack before the government intervened.<sup>27</sup>

The Freedom Rides represented a new stage in the movement that the sit-ins and earlier protests and demonstrations had avoided. Instead, they directly confronted the issues of states' rights and southern fears of "outside agitators" from predominantly northern civil rights organizations. Moreover, they flew in the face of public opinion as only 27 percent thought they were improving the chances of integration in the South. However, historian Raymond Arsenault reflects, "...once that passage was completed, there was renewed hope that the nation would eventually find its way to a true and inclusive democracy."<sup>28</sup>

Elizabeth Slade Hirschfeld, a Jewish lesbian, was one of the activists in the Freedom Rides. She was born in 1937 in Detroit, Michigan, and raised there as well. She attended an elite private girls' school, where she was known as "the Jewish girl." Hirschfeld's mother was important to teaching her anti-racism. Historian Debra Schultz notes that most Jewish women who were involved in the civil rights movement were exposed to a Jewish framework for understanding social justice at a young age, even if they were not from religiously observant families. This moral framework often included explicit teaching about justice for African Americans. Hirschfeld attended Cornell University where she met other Jews and grew to identify increasingly with her Jewish heritage.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 2-3.

<sup>28</sup> Arsenault, 3, 6, 10.

<sup>29</sup> Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 154; Debra L. Schultz, "Our Unsung Civil Rights Movement Heroines," *Lilith* (Fall, 1999), 12.

Hirschfeld was inspired by the Greensboro sit-ins of February, 1960, and heard CORE's call for Freedom Riders to travel through the South. She traveled on a Greyhound bus from Nashville to Jackson with two other white women, one white man, and one black man. Shortly after noon on June 16, 1961, her group was arrested for breach of the peace. They were tried in City Court that same day and each ordered to pay a \$200 fine and serve four months in jail. Hirschfeld was sent to Parchman Penitentiary. Later, Hirschfeld joined the Friends of the South in Michigan to continue supporting the southern civil rights movement and lobbied for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964.<sup>30</sup>

Malcolm Boyd, a white gay Episcopal priest, also joined the Freedom Rides as part of the Episcopal Society for Cultural and Racial Unity. The group of 28 embarked on a prayer pilgrimage from New Orleans. When they arrived in Jackson at a Trailways station, many were arrested while attempting to desegregate the waiting room. Boyd, speaking for the group, announced that the Freedom Ride would continue. He and five other priests journeyed on to the University of the South in Sewanee, Tennessee. There, they desegregated a campus restaurant by declaring a hunger strike. Their pilgrimage ended when the presiding bishop of the

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<sup>30</sup> Schultz, *Going South*, 16, 154, 178; Arsenault, 327, 556; Jewish Women's Archive, "JWA - Elizabeth Slade Hirschfeld - Biography," <http://jwa.org/discover/infocus/civilrights/hirschfeld/hirschfeldbio.html>; Jewish Women's Archive, "JWA - Elizabeth Slade Hirschfeld - Interview," <http://jwa.org/discover/infocus/civilrights/hirschfeld/index.html>; "Investigation of 'Freedom Riders' their arrival, arrest, trials and sentences," investigated by A.L. Hopkins, typed by M. Curry, June 19, 1961, Sovereignty Commission Online. Her last name is spelled Hirshfeld in this document and her birthplace is listed as Ithaca, N.Y., though her birth date, university and other information are consistent with other records. Hirschfeld's biography for the Jewish Women's Archive as well as Debra Schultz's book *Going South* say she was in the sixth group of Freedom Riders, though the detailed Sovereignty Commission files list her in the fifteenth group arrested as did the *Jackson Daily News*; "Freedom Riders Through July 6, 1961," p. 8, Sovereignty Commission Online; "Riders Escape Hoe Duty at Parchman," *Jackson Daily News*, June 16, 1961, in Sovereignty Commission Online.

United States endorsed their efforts and condemned segregation. However, Boyd continued to be involved in efforts to advance civil rights. He worked on voter registration in McComb, Mississippi, in 1964, and continued working with SNCC in Mississippi and Alabama the following year.<sup>31</sup>

Eddie Sandifer, a white gay man and a native southerner, helped host the Freedom Riders who came through Jackson. Sandifer's father was a "hellfire and brimstone" white southern Baptist preacher. But, he was one who believed in civil rights and frequently preached at black churches. Historian John Howard writes, "Though he was well-known since the 1940s as a communist, homosexual, and civil rights activist, Sandifer never suffered harassment based on his sexual orientation until the 1960s, when he hosted freedom riders in his Jackson home." However, despite resistance, Sandifer would continue to organize in Mississippi decades after to advance gay rights, black civil rights and other causes.<sup>32</sup>

Another important Mississippi civil rights activist was Bill Higgs, a white gay man. After attending the University of Mississippi and earning a law degree from Harvard, Higgs settled in Jackson in 1958. He ran as a segregationist for state legislature and lost. Though it is not clear how, he reversed course and became, according to John Howard, "...the state's most visible white integrationist." Higgs co-founded the *Mississippi Free Press*, a pro-civil rights newspaper, served as counsel to

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<sup>31</sup> Arsenault, 433; Malcolm Boyd, *As I Live and Breathe: Stages of an Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1969), 141; Malcolm Boyd, *Take Off the Masks: The Classic Spiritual Autobiography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1993), 10, 116-119; Michael Battle, *Black Battle, White Night: The Authorized Biography of Malcolm Boyd* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 15-16.

<sup>32</sup> Studs Terkel, *American Dreams: Lost & Found* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 279-280. In Terkel's collection, "Charlie Dellakamp" is Eddie Sandifer according to Eddie Sandifer vertical file, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 234.

James Meredith in his case against the University of Mississippi, sued the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, a counter-intelligence group intended to thwart the movement, created a handbook for civil rights organizers, and more. After being run out of Mississippi in early 1963 (discussed in chapter four), Higgs continued to be active in the civil rights movement from Washington, D.C. Higgs served as the attorney for both SNCC and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party as well as a consultant for CORE. He also continued to recruit more student activists to travel to Mississippi and do the work that he could not.<sup>33</sup>

### **SNCC in Southwest Georgia**

Faith Holsaert was raised in an interracial family in New York City, with a Jewish birth mother and an African American mother by affection. At age six, her mother and father separated and her mother continued raising her with her partner Charity Bailey. Faith, who was also a lesbian, remembers learning about racial injustice from a young age. Her elementary school incorporated black history and Jewish history and she spent a year in Haiti at age seven. Her parents were also very activist, taking her to demonstrations for the Rosenbergs, Pete Seeger concerts, and more.<sup>34</sup>

Faith attended Barnard College. Even before she went to work in Georgia, Faith was jailed in Crisfield, Maryland, for a week following a sit-in in late December, 1961. There she met many people who would organize the Cambridge Movement.

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<sup>33</sup> Howard, 150-58.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Faith Holsaert, telephone interview by author, July 13, 2011; Schultz, *Going South*, 138-39, 152, 154; Faith S. Holsaert, "Resistance U," in *Hands on the Freedom Plow: Personal Accounts by Women in SNCC* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 181-82.

In 1962, Faith joined a march from Baltimore to Washington, DC, to highlight the situation in Baton Rouge where three civil rights workers were being held. That summer, the rising level of violence with three church burnings in Georgia convinced Faith that she needed to go South and join the civil rights movement there. She travelled to Albany, Georgia, and joined SNCC under the leadership of Charles Sherrod.<sup>35</sup>

Faith felt very much a part of this movement. However, as a result of spending time in an unsanitary jail for her activism, she had to leave Southwest Georgia because she became ill with hepatitis. After having to sit out and watch the movement, Faith also became increasingly disillusioned by the failure of the government to intervene to help the workers in their struggle. However, she lobbied congressmen in Washington, D.C., to support the movement and continued to work in the New York SNCC office in the summers of 1963, '64 and '65. The New York office was instrumental to the success of SNCC, raising far more money than any other office. Faith spent her summers preparing direct mail and processing the returns under the stewardship of Julie Prettyman.<sup>36</sup>

Cathy Cade, a white lesbian, grew up in the suburbs of Chicago in the 1940s and 50s. When she was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, she first heard of the civil rights movement when someone at the Unitarian Church told her about Martin Luther King, Jr. The following year, her father was relocated to Memphis and Cade began attending

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<sup>35</sup> Schultz, 152; Holsaert, 183-84; Howard Zinn, *SNCC: The New Abolitionists* (New York: Beacon Press, 1965), 144.

<sup>36</sup> Holsaert interview; Holsaert, 183-94; The SNCC Papers list her as a member of the New York office staff in August, 1965, working on community relations. Mary Britting to Muriel Tillinghast, August 4, 1965, The Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee Papers, 1959-1972, microfilm, reel 12, 0195.

Central High School there at the same time the crisis at Central High School was occurring in Little Rock. Her school was segregated and the question of integration had many white families anxious.<sup>37</sup>

After high school, Cade attended Carleton College in Minnesota. In the spring of 1962, her junior year, she decided to participate in a new exchange program at Spelman. She viewed it as an opportunity to form friendships across racial lines that she had been denied thus far in life. One day, she heard there were demonstrations taking place downtown. Many black students, a few white students and some teachers were protesting at the Georgia State Legislature. While she was scared of the white opposition forming around the demonstration, she was inspired by the courage of the black students and her teacher, Howard Zinn. For the rest of the semester, she would continue learning from Zinn and, for the most part, spending time at the SNCC office listening to activists like Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, Frank Smith and Frank Holloway.<sup>38</sup>

Cade returned to Carleton to complete her degree. But, she continued supporting the movement by raising money for SNCC, collecting goods to send South, and arranging for the Freedom Singers to perform on campus. Upon graduating, she joined the movement in Albany, Georgia. Cade was there just one day before she was arrested for “vagrancy.” She was placed in a segregated jail and participated in a hunger strike. She also sent letters to her family, now in Chicago,

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<sup>37</sup> Cathy Cade, “Caught in the Middle,” in *Hands on the Freedom Plow*, 195; Interview with Cathy Cade, interview by Ronald J. Grele, January 5, 1985, transcript p. 1-2, 10-12, Student Movements of the 1960s Oral History Project, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University.

<sup>38</sup> Cathy Cade, “My First Demonstration – Atlanta, 1962,” speech at the Main Library, San Francisco, March 27, 2010, Civil Rights Movement Veterans Website, [http://www.crmvet.org/nars/stor/s\\_cade.htm](http://www.crmvet.org/nars/stor/s_cade.htm); Cade, “Caught in the Middle,” 196.

asking them to publicize what was going on in Albany. Her father, who was not a partisan of the movement, grew increasingly concerned and traveled to Albany to investigate, visiting the SNCC office and talking to Chief Laurie Pritchett. After nine days in jail, Cathy's case went to trial. The judge sentenced her to 60 days probation under the jurisdiction of her parents and she and her father got on a flight back to Hinsdale, Illinois. Upon returning, he contacted the Chicago FBI to tell them about the Communist influence in SNCC. Then, he had a nervous breakdown and was hospitalized. Though he wanted his daughter to stay out of the movement, Cathy spent two weeks at home before heading to Atlanta to work in the SNCC office for the rest of the summer. She would go on to do civil rights work in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Gulfport and Canton, Mississippi.<sup>39</sup>

### **Birmingham, 1963**

Barbara Deming, a white lesbian, began her activism in the peace movement, focusing on nuclear disarmament. She was also an important ideological influence on many movements and historian Martin Duberman writes, "she is today considered by some to be among the leading theorists of secular nonviolence." Deming viewed the peace movement and civil rights movement as part of a single struggle. In May, 1963, she joined the efforts for racial justice in Birmingham and was arrested in a demonstration for wearing a sign declaring "All Men Are Brothers." Her participation in the Birmingham movement pushed her to greater

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<sup>39</sup> Cade, "Caught in the Middle," 196-207; Cade interview, 24-32. Cade is listed as part of the Gulfport research project in "Volunteers in the State," July 3, 1964, p. 2, SNCC Papers microfilm, reel 12, 0796. She is listed in Moss Point in WATS Line Reports, June 24, 1964, SNCC Papers microfilm, reel 15, 0334.

commitment to efforts for black civil rights. Later that year, she took part in the Peace Walk from Quebec to Washington to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. In Albany, Georgia, where Cathy Cade and Faith Holsaert were part of the movement, Deming and others were arrested for marching on the wrong side of the street. The Albany movement provided support to the jailed peace walkers, leading Deming to state, "...the struggle for rights for Negroes and the struggle for peace are properly speaking part of one and the same struggle." She would later join the SCLC's Poor People's Campaign, staying in Resurrection City for three weeks.<sup>40</sup>

### **The March on Washington**

The March on Washington of 1963 was a major point in the history of the civil rights movement. Suggested by A. Philip Randolph in the winter of 1962, it represented the first time in which all major civil rights organizations collaborated on national action. The "Big Six" (the Negro American Labor Council, SNCC, CORE, the NAACP, SCLC, and the National Urban League) joined together to mark the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation by speaking out against the failure to make good on the political, social and economic promise one hundred years after the end of slavery. A. Philip Randolph asked Bayard Rustin to draft the proposal for the Emancipation March, which would eventually become the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: New Press, 2011), 54, 59, 66-70, 130-31.

<sup>41</sup> Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I've Seen, A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 239-242.



The civil rights organizations not only had to deal with differences over whether to incorporate civil disobedience into the march and convince President Kennedy it would not lead to a backlash against the civil rights bill, they also clashed over whether Rustin should be the director. Roy Wilkins was the only one who dissented from Rustin organizing, but he led a massive organization, the NAACP. Ultimately, it was decided that Randolph would hold the title of director, but could appoint Rustin as his deputy to do the hard work of organizing.<sup>42</sup>

With just seven weeks to organize the event, which was expected to bring 100,000 people to Washington, D.C. for a single day, Rustin took on a monumental task. Working out of Harlem, he brought together 100 volunteers and paid workers for long days of labor that were compared in the press to preparations for the invasion of Normandy. Rustin had eight principal assistants, one of whom was Tom Kahn, his partner. The two met while Rustin was organizing In Friendship. Michael Harrington had suggested two undergraduates from Brooklyn College to assist in Rustin's efforts, Rachelle Horowitz and Kahn. The two would be instrumental to many of Rustin's organizing efforts, including the Prayer Pilgrimage, the Youth Marches of 1958 and '59, and eventually the March on Washington. Kahn, in particular, would encourage Rustin to continue to be involved in the black freedom struggle so that the movements for labor and racial progress would continue to be united.<sup>43</sup>

Kahn, a white gay man, was an important civil rights activist in his own right. In the early 1960s, he returned to college to finish his undergraduate degree, which

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<sup>42</sup> Anderson, 241-48.

<sup>43</sup> Anderson, 195, 201, 211, 223, 248-250.

he had put on hold to devote time to movement activism. Kahn enrolled in Howard University, becoming one of the few white undergraduates, and exerted a strong influence on the Nonviolent Action Group (NAG) there. He was important to adding a democratic-socialist analysis to their racial activism. He also helped bring Bayard Rustin to campus to speak and debate Malcolm X. While the NAG activists were not completely in agreement with Rustin's ideas, they were drawn to his example of leadership as he was a black intellectual-activist the likes of which they had not often seen before.<sup>44</sup>

In 1963, Kahn was called on to assist in preparations for the March on Washington. The logistics were incredible. Rustin and his assistants and volunteers ended up having to prepare for twice as many people as initially expected, providing food, water, sanitation, medical care, and more. In the end, the March on Washington became one of the most memorable events in the history of the civil rights movement, especially with Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. Roy Wilkins later said that King's name became attached to the march, but it was more accurately Rustin's march. The day ended peacefully, the prospects for the civil rights bill likely improved, and Andrew Young said it helped turn the southern movement into a national one.<sup>45</sup>

However, the march also had its dissenters within the circle of civil rights activists. The strongest voice was Pauli Murray. She wrote a letter to A. Philip Randolph one week before the march drawing attention to the lack of black women on the dais. She reminded Randolph and others that black women played a major

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<sup>44</sup> Anderson, 236-38.

<sup>45</sup> Anderson, 251-52, 261-64.

role in the movement at the grassroots, yet they were largely excluded from leadership roles. Murray concluded, "...I have not devoted the greater part of my adult life to the implementation of human rights to (now) condone any policy which is not inclusive."<sup>46</sup>

At the same time, a number of gay and lesbian activists likely attended the March on Washington. Yvonne Flowers, a black lesbian, joined in the march along with her mother, Theo. But, while she participated in the March on Washington, Flowers did not participate in other civil rights demonstrations. She found the homophobia both in black churches and black political movements at the time too high. Instead, the group she most identified with was Women Strike for Peace.<sup>47</sup> Marcia Perlstein, a white lesbian, was also present that day. As a teenager in the Bronx, she went to Harlem on Saturdays to join the sympathy picket at a Woolworth's in 1960. She also traveled to Washington, D.C. to join the Youth March for Integrated Schools. Though unable to see the beginning or end, Perlstein remembers the March on Washington in August, 1963, as by far the biggest march she had participated in. When King rose to speak, Perlstein writes, "It was the first moment of true oneness with others--friends and strangers alike--that I'd ever felt in my life."<sup>48</sup>

Audre Lorde also joined in the March on Washington. She had previously attempted to get involved in the Freedom Rides along with her friend, Elaine Paul. However, Paul's mother convinced them not to travel to Mississippi. Instead, the

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<sup>46</sup> Anderson, 258-59.

<sup>47</sup> Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume, 1993), 91-92, 98.

<sup>48</sup> Marcia Perlstein, "Walking the Walk," *Frontiers*, June 26, 1998, p. 64, Civil Rights Movement and Gays folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

March on Washington became Lorde's first direct involvement in the civil rights movement. She was overwhelmed by the experience and believed, at the time, that ending racism was a real possibility. In 1979, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Stonewall, she would speak at the National March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. In that speech, she challenged the notion that the lesbian and gay struggle was separate from other struggles, saying they "have always been in the vanguard of struggle for liberation and justice in this country and within our communities." In 1983, on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, Lorde was the only lesbian or gay speaker, and emphasized the common goals of black civil rights and gay liberation.<sup>49</sup>

Alice Walker, who also became a major literary figure and would identify as "two-spirited," or bisexual, joined the March on Washington as well. Born and raised in Eatonton, Georgia, Walker experienced the harsh realities of being the daughter of a southern black sharecropper. Walker cites seeing Dr. King on television protesting a department store in Atlanta in October, 1960, as a transformative moment for her. She says, "At the moment I saw his resistance I knew I would never be able to live in this country without resisting everything that sought to disinherit me." When she left for Spelman College the following Fall, Walker sat down in the front of the bus in protest, but moved to the back "in confusion and tears" when told.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Alexis de Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004), 71-72, 81, 253-57, 324-26.

<sup>50</sup> Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker, A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 59, 64-65, 443-44.

Biographer Evelyn C. White writes that, "Alice's objectives at Spelman were to read more books, improve her writing, and get in the thick of the civil rights protests that were erupting on the streets of Atlanta, seemingly everyday." In college, Walker, like Cathy Cade, was heavily influenced by Howard Zinn, "the first white man with whom she ever had a real conversation." His class was also the only one she found where the civil rights movement was being intelligently discussed. However, Spelman discouraged protest. Zinn was soon fired and Walker transferred to Sarah Lawrence College.<sup>51</sup>

In the summer of 1963, Alice Walker lived in Boston. That August, she took an early morning bus to Washington, D.C. to join the March on Washington. Walker wrote of hearing King,

...when his resounding voice swelled and broke over the heads of thousands of people assembled at the Lincoln memorial I felt what a Southern person brought up in the church always feels when those cadences--not the words themselves, necessarily, but the rhythmic spirals of passionate emotion, followed by even more passionate pauses--rolls off the tongue of a really first-rate preacher. I felt my soul rising from the sheer force of Martin King's eloquent goodness..."<sup>52</sup>

In the summer of 1965, Walker returned to Georgia to work on voter registration in Liberty County. Civil rights workers there faced a hostile response, ducking rocks and bottles thrown by irate white segregationists. Already blind in one eye from a childhood accident, Walker was concerned that she would be hit in the other eye and permanently lose her sight, or worse. Walker says, "I wasn't ready to be a martyr just then." She left Georgia and joined the Experiment in

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<sup>51</sup> White, 69, 75, 77-79, 86-89, 100.

<sup>52</sup> White, 81-84.

International Living in Kenya. There, she worked on building a school as well as other community improvement efforts. While she despaired at the conditions in many areas, she also found herself inspired by the independence movements across the continent. In the summer of 1966, she moved to Mississippi to work for the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. The following year, she wrote a prize-winning essay, "The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" in which she contended, "...regardless of the outcome, the movement had sparked a sense of pride in blacks that would live forever."<sup>53</sup>

### **The Freedom Vote of 1963**

The Freedom Vote was a parallel election held in Mississippi to challenge the white supremacist argument that African Americans had no interest in participating in politics. One of the key organizers of the Freedom was Allard Lowenstein, a white bisexual man. Born in 1929 and raised in West Chester, New York, Lowenstein was interested in politics from an early age, following the Spanish Civil War when he was just ten. Lowenstein was also interested in racial injustice from a young age, beginning with discussions with Rex Freeman, the family chauffeur. When he arrived at the University of North Carolina, he became involved in the struggle to end Jim Crow in the state. As president of the National Student Association, he pushed the group to support desegregation efforts nationwide. Lowenstein was

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<sup>53</sup> White, 110-11, 130, 152.

also interested in racial justice abroad, traveling to South Africa and writing a book about apartheid, *A Brutal Mandate*.<sup>54</sup>

After being pushed out of his job at Stanford, Lowenstein moved to Raleigh, North Carolina, where he became increasingly involved in civil rights activism in spring, 1963. Lowenstein invited Liberia's ambassador to the United Nations, Angie Brooks, to Raleigh for a lecture. He also arranged for an integrated group to take her to dinner at the Sir Walter Raleigh Hotel, a white-only establishment. Then, they went to a large segregated cafeteria, where they were also denied service. These incidents produced headlines across North Carolina and, within days, galvanized hundreds of people to insist on desegregation.<sup>55</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Medgar Evers was assassinated in Mississippi and Lowenstein traveled there to provide assistance, likely at the invitation of Aaron Henry. Henry was a bisexual black man who was president of the Mississippi NAACP and ran a pharmacy in Clarksdale. Henry was central to the movement in the state. Constance Curry writes, "There isn't one aspect of the fight for freedom and equality in the state of Mississippi over the past fifty years that does not reflect the influence of Aaron Henry." Henry served in World War II and believed it was essential to broadening his views and the views of other African Americans, boosting their morale to fight for their rights in the post-war years. In 1951, following the rape of a 17- and 19-year old black girl for which the white men were acquitted, Henry decided to start an NAACP chapter and was elected its president.

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<sup>54</sup> David Harris, *Dreams Die Hard* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 8; William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 177.

<sup>55</sup> Chafe, 174-79; Harris, 24.

He and Medgar Evers also worked together on the Regional Council of Negro Leadership (RCNL) to defend the economic interests of African Americans in the Mississippi Delta.<sup>56</sup>

In the wake of the *Brown* decision, whites cracked down on the NAACP and RCNL while White Citizens' Council membership rose. The following year was an extreme low. Five African Americans (Gus Courts, Clinton Melton, Rev. George Lee, Lamar Smith and Emmett Till) were murdered in Mississippi and almost all NAACP chapters became inactive or were abandoned. By 1959, the movement began to slowly rise again and Henry was elected head of the state NAACP. In the early 1960s, the Freedom Riders began arriving and the Coahoma County Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) was formed and would expand to include all of the state's black leaders. Henry wrote that that period saw a turnaround in the movement because of increased outside assistance, a brighter media spotlight, and the poor strategizing by the white opposition.<sup>57</sup>

Henry's friendship with Lowenstein went back to 1949. In 1963, they talked increasingly about ways to revive the movement. In the course of discussion, Lowenstein and others concluded that they have a day of voting to challenge the notion that African Americans in Mississippi chose not to exercise the franchise and had no interest in politics. Lowenstein contended that he came up with the idea as a result of his experience in South Africa where blacks held a day of mourning on election day. Since blacks were supposed to be able to vote in Mississippi, they

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<sup>56</sup> Chafe, 182; Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), xvii, 70-79.

<sup>57</sup> Henry, 79, 98-99, 101, 137.



should have a day of voting instead. Lowenstein became the chairman of the Aaron Henry for Governor Advisory Committee, began raising money for the effort, and was instrumental in bringing students to the South to aid the Freedom Vote. In the end, the Freedom Vote saw roughly 85,000 African Americans visit the polls to dispel the myth of political indifference. It shone a national spotlight on racism and voter suppression in Mississippi. It also led to a larger project, Freedom Summer.<sup>58</sup>

### **Freedom Summers, 1964-65**

Freedom Summer was a formative experience for many activists of the 1960s and numerous lesbians and gays participated in this effort to place a national spotlight on racial discrimination and violence in Mississippi. Bob Moses and Allard Lowenstein were central to planning the Freedom Summer of 1964, which would increase the number of student workers from outside the South tenfold. Lowenstein drew on his connections at various colleges to supply volunteers including Dennis Sweeney at Stanford, Jim Scott and Bruce Payne at Yale, and Barney Frank at Harvard.<sup>59</sup>

However, by April, Lowenstein broke with the project because he did not believe SNCC was working with other groups, like CORE and the NAACP. He also believed they should not associate with the National Lawyer's Guild because of its Communist associations and thought SNCC's decision-making process hindered action. However, many people he had recruited continued to work with the project

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<sup>58</sup> Chafe, 182-86; Harris, 30-37. Interview with Allard Lowenstein, interview by Anne Romaine, March 4, 1967, Anne Romaine Papers, Wisconsin Historical Society.

<sup>59</sup> Chafe, 188-89.

and a number were upset with Lowenstein's decision to part ways. The killing of Goodman, Cheney and Schwerner led Lowenstein to reconsider and he ended up spending most of the summer in Mississippi, laying low helping lawyers.<sup>60</sup>

Volunteers that Lowenstein had recruited, like Barney Frank, were important to the success of the Freedom Summer Project. Born in Bayonne, New Jersey, in 1940, Frank was raised in a close-knit family that took seriously the importance of social conscience. One of the first issues to raise Frank's concern about racial justice was the killing of Emmett Till. He was angered that the authorities knew who killed Emmett Till, yet they went unpunished. Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam were eventually tried and acquitted, but admitted they killed Till to *Look* magazine. Weisberg concludes, "The Emmett Till tragedy instilled in Barney a desire to fight for civil rights and put an end to hatred and bigotry." At the same time that Barney Frank was developing a passion for racial justice, he was coming to the realization that he was gay and dealing with the consequent pain and fear instilled by a homophobic society.<sup>61</sup>

In his junior year at Harvard, Frank met Allard Lowenstein, who would have a major impact on his life and political future. In December, 1963, Lowenstein recruited Frank to serve as one of his deputies and make preparations for the 1964 Freedom Summer. When the summer arrived, Frank worked for about five weeks in Jackson helping form the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP), which would challenge the all-white Mississippi Democrats for their seats at the

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<sup>60</sup> Chafe, 192, 194-95; Harris, 60.

<sup>61</sup> Stuart E. Weisberg, *Barney Frank: The Story of America's Only Left-Handed, Gay, Jewish Congressman* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 22, 30, 34, 37-38.

convention in Atlantic City. At one point, two COFO volunteers were arrested in Canton and their truck confiscated by police. The truck was filled with voter registration forms for hundreds of African Americans who would now be vulnerable to retaliation. Frank had to frantically find and claim the truck from the auto yard before its contents were discovered, which he and actor Richard Beymer successfully accomplished. Barney Frank later said he was more proud of volunteering for Freedom Summer than anything else in his life.<sup>62</sup>

Nina Boal also took part in Freedom Summer. She was born in 1946 and raised in Winnetka, an all-white suburb of Chicago where there was a gentlemen's agreement not to sell one's house to black or Jews. Nina was a tomboy as a child and recalls developing a fear that she was not feminine enough and would eventually turn into a "gasp-choke-horror lesbian." She was bullied for being different, in a variety of ways, and believes it really affected her childhood.<sup>63</sup>

Being raised in a white suburb, Nina's first encounter with the civil rights movement was reading about the North Carolina sit-ins in the newspaper. She also heard about the demonstrations in Birmingham and thought all of this activism and protest was wonderful. Nina believes she identified with the movement because of her experience being bullied for her sexual orientation. As a result of her own mistreatment, she was ready to join a fight against injustice. During her senior year,

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<sup>62</sup> Weisberg, 55-57; Bruce Watson, *Freedom Summer: The Savage Season That Made Mississippi Burn and Made America a Democracy* (New York: Viking, 2010), 161-64, 290; SNCC Papers list Barney Frank as a worker on the federal research project. "Volunteers in the State," July 3, 1964.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with Nina Boal, telephone interview by author, July 9, 2011.

Nina also participated in a protest against real estate segregation, or redlining, and was arrested.<sup>64</sup>

Nina attended Roosevelt University in Chicago and participated in the demonstrations there. It was at one of these demonstrations that she was recruited by the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee. She went through an orientation in Hattiesburg for non-violent training. Nina acted like she did not know how to type because she knew that would get her stuck working in an office all summer. Instead, she was able to concentrate on voter registration and building the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Nina also worked in Clarke County on voter registration in the town of Stonewall.<sup>65</sup>

Nina returned to Philadelphia, Mississippi, and stayed from 1965 to 1966. While there, she worked on voter registration, school desegregation and a push to hire black police officers. Nina also worked over in Meridian on a boycott of Winn-Dixie. Nina was arrested at this protest and beaten while serving time. Not only did Nina have to undergo a painful exam for venereal disease as part of her processing into the jail, she was placed with a drunk white woman. The woman led her to believe she was in favor of civil rights only to tease out Nina's beliefs. When she found out Nina had been arrested for civil rights activism, she got a hold of a Coke bottle and smashed it over Nina's head. After being released, she began working in the Philadelphia Freedom School, before being arrested again driving a car that contained a gun belonging to someone else. Having served her time, Nina was

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<sup>64</sup> Boal interview.

<sup>65</sup> Boal interview. Nina is listed in "Volunteers for the MFDP Summer Project," 1965, SNCC Papers microfilm, reel 12, 0831.

released, joined a demonstration, and was jailed again. At this point, she decided it would be best to return to Chicago.<sup>66</sup>

Mary Jo Osgood was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1947. She knew she was gay from about age 8. However, given laws that criminalized homosexuality as well as the lack of strong a gay and lesbian movement for social change, she lived in silence and dated men. Mary Jo says white lesbians and gays “didn’t have the self-awareness to fight for our own rights” and she made the struggle of African Americans a focus of her life.<sup>67</sup>

The press had a tremendous impact on Mary, making her more socially aware and motivating her to join the movement. She recalls the impact of the national news, especially *Look* magazine, in her “social awakening.” After the murder of Cheney, Goodman and Schwerner, Mary read a newspaper article about the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee and decided to contact them. When she graduated from high school in 1965, she joined SNCC in Denver. Two days after joining, she traveled to Washington, DC, to join a protest to unseat a senator. She spent ten days in DC, staying with a family there. After this experience, she knew she wanted to travel to the South.<sup>68</sup>

Mary Jo traveled to Jackson, Mississippi, in June, 1965, to join the movement. Within 12 hours, she participated in a peaceful demonstration with 200 other people. The group was standing up against voter intimidation and attempting to encourage people to register to vote. The protest became a site of violence as many

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<sup>66</sup> Boal interview.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mary Jo Osgood, telephone interview by author, July 10, 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Osgood interview.

of the men were attacked, as well as a few of the women. Police brought in a tank called Big Blue to disperse demonstrators. Osgood was arrested for demonstrating, charged with breach of the peace and jailed for about 20 days.<sup>69</sup>

After her release, Mary Jo's work in Mississippi centered on teaching at a freedom school being held in a black church. Like many other freedom school educators, Mary Jo had no previous teaching experience and lessons were put together on an ad hoc basis. She wrote back home asking people to send materials for the school to use. Despite a lack of experienced educators, the response to the freedom school in Jackson was very good. They did not face many problems with white segregationists as the school was in the black part of town and freedom schools were generally left alone.<sup>70</sup> Working in the capital and in the coastal tourist areas tended to be safer as Mississippi segregationists wanted to avoid the image of being violent racists.

However, Mary Jo volunteered to transfer to Hattiesburg sometime in late July or early August where the situation was more dangerous. In Hattiesburg, she began working on voter registration. She experienced some resistance from the black community and admits she did not know much about African American experiences in the South at the time. During her time in Mississippi, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 passed the US Congress, but Mary Jo notes that news about it did not quite make it to the South. There were few protests in the area in support of voting rights because of Klan activity.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Osgood interview.

<sup>70</sup> Osgood interview.

<sup>71</sup> Osgood interview.

In 1966, Mary Jo went back down to Mississippi to work for SNCC. She drove a U-Haul from Denver filled with supplies for the movement along with another SNCC worker. This time, after dispersing the donations, Mary Jo set to work in Canton, located just north of Jackson. She stayed in the area for between two and three months doing the movement work she had been initiated into the previous summer; voter registration, demonstrations, and teaching in freedom schools. This summer was different for a number of reasons, particularly because there was much less visibility for the movement, fewer white workers joined the movement and a sharper focus on Alabama.<sup>72</sup>

In 1968, Mary Jo spent her final summer in Mississippi. The movement was dealing with the loss of King and Robert F. Kennedy. Black Power was increasing its following and H. Rap Brown's leadership altered SNCC. She worked in the small town of Moss Point along with Ike and Nettie Sellers. The couple had recently focused on installing radios in SNCC's movement automobiles so they could immediately alert each other of any danger. She also traveled to Bogalusa, Louisiana, along with four or five ministers. As a white woman in a car traveling with African American men, the situation was quite dangerous. The group decided to integrate a diner and were protected by black men with rifles outside. Mary Jo stopped participating in the movement after this summer in part because she felt there was a growing resentment against white volunteers and especially resentment of white women.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Osgood interview.

<sup>73</sup> Osgood interview.

Linda Seese, a white lesbian, also worked for an extended time in Mississippi. Born in Akron, Ohio, in 1942, Linda was raised in nearby Stow and went on to attend the College of Wooster. For one semester, she participated in an exchange program at NYU. It was in New York that she first heard the Freedom Singers and wanted to join the civil rights movement. She tried to find the SNCC office but got lost on the subway. She returned to Ohio and graduated just as students were being recruited for the Mississippi Summer Project.<sup>74</sup>

She and a friend traveled to Oberlin College to interview for Freedom Summer. Linda was picked; her friend was not. Jesse Morris, head of SNCC's federal programs, later told her that they did not want to choose her because she was too naïve, but Morris wanted her because she had a degree in economics, which would be important to the federal programs. The orientation for federal programs was combined with the freedom school orientation and, initially, Linda was sent to Ruleville to work at a Freedom School. After a short time, though, she was sent to Holmes County to help set up producer co-ops in which local African Americans could make crafts and sell them in the North as an alternative to picking cotton. But, she had trouble recruiting people to be a part of the program at mass meetings.<sup>75</sup>

Despite difficulties and a few moves, Linda decided to stay for roughly a year and spent most of her time in Indianola teaching at a freedom school. She recalls the disparities in education. Black students continued to be segregated, attended school in the summer so they would be free to pick cotton, and many of the adults in the

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Linda Seese (Spes Dolphin), telephone interview by author, February 22, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Seese interview. Linda is listed in Ruleville in "Volunteers in the State," July 3, 1964, p. 5, SNCC Papers microfilm, reel 12, 0798.



evening classes could not write their names. In the evenings, Indianola saw bursts of violence. The freedom school was burned down and white terrorists threw Molotov cocktails into Mrs. MacGruder's house, where Linda was staying.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, African American life in Indianola improved. The teachers, though inexperienced, attempted to engage the students in a variety of ways and drew between 40 and 60 students. A number of schools incorporated African studies and, because one of the teacher's knew dance, the Indianola freedom school taught that as well. Linda views the program as a success as several of the teenagers in the freedom school became workers in the project itself. Decades later, when they held a reunion, one of the students in the freedom school became an accomplished poet. Linda's time in Mississippi ended with a cotton worker's strike. She went to Michigan to attempt to raise financial support for the strike. But at that time, white workers were being nudged out of the movement and the War on Poverty expanded Head Start programs which took the place of freedom schools.<sup>77</sup>

Nancy (Shaw) Stoller, a white lesbian, grew up in segregated areas in Hampton and Newport News, Virginia. It was during her time at Wellesley College, when she heard about the sit-ins in Greensboro that Nancy first became an activist organizing a sympathy picket at a local Woolworth's. That summer, living with her parents, she became involved in the Non-violent Action Group (NAG) in Washington, D.C., joining sit-ins on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and working on support efforts for the southern movement. During this time, Nancy worked closely with Stokely

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<sup>76</sup> Seese interview. Linda is listed in Indianola in "Memo to all Project Directors Re: Subsistence for Volunteers," p. 2, SNCC Papers microfilm, reel 12, 0759.

<sup>77</sup> Seese interview.

Carmichael and the two remained in touch after their time in SNCC. In the summer of 1962, Nancy joined the Northern Student Movement to set up Freedom Centers in Prince Edward County, Virginia.<sup>78</sup>

While Stoller was not a part of the Freedom Summer of 1964, she went South the following year. Though SNCC was concerned about the already high number of “hangover volunteers,” Nancy was given a staff position in the South because Carmichael vouched for her. In January, 1965, she began working in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her primary task was to coordinate the Freedom Center, ensuring they were supplied and running effectively. One notable protest that Nancy and others organized was to desegregate the cafeteria at the state capitol, which remained divided despite federal law. In March, 1965, the group attempted to purchase food and sit in the cafeteria. However, they were refused and attacked by state troopers with billy clubs. The group tried on two subsequent occasions to desegregate the cafeteria with the same result. The NAACP also filed a lawsuit and soon the cafeteria was integrated. After her time organizing in Arkansas, Stoller continued to be involved in civil rights activism as a member of the Boston Action Group and People Against Racism.<sup>79</sup>

Sandra Tignor, an African American and lesbian who was a part of the Medical Committee for Civil Rights, was born in Washington, D.C. in 1937 and lived there until age 16. She recalls growing up in a segregated society, but saw little if

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Nancy Stoller, telephone interview by author, September 15, 2011; Nancy (Shaw) Stoller, “Lessons from SNCC--Arkansas 1965,” in *ARSNICK: The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee in Arkansas*, ed. by Jennifer Jensen Wallach and John A. Kirk (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 2011), 132-138. Nancy is listed in Little Rock in “Memo to All Project Directors Re: Subsistence for Volunteers,” SNCC Papers microfilm.

<sup>79</sup> Stoller, 133-38; Stoller interview.

any problems with it and had a great life as a child. It was not until age 15, around 1952, when her family moved into a predominantly white neighborhood in Northwest D.C. that the racial divide became more apparent. Her family experienced no overt hatred or violence. But, one day, a white boy in the neighborhood relayed to Sandra a comment from his mother. She told her son they would be moving soon because there were “too many black clouds moving in to the neighborhood.” Sandra was confused at first but soon realized he was talking about African Americans. It was not until she was in her twenties and living in California that she first became concerned with issues of racial justice.<sup>80</sup>

Sandra attended Dunbar High School in Washington, D.C. She reflects that it was a great experience because they had highly-educated, highly-qualified teachers. While the system of segregation prevented these teachers entering careers commensurate with their education and experience, it offered the students an excellent education. Sandra graduated at the age of 16, too young to enter nursing school. So, she attended Howard University for one year. Then, when she reached age 17, she moved to New York City, attended Bellevue School of Nursing and graduated in 1958.<sup>81</sup>

Sandra became a nurse and worked with a group of Jewish and liberal doctors. The doctors offered their employees the opportunity to fly with them to the South to support civil rights efforts in their capacities as medical professionals. She believes it was the culmination of years of racial segregation, even if it entailed

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<sup>80</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, July 10, 2012, 1; Sandra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, 1.

<sup>81</sup> Arden Eversmeyer and Margaret Purcell, eds., *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories* (Houston: Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project, 2012), 286-87.

no overt violence or recognizable loss of opportunity to her personally, as well as the feeling of being a helpless onlooker to the discrimination and racial violence of the South that motivated her to join.<sup>82</sup> Eventually, Sandra traveled to Mississippi.<sup>83</sup> While there, she provided medical assistance in a variety of ways. The group conducted first aid on demonstrators, taught health classes and met with local medical and nursing personnel.<sup>84</sup>

Sandra felt unsafe during her time in Mississippi, though she was never directly threatened and was not a participant in sit-ins or marches, which would have exposed her to greater danger. Her group served as the second line of defense by administering first aid to anyone injured in demonstrations or other activism. Like other civil rights workers, Sandra lived with a local African American family and recalls the generosity and sense of community there. She developed a strong admiration for the activists and community members that were willing to risk their security and livelihood for the cause of civil rights.<sup>85</sup>

Joseph Herzenberg, a white gay man, also joined in Freedom Summer, working primarily on voter registration. He had recently completed an M.A. in History at Yale, where he was a member of New Haven CORE, and accepted a teaching position at the historically black Tougaloo College, near Jackson.

Herzenberg recalled much of the tedium required by civil rights work. The boards of election would not supply him with a copy of the voter registration rolls. So, he

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<sup>82</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, July 10, 2012, 2.

<sup>83</sup> In Eversmeyer and Purcell, 290, Sandra says, "I believe it was the summers of 1963 and 1964 that I went down to Mississippi, and then to Louisiana." In letter to author, June 4, 2012, Sandra says the doctors, "...offered their employees the opportunity to go to Miss. as well. I chose to go in 1965."

<sup>84</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Eversmeyer and Purcell, 290-91.

would often sit in their offices copying them by hand. On other occasions, though, he went out and canvassed for African Americans willing to register to vote. He stayed at Tougaloo until 1969, when he relocated to Chapel Hill, North Carolina.<sup>86</sup>

### **Chapel Hill, 1963-1964**

Chapel Hill was a unique locale in the history of the civil rights movement. The town was supposed to be “a symbol of the enlightened South.” It prided itself on its more liberal attitudes on racial matters as distinct from the violence of the Deep South. This attitude was beneficial so long as liberal actions followed from liberal views. However, segregation persisted in Chapel Hill. When James Farmer came to speak in Chapel Hill in January, 1964, he declared Chapel Hill “...a key to the South and the nation.”<sup>87</sup> In order to push the movement forward, citizens of Chapel Hill first needed to be convinced that they had a problem with race and abandon their pride in supposed racial egalitarianism. Three gay men who led the desegregation in Chapel Hill were important to making this happen.

Patrick A. Cusick was born in Gadsden, Alabama, in 1931. His great grandfather was a slave-owner, Confederate Army major, and founder of the Ku Klux Klan in Etowah County. Though, Cusick also had a great great grandfather who was a Southern abolitionist and he clearly inherited that legacy. Pat remembers knowing black families in the area whose ancestors had been slaves of his great

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<sup>86</sup> Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg, interview by Joseph Mosnier, July 27, 1995, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Samuel Spies, “Mentor, political icon is mourned,” *The News & Observer* (Raleigh, NC), October 30, 2007, p. B1.

<sup>87</sup> John Ehle, *The Free Men* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 29, 154.

grandfather. The family's kitchen furniture had been hand-carved by slaves which left Pat with a lot of guilt.<sup>88</sup>

As a teenager, Pat's mother sent him to a Benedictine boarding school where two priests taught him about the evils of segregation and changed his racial outlook greatly. The other important influence was joining the Air Force. Cusick began to encounter black men who were working as his equals or better in the military ranks. He also began to form friendships with black men on a more equal basis than he had before. When he returned to the States, he went to Rome, Georgia, to care for his mother, then moved to Charlotte, North Carolina, to attend college and finally to Chapel Hill.<sup>89</sup>

In January, 1963, James Baldwin came to speak in Durham. In his speech, sponsored by the NAACP and CORE, Baldwin made clear his support of non-violent direct action in the service of black civil rights. He spoke out against the 'go slow' approach to freedom saying, "It is a time to take great risks, because if we don't, I don't believe we have a future. And I'd hate to see so much beauty die..."<sup>90</sup> That same month, Pat tried to set up a local chapter of the Student Peace Union and met John Dunne.<sup>91</sup>

John Dunne was born in Boston. Unlike Cusick, Dunne's great grandfather fought for the North in the Civil War. His family moved to Pittsburgh when he was two, then around a number of different places including Centerville and Cleveland,

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<sup>88</sup> E. Jane Smith, "New South, old memories," *South End News*, August 4, 1988, p. 4, 16; Ehle, 6-7; Interview with Pat Cusick, interview by Lois Gillman, June 10, 1974, tape 61, transcript p. 46.

<sup>89</sup> Ehle, 6-7; Cusick interview; G. McLeod Bryan, *These Few Also Paid a Price: Southern Whites Who Fought for Civil Rights* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 31-32.

<sup>90</sup> JC (Jim Clotfelter), "Lean, Hungry Black Cat: From 'Cool' To Cold," *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 6, 1963, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Ehle, 8.

Ohio.<sup>92</sup> When he reached his senior year, Dunne decided to attend the University of North Carolina, which he felt was “...a new, interesting place to go...” and was drawn to the emerging “social conflict” in the South.<sup>93</sup>

Cusick’s predominantly white SPU did not feel comfortable pushing integration on its own, especially when its mission was to stop war. However, when they approached David Dansby and the NAACP about lobbying businesses for integration, the NAACP said that its focus was on improving hospital care in Chapel Hill and did not want to shift their agenda. So, in March, 1963, the SPU began going around talking to business owners about integration. When discussions failed, they moved on to petitions and letter-writing and, eventually, picketing businesses that continued to discriminate.<sup>94</sup> In the spring of 1963, there was a rally for the mass campaign to desegregate neighboring Durham at the church of Rev. Swann. John and Pat were there to support the effort and met Quinton Baker, who later joined them in their efforts in Chapel Hill.<sup>95</sup>

Quinton Baker was originally from Greenville, North Carolina.<sup>96</sup> His father set strict rules of conduct in his family and was scared that Quinton was going to be ‘funny’ and called him a ‘sissy’, which hurt Quinton a lot. He also discouragingly predicted that Quinton “would never be a goddamn thing.” At the same time, Baker’s father was very defiant of racial etiquette, which Quinton probably learned.<sup>97</sup> Quinton became involved in civil rights activism because of an incident at

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with John Dunne, June 8, 1974, tape 68, transcript p. 1-2 and tape 70, transcript p. 26.

<sup>93</sup> Dunne interview, tape 68, p. 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> Cusick interview, tape 63, p. 16.

<sup>95</sup> Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by Larry Goodyn, June 2, 1974, transcript p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by James T. Sears, September 25, 1996.

<sup>97</sup> Baker interview with Sears.

East Carolina College during his junior year of high school. Baker had been denied permission to attend a performance of Fred Waring and His Pennsylvanians at the college.<sup>98</sup> He says this was the first time in his life that he wanted to do something but could not because of segregation. Baker soon became important in the struggle in Chapel Hill, making it a more integrated movement, as it was primarily white, providing it with greater momentum and bringing his experiences from the movement in Durham.<sup>99</sup>

At one point, David McReynolds came to Chapel Hill on a speaking tour for the Student Peace Union. McReynolds, a white gay activist, had previously worked for the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters planning a rally for civil rights at Madison Square Garden at the suggestion of Bayard Rustin and worked under Ella Baker planning prayer pilgrimages to Washington, D.C.<sup>100</sup> Pat Cusick, as the leader of the local SPU, first took McReynolds to Williamston, so he could see one of the few rural civil rights groups operating in the South. Because Cusick was dealing with a trial, McReynolds was then shown around by John Dunne. Chapel Hill activists were conducting “hit and runs” in which they sat in at a segregated establishment and then left before the police arrived. McReynolds unwittingly participated in one such protest when Dunne decided to take him and an integrated group to the segregated Pines Restaurant.<sup>101</sup> The police arrived and the group was asked to drive themselves to the jail where the owner would be signing warrants for their arrest.

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<sup>98</sup> Ehle, 55-56.

<sup>99</sup> Baker interview with Goodyn, tape 67, p. 5.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with David McReynolds, telephone interview by author, July 20, 2011; Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 36-38.

<sup>101</sup> David McReynolds, “A New Kind of Christmas In Chapel Hill,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, January 7, 1964, 3.



When they arrived, the owner only wanted he and Dunne arrested because the other two, “being niggers, didn’t really know what they were doing.”<sup>102</sup>

Chapel Hill became an important site of civil rights protest. From December 13, 1963, through January 5, 1964, police arrested 239 demonstrators.<sup>103</sup> By March 20, the Orange County Superior Court had jurisdiction over the 734 cases involving 217 people who were arrested during civil rights demonstrations.<sup>104</sup> That same month, an integrated group of four activists, Dunne and Cusick, both white, and Rev. Foushee and LaVert Taylor, both black, drew attention when they held an 8-day Holy Week Fast on the post office yard in March, 1964.<sup>105</sup> The opposition grew during the Holy Week Fast as the first Klan meeting in a long time was held in the Chapel Hill on Saturday, March 28. A 25-foot high cross burned as the Klansmen discussed the racial situation in the area. The event was a major spectacle not only because of the towering cross aflame in the backdrop, but because 600 to 700 people gathered to observe including civil rights activists and reporters. This was not a secret meeting in a clearing in the woods. Rather, it was in an open field near Chapel Hill-Durham Boulevard, brightly lit by the burning cross, the full moon, and the glare of lights from television crews.<sup>106</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Allard Lowenstein arrived in Chapel Hill and attempted to mediate between the city and the Chapel Hill Freedom Committee. He suggested they stop their protests until the US Congress had a chance to vote on the Civil

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<sup>102</sup> McReynolds, 3.

<sup>103</sup> “Negro To Join Fowler’s Staff,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, January 8, 1964, 1.

<sup>104</sup> “Transfer Appeals Nixed By Stanley,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, March 22, 1964, 1.

<sup>105</sup> “Integrationists Start 8-Day Fast Today,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, March 22, 1964.

<sup>106</sup> Ehle, 256; “The Klan Rode Again,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, April 1, 1964, 4.

Rights Act. John Dunne admitted that they did not have the funds or support to attempt another major campaign of civil disobedience anyway and protest waned. On July 2, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and desegregation proceeded in Chapel Hill. Meanwhile, Baker, Dunne and Cusick, who had been imprisoned, were all paroled outside of the state.<sup>107</sup>

One source of support for the movement in Chapel Hill was the NAACP Youth Council. Quinton Baker was the State Youth President for the NAACP. Charles McClain, the state Youth Advisor for the NAACP became concerned that Baker was in a relationship with Dunne and tried to get him removed by claiming Baker was being too loyal to CORE. However, Baker received support from his friend and National Youth Secretary of the NAACP, Laplois Ashford, a black gay man.<sup>108</sup> Ashford was born in McCool, Mississippi, in 1934. But, his family relocated to the North, settling in Rochester, New York. There, Ashford became involved in the civil rights movement, focused specifically on desegregating the Rochester School District.<sup>109</sup> Ashford rose to the position of National Youth Secretary of the NAACP, a position he held from 1962 to 1965, at the height of the civil rights movement. In that position, Ashford was a major advocate for youth involvement in the civil rights movement, which was a controversial issue. He joined his first picket line at age 13

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<sup>107</sup> Ehle, 320-22.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Quinton E. Baker, interview by Chris McGinnis, February 23, 2002, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Quinton E. Baker to Laplois Ashford, November 8, 1963, Papers of the NAACP, Youth Files, lists Baker as the President of the NAACP Youth Councils and College Chapters of North Carolina; First Annual College Chapters Conference, February 14-15, 1964, Papers of the NAACP, Youth Files, shows a conference held at Livingstone College in Salisbury, North Carolina, where both Baker and Ashford spoke.

<sup>109</sup> Interview with Walter Cooper, interview by Laura Warren Hill, May 21, 2008, Rochester Black Freedom Struggle Oral History Project; Fred Powledge, "Rochester Appoints a Negro Deputy Safety Chief," *The New York Times*, March 16, 1965, p. 33.

and wanted to see others experience the empowerment he felt in joining the movement. Ashford observed, "Participation in the struggle is a source of pride. Our teenagers are asserting themselves..."<sup>110</sup> He later became head of the Chicago Urban League.

Charlotte Bunch, a white lesbian, was raised in Artesia, New Mexico. While Bunch grew up in a town with few African Americans, she says, "The imperative that I should become a responsible, active citizen...was never in doubt." In the fall of 1962, she entered the Women's College of Duke University. Through her involvement with the YWCA, she learned about important social issues, particularly the imminent integration of Duke. The group discussed racism and thought of ways they could work to support the incoming African American students. She also attended her first demonstration: a pray-in outside of a local segregated church. Bunch writes, "It happened gradually, but as I look back, I see that 1963 was the turning point in my life, moving me inexorably from timid moral opposition to the unfairness of segregation in the South to a wider political understanding of injustices in the world and a commitment to work against them." Bunch was elected President of the state Methodist Student Movement as the group was becoming more active in advancing civil rights. She also traveled to Montgomery with a Methodist group and provided support for arriving marchers in 1965. The following year, she began working on organizing in African American communities

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<sup>110</sup> Martin Tolchin, "Teen-Agers Take Action on Urgent Social Issues," *The New York Times*, July 4, 1963, p. 20.

in Washington, D.C. But, with the rise of black power, she felt her role was more appropriately organizing in white communities and educating them about racism.<sup>111</sup>

### **Alabama, 1965**

Joan Nestle (b. 1940) was involved in the sit-ins of the early 1960s and traveled to Selma in 1965. In fourth grade, Nestle recalls being assigned to write an essay of a famous African American for National Negro Week. It was 1949 and the teacher told them there was one African American they could not write about. The teacher said Paul Robeson was a “disgrace to the country” and off limits for this project. After that, Nestle knew that she had to find out and write about Paul Robeson. She later reflected, “Along with the shame of that day...I learned something else: authority often said things that were not true about people it did not know, that enemies were made of those who were different, and that I would struggle never to accept dictated hatreds.” She continues, “If I had accepted the voice of orthodoxy in this early skirmish with McCarthy America, I would never have found the courage to claim my Lesbian life ten years later.”<sup>112</sup>

Part of Nestle’s identification with the civil rights movement was growing up Jewish. In her memoir, *A Restricted Country*, Nestle recounts an incident from her childhood, when her family took a vacation to the Shining Star Guest Ranch in Tucson, Arizona. Upon checking in at the ranch, they were given a card indicating that only members of “the Gentile faith” were welcome. Her parents informed the

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<sup>111</sup> Charlotte Bunch, in *Journeys That Opened up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975*, ed. by Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 122-31.

<sup>112</sup> Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987), 22-23.

manager they were Jewish. He told them that as long as they did not tell anyone they were Jewish, came and went through the back door, and took their meals separate from the other guests, they would be allowed to stay at the hotel. Her parents refused.<sup>113</sup>

Living in New York City in the early 1960s, Nestle joined various protests and demonstrations for black civil rights, traveling to Philadelphia and Baltimore. She participated in demonstrations where a number of white protesters would enter a restaurant and be seated. They would not eat or drink. At the signal of a minister, the group would rise and he would read a statement saying they would not leave until the black protesters picketing outside were allowed to eat. She writes of being dragged out of restaurants and having to wash spit from her face and hair. Nestle observes, "We, the white protesters, acted as a fifth column."<sup>114</sup>

In 1965, Nestle saw photographs from the freedom struggle in Alabama. One showed a black woman pinned to the ground by three police with her skirt pushed up. Her friend, Judith, called her after seeing the attempt by civil rights marchers to cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge. She asked if Joan would go with her to Selma to assist the voter registration campaign. Joan writes that she agreed, in part, "to do battle with another enemy besides my own despair."<sup>115</sup>

During her time in Selma, Joan was assigned to do voter registration work in the surrounding farmlands. She and Judith stayed with a black family. The two had to share a bed. Judith, knowing Joan was a lesbian, became alarmed whenever the

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<sup>113</sup> Nestle, 31.

<sup>114</sup> Nestle, 52.

<sup>115</sup> Nestle, 53.

two got too close. Joan kept her identity secret from everyone else at the time, fearing the family would not take her into their home if her “Lesbian self had stood in the church with [her].”<sup>116</sup>

Ruby Sales, a bisexual African American woman who was raised in Columbus, Georgia, was also part of the movement in Alabama.<sup>117</sup> She grew up experiencing segregation and racial violence. Dr. Thomas H. Brewer, head of the NAACP in Columbus, was killed in 1956. Subsequently, Sales recalls, there was not much enthusiasm for civil rights activity. However, she became more involved while she was a student at the Tuskegee Institute, where Gwen Patton was Student Body President. Sales says seeing a woman in a position of leadership as well as reading works by authors like James Baldwin, who had a “profound impact” on her, moved her to get involved. Tuskegee was also going through a transition from a campus centered on fraternities and sororities to civic groups. The faculty was also increasingly composed of young, activist professors. She joined the group of Tuskegee students who staged a march to Montgomery shortly after the Selma-to-Montgomery March.<sup>118</sup>

That summer, she and her friend joined the project run by Stokely Carmichael in Lowndes County. Carmichael made it clear to them that they were in “Bloody Lowndes.” They spent many days canvassing for people to register to vote.

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<sup>116</sup> Nestle, 55.

<sup>117</sup> Johnnetta Betsch Cole and Beverly Guy-Sheftall, *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African American Communities* (New York: One World Books, 2003), 35-36, 54.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with Ruby Sales, interview by Jean Wiley and Bruce Hartford, September, 2005, Civil Rights Movement Veterans Website.

But, just convincing people to come to a meeting first was a major obstacle given the pervasive fear.<sup>119</sup>

Unfortunately, Sales experienced one of the great tragedies of the civil rights movement. Following their release from jail, she, Jonathan Daniels, Father Richard Morrisoe, and Joyce Bailey walked up to a store in Hayneville, Alabama. As Sales approached the steps, two white men raised guns. Daniels pushed her out of the way and was hit in the stomach with a blast from the shotgun of Lowndes County Deputy Sheriff Tom Coleman and died.<sup>120</sup>

### **The Meredith March**

In June, 1966, James Meredith decided he would walk 220 miles from Memphis, Tennessee, into his home state of Mississippi on a “March Against Fear.” He covered about 26 miles before a man named Aubrey Norvell fired at him, covering his body with 70 shotgun pellets. CORE announced it would continue Meredith’s March followed by King and other leaders and organizations.<sup>121</sup>

Arthur Finn, a white gay man, was one of the people who joined in the March Against Fear. Born in 1944 in New York, Finn first became really interested in political issues in 1960 at the age of 16 when John F. Kennedy was running for president. Finn came from a family of liberal Democrats and, inspired by JFK, Finn started a teen Democrat Club in his predominantly Republican town. Throughout college, Finn spent his summers involved in important issues. In March, 1963, Finn

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<sup>119</sup> Sales interview by Wiley and Hartford.

<sup>120</sup> Charles E. Fager, *Selma, 1965* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1974), 204-5.

<sup>121</sup> Taylor Branch, *At Canaan’s Edge: America in the King Years, 1965-68* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 475-79.

participated in an anti-nuclear protest. In 1964, Finn heard news of the three civil rights workers killed in Mississippi. He and a group of Mennonites traveled to the South for a brief time to help with the movement.<sup>122</sup>

However, his first prolonged commitment to a movement came after he finished college in 1966 when he joined the Meredith March Against Fear. Following this, he took up residence near Valley View, Mississippi. Finn accompanied a group of Mennonites and Quakers from the American Friends Service Committee who created a tent city in the black section on the outskirts of this small southern town. Arthur saw this as his calling.<sup>123</sup>

Though he joined the Meredith March and would later be part of a demonstration in Canton, he did not feel drawn to “in your face” protests or bold challenges to segregation like the Freedom Riders. While Finn certainly supported these marches, he felt his personal talents were more suited for service. He believed he could best aid the movement by providing support to black communities. During his time in Mississippi, Finn worked on building a community center, assisting the Head Start program, and registering voters. He also did odd jobs around the town like working on home improvements; making repairs, increasing insulation, and so on.<sup>124</sup>

### **Poor People’s Campaign**

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<sup>122</sup> Interview with Arthur Finn, telephone interview by author, July 7, 2011.

<sup>123</sup> Finn interview.

<sup>124</sup> Finn interview.



Along with Barbara Deming, mentioned earlier, Mandy Carter, a black lesbian, joined the Poor People's Campaign in 1968. The demonstration brought poor people and their allies from across the country to create and reside in a shantytown on government property in Washington, D.C. In the first two weeks, they would focus on lobbying government officials. That would be followed by demonstrations at the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. This demonstration, conceived of by Marian Wright and led by SCLC, was connected to the Sanitation Workers' Strike in Memphis, which King said was the beginning of the Poor People's Campaign.<sup>125</sup>

Raised in children's homes in Albany and Schenectady, New York, Mandy was first introduced to activism by a man from the American Friends Service Committee who spoke at her high school. She says the experience "transformed my life." She signed up for a one-week retreat sponsored by the AFSC where she learned about the spirit of non-violence and the power of one. After spending one year at junior college, Mandy decided to move out to California and become a part of the Institute for the Study of Nonviolence.<sup>126</sup>

In 1968, Mandy and a number of other activists from the Institute took a bus across the country to join those living in Resurrection City. The bus caravan traveled through the South, picking up people along the way, which Mandy says was a scary experience. After arriving in D.C., she recalls sleeping out in the cold and rain for two weeks which contributed to illness among the city's residents. Mandy

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<sup>125</sup> Adam Fairclough, *To Redeem the Soul of America: The Southern Christian Leadership Conference and Martin Luther King, Jr.* (Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), 358, 365, 371,

<sup>126</sup> Interview with Mandy Carter, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2012; Interview with Mandy Carter, interview by Bridgette Burge, April 10, 2007, transcript p. 9-10, SOHP.

was disappointed that the leaders of the demonstration did not join those living in the harsh conditions of the shantytown. Mandy's time in Resurrection City ended when she was arrested with a number of other protesters and placed in the Women's House of Detention. The following day, the group departed.<sup>127</sup>

Still, Mandy believes the Poor People's Campaign provided her with "wonderful life lessons," in movement organizing and solidarity. The Campaign faced a number of obstacles, including King's death, repeated changes in leadership, and problems with crime and violence in Resurrection City. While Solidarity Day, June 19, 1968, attracted 50,000 people to support the campaign and Congress made some concessions, they reduced spending on social programs for the third year in a row.<sup>128</sup>

### **Memphis, 1968-1969**

Rose Gladney was born in Shreveport, Louisiana on April 17, 1945. Her parents raised her in Homer, Louisiana, and Rose describes it as a wonderful small town where she was able to remain close to her extended family as a child. At the same time, Rose was conscious of the racial divisions of the town and cannot recall a time when she was not aware of the racial divide. This was most apparent to Rose with black domestics. While she and her six siblings were taught to respect the people working in their home, she was quite aware that she could call domestics by their first names and could not do so with other adults.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Carter interview by author; Carter interview by Burge, 24-28.

<sup>128</sup> Carter interview by Burge, 27; Fairclough, 386-88.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Margaret Rose Gladney. telephone interview by author, June 28-29, 2011.

Rose became especially aware of segregation with the Little Rock crisis in 1957. Rose was twelve years-old at the time and in grade seven. She did not understand why exactly anyone would mind racially integrated schools and was told by a teacher she should go to the black high school. Locally, though, integration was not an important issue. While the district was compelled by the *Brown* decision to desegregate its schools, Rose's father, a member of the school board, worked with other board members to delay any desegregation of schools. Rose recalls that, at her high school, many teachers instructed their students that anyone pushing for racial integration was a Communist. By the time she graduated in 1963, there was still not racial integration at Homer High School. The district would observe token desegregation in 1966 and desegregate more substantially in 1969. Meanwhile, three of her younger siblings attended a segregated academy in the area to avoid racial integration.<sup>130</sup>

Rose went on to Rhodes College (later Southwestern College) in Memphis, Tennessee. During her time as an undergraduate, from 1963 to 1967, Rose did not participate in the civil rights movement primarily because she was afraid of breaking with her family back home. She recalls that a black Presbyterian Church in Memphis asked around Rhodes, a Presbyterian college, if there were any white students who would picket white churches. But, Rose did not join.<sup>131</sup>

As an English major seeking a teaching certificate, Rose student taught at a mid-town high school in Memphis in 1966. The school was largely white working class and famous for being Elvis' high school. It was progressively integrating and beyond

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<sup>130</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>131</sup> Gladney interview.

50 percent black. Rose moved to Ann Arbor in 1967 to pursue her M.A. in English at the University of Michigan. She returned the following year to take a job at the school she had student taught at. The high school had become Northside High, an essentially all-black vocational-technical training school.<sup>132</sup>

Throughout this time, Rose was becoming more conscious of social and political issues, especially racism. She worked as an R.A. while in graduate school and became close with a black woman from the South, Jennifer, who was also an R.A. For Jennifer, the South was a place to be feared. Jennifer hung a poster of Malcolm X in her room and encouraged Rose to read his autobiography. During this time, Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. That event, along with her sister's involvement in the civil rights movement there, pushed her to become more involved in the movement. While in graduate school, Rose wrote her M.A. thesis about the southern segregated academy movement. She recorded oral histories with parents, teachers, and administrators in Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama and Virginia.<sup>133</sup>

When she returned to Memphis, Rose was much more conscious of issues of race and civil rights. Rose learned the elements of organizing from a variety of groups. Rose began attending Centenary Methodist Church in Memphis where James Lawson preached. Lawson was instrumental in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Memphis. Rose attended the SCLC meetings and was secretary for a brief time. Here, she received a crash course in political organizing based on non-violent direct action. Lawson taught the importance of

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<sup>132</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>133</sup> Gladney interview.

preparing oneself for action, being aware that the movement was a long struggle in which one must continually reaffirm one's commitment, and the role of a core of dedicated people. In the spring of 1969, Rose attended the rally in Memphis on the anniversary of King's death, along with her sister Cynthia and others. But, much of her work was getting the word out about issues, meetings and events, attending gatherings, and participating on a daily basis. Rose also joined in protests against segregation, inequality in education, and police brutality during her time in Memphis.<sup>134</sup>

Churches were essential to the movement in Memphis, but so was the American Federation of Teachers, who worked on Rose's appeal when she was told she would not be rehired because she had testified on behalf of a student being expelled for protest. The American Civil Liberties Union, who took the student's case, was also essential. The student, Deborah Cleaves, was her class Vice President and part of a group of student leaders who worked with the NAACP marching in Black Monday demonstrations against educational inequality. On one Monday, more than 62,000 students boycotted school in Memphis. Northside High School provided much of the student support for the civil rights movement in Memphis. Students who encouraged others to stay out of school and those who accumulated more than five absences in a school year were suspended. Cleaves was arrested and held in juvenile detention. Rose joined in her legal defense and faced retaliation.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>135</sup> Gladney interview; *The Cougar*, Northside High School Yearbook, 1969; "Memphis Boycott Success," *Chicago Daily Defender*, October 15, 1969, p. 12; Jimmy Covington, "King Implored By Ministers To Come Here," *The Commercial Appeal* (Memphis, TN), March 14, 1968.

Don Steele, a white man, was born in Nashville, Tennessee, and raised in Franklin. He came from a strict immigrant Calvinist family. While his local church did not oppose segregation, his parents did along with the larger Presbyterian church. Don's family was especially important to his participating in the movement. They took their faith seriously and emphasized living one's values.<sup>136</sup>

Like Gladney, Steele attended Southwestern College in Memphis, Tennessee, from 1964 to 1968. The year he entered was also the first year there were African American students at the college, though they were few in number. Don recalls that the college was composed of about one thousand white students, largely from the rural South, and perhaps four African Americans.<sup>137</sup>

Steele's most important participation in the Memphis civil rights movement came his senior year, with the Sanitation Workers' Strike in 1968. The workers had long complained of low wages and poor working conditions. However, the precipitating incident came when a man's arm got caught in a trash compactor and he was killed. The city refused to pay for his funeral and this set off a storm of protest. The sanitation workers had also long advocated for a shower at the garbage facilities so they could clean up after work. Being unable to wash immediately after work, they were forced to endure the humiliating experience of riding the city buses home smelling like trash. Steele recalls that much of their work was dehumanizing and standing up for better working conditions was a way to show the city that they were human.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Interview with Don Steele, telephone interview by author, July 6, 2011.

<sup>137</sup> Steele interview.

<sup>138</sup> Steele interview.

Steele was a part of a group that went around educating people about the strike. These groups would attempt to speak to churchgoers and were often thrown out of churches. Steele felt their work was often thwarted by protesters who smashed windows and attacked small businesses, including those owned by African Americans. He recalls being at the college when Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. Everyone on campus was told to stay indoors. Later that night, they heard gunfire on campus and soon the National Guard was called in. King's death was a major blow to the civil rights movement, though his final campaign was a success as the sanitation workers' union was recognized and Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1968.<sup>139</sup>

As with the March on Washington, it is likely that a number of gays and lesbians joined the Memphis march following King's assassination. One of them was Jan Griesinger, a white woman who grew up in the suburbs of Chicago and was in divinity school at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, in April, 1968. She had been involved in Vietnam Summer the previous year and saw King speak at the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago, which worked to build a coalition between peace and civil rights activists. Three days after King's assassination, she and group of men from her seminary drove all night to Memphis to join the march, held on April 8, 1968, with more than 20,000 people honoring King's legacy.<sup>140</sup>

The following year, Jan was part of the demonstrations at the 1969 PGA Championship, which was the "target of frontal attacks by Civil Rights protestors,"

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<sup>139</sup> Steele interview; Fairclough, 370-82.

<sup>140</sup> Interview with Jan Griesinger, telephone interview by author, March 14, 2012; Jan Griesinger, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World*, 191-194; Duren Cheek, "Third Black Monday Held," *Chicago Daily Defender*, November 4, 1969, p. 1.

according to one newspaper. Held in Kettering, Ohio, outside of Dayton, the tournament faced a coalition of 11 groups who came together as the Dayton Organization and issued 27 demands, including recognition of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, an end to apartheid and the war in Vietnam, and relief for poor people. Jan remembers them being particularly focused on South African Gary Player for his failure to speak out against apartheid. When the group's demands were not met, then entered the tournament as spectators and began disrupting play. Jan was arrested for her part in the demonstration. Player would not soon forget the experience. In 1990, when the PGA Championship was held at an all-white country club in Birmingham, Player sided with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and other protesters, refusing to play.<sup>141</sup>

### **The Civil Rights Movement Outside the South**

The 1969 PGA protest was just one of countless civil rights demonstrations that took place outside the South. Jewelle Gomez was also a part of the movement in the North. Born in 1948 in the South End of Boston, Massachusetts, she was raised by her great grandmother, who first instilled in her a consciousness of identity as an

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<sup>141</sup> Griesinger interview; Jim Taylor, "Angelic Floyd Holds Off Mob," *The Blade* (Toledo), August 18, 1969, p. 15; "Gary Player attacked," *The Telegraph-Herald* (Dubuque, IA), August 17, 1969, p. 24; "Gary Player Sides With PGA Protesters," *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1990, [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-30/sports/sp-859\\_1\\_gary-player](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-07-30/sports/sp-859_1_gary-player). Jan says, "I threw a ball out on the green about the time that he [Player] was about to putt, making everybody upset...The police came and dragged me out and we went to jail in Dayton." *The Telegraph-Herald* confirms, "On the 13<sup>th</sup>, as Player prepared to putt, a woman threw a ball onto the green in front of his line. She was arrested."



African American and Native American (Ioway and Wampanoag). Living on welfare, Jewelle was also conscious of economic disparities.<sup>142</sup>

Attending school in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jewelle became very interested in journalism. She recalls watching southern demonstrations on television, especially the vivid display of fire hoses and dogs being employed to end demonstrations. As she aged, Jewelle read more and became more conscious of issues of social justice. In 1962, her freshman year, activists called for students at Jewelle's high school to stay home in protest of educational inequality. Her high school was small, roughly 400 or 500 students and many people stayed out, including her. This was her first memorable participation in a protest. In school, Jewelle had initially been guided toward the vocational track. But, in part because of progress brought about by the civil rights movement, which increased opportunities for students of color, Jewelle was able to switch to the college prep track. As a senior, she began attending other demonstrations, around issues like unsafe housing, though she acknowledges she was not one of the student leaders.<sup>143</sup>

Jewelle attended Northeastern University in Boston, a co-op school which alternated periods of academic study with periods of paid internship. Jewelle would go to school for a set time, then be assigned to work at a newspaper. But, in 1968, her second year, she got placed as a production assistant for *Say Brother*, a magazine show in Boston which represented her first full immersion in black activism. The show was based in the local community and hoped to have an impact on the media's coverage of issues important to African Americans. *Say Brother* covered the

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<sup>142</sup> Interview with Jewelle Gomez, telephone interview by author, July 12, 2011.

<sup>143</sup> Gomez interview.

community demonstrations of the late 1960s. The show highlighted pickets and sit-ins outside the school board to protest educational disparities and gave airtime to community meetings on issues like police brutality. This would be important to Jewelle's later activism, particularly with the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), which served as a media watchdog on LGBT issues.<sup>144</sup>

Achebe Betty Powell (b. 1940), a black woman, worked for integration with the National Conference of Christians and Jews in Florida in the late 1950s and the Catholic Interracial Council in Minnesota in the early 1960s. Powell grew up in Miami, Florida, with a father who was a captain in the Army and a mother who worked as a domestic. Her grandfather was a preacher in the A.M.E. church and her ancestors had been slaves in North Florida. During her childhood, Powell did not know much of racism; her segregated community was all she knew. She says, "So, it was just home and it was a very rich home and very nurturing." However, she did realize the importance of observing rigid segregation laws. Powell recalls, "...the feel of my mother's fingernail running down the back of my neck as she yanked me away from the Whites-Only drinking fountain."<sup>145</sup>

Because her father was in the military, Powell ended up making some significant moves. At age 8, her family moved briefly to California and then Texas before re-locating to Germany for several years, residing in Mannheim and Heidelberg. She returned to Florida to finish high school at the all-black Booker T. Washington High School in Miami. Returning from years in Germany where she

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<sup>144</sup> Gomez interview.

<sup>145</sup> Interview with Achebe Betty Powell, interview by Kelly Anderson, July 6-7, 2004, transcript p. 1-2, 8-9, 20-21, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

experienced integrated life, Powell felt more acutely American racism. She says, “...this fire jumps up, you know, begins to rise up in me.”<sup>146</sup>

Powell joined the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), which had a high school program in the South to bring together black and white students to learn about racial justice. Powell’s first, and perhaps most important, exemplar of racial justice activism was her father. In the NCCJ, though, she found a more formal mentor in Max Karl, a Jewish man who was regional director of the organization. While others taught her about injustice, she says Karl helped teach her how to fight it. The NCCJ put black and white students into pairs in their program Youths Speak Against Prejudice and students attended conferences and events to call for racial justice. Eventually, the students decided they wanted to do more than speaking and began to meet outside of the NCCJ.<sup>147</sup>

It was soon discovered that the teens were meeting outside the NCCJ and they were told that they would not receive their diplomas if they continued to do so. The group’s last major statement came when Betty received the Brotherhood Award from the NCCJ. At the awards ceremony, some city and school officials were present. She and the rest of the group all went up on stage together and said they would never stop fighting to end prejudice.<sup>148</sup>

In Germany, Powell converted to Catholicism. By the time her family returned to Florida and she was finishing high school, Powell decided she wanted to attend a Catholic women’s college. She attended the College of St. Catherine in St.

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<sup>146</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 9, 13, 21.

<sup>147</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 21-22.

<sup>148</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 23-24.

Paul, Minnesota. She was one of the few black women, but notes that more began enrolling during her time there. During her time at St. Catherine's, Powell joined the Catholic Interracial Council. One of the primary efforts of the group was in meeting with real estate agents to document the ways in which they perpetuated segregation and discrimination in housing. This documentation was then provided to members of the Minnesota legislature, which passed a Fair Housing Law in 1961, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race and a number of other factors. Betty also spent her summers working with the Neighborhood Youth Corps in Harlem at their Street Store Academies "...educating young people who had been totally dismissed by the system, had been dropped through the cracks." This led her to join protests and demonstrations to push the school board to provide more resources to black schools and support Store Front Academies. At the same time, Powell felt like the civil rights movement was passing her by and thought of transferring to a college in the South.<sup>149</sup>

Sharon Raphael (b. 1941), a white lesbian, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and grew up in the predominantly-Jewish suburb of Cleveland Heights. She first became aware of issues of racial justice in talking with her Aunt Marie, who was a left-wing union organizer. Marie helped educate Sharon about racism and she recalls Marie introducing her to Paul Robeson. Her involvement with civil rights activism began around 1957 when she became a founding member of the Council on Human Rights at her high school. The group invited people who were working on civil rights issues to speak. Since the students were primarily white, this group offered them a

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<sup>149</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 14-16, 19, 31, 38-39; "Minnesota Finds Fair Housing Easy," *The New York Times*, April 13, 1962.

chance to learn more about the conditions of racial minorities and meet those who were leading efforts for racial justice. Sharon also cites the importance of Karamu House in promoting her involvement in the civil rights movement. Karamu House was a black culture and arts center in Cleveland which welcomed all races to experience African American plays, dance, poetry and other artistic productions. Sharon remembers feeling very welcome there and believed it was an excellent learning experience, noting that many with an interest in civil rights were drawn to the center.<sup>150</sup>

Sharon attended Hiram College in western Ohio. One racial incident stands out in her mind. One night, she went to a bar with a group of friends. After everyone else left, only she and a black man from Uganda remained. The lights were turned on and off, which Sharon took as an indication they were supposed to leave. As the others in their group had already returned to campus, she and her friend were left to walk home. A truck of white men followed them in a truck and Sharon believes they had rifles. Because the truck was on the road, Sharon and her friend were forced to walk in the ditch while the men in the car yelled, "Nigger lover!" Being an exchange student from Uganda, Sharon believes he probably was not familiar with the racial conventions of the U.S. and did not understand what was going on. Sharon felt responsible for what happened and began a campaign for students to boycott that bar.<sup>151</sup>

Sharon was very much influenced by Martin Luther King, Jr. She attended King's speeches in Cleveland and traveled to Detroit for one of his rallies. Before

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<sup>150</sup> Sharon Raphael to author, March 12, 2012; Sharon Raphael to Jan Griesinger, February 28, 2012.

<sup>151</sup> Sharon Raphael to Jan Griesinger, February 28, 2012.

entering graduate school in sociology at Case Western Reserve, Raphael worked for Operation Head Start and was invited to attend the March on Washington. The Sociology Department funded her trip in exchange for her distributing and collection questionnaires to people on the trip. Like Betty Powell, Sharon worked with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. She was awarded a fellowship with the NCCJ one summer as a graduate student to study inter-racial conflicts. During her time in graduate school, Sharon also joined an organization supporting housing integration in the Ludlow area of Cleveland. She helped facilitate discussions between blacks and whites, in the hope that improved dialogue would reduce racial tensions. While Sharon says she was no leader in the civil rights movement, she points out, "...we did need persistent followers too."<sup>152</sup>

Barbara Smith, a black lesbian, was also involved in the civil rights movement in Cleveland. Smith reflects, "I grew up under apartheid. I grew up under segregation even though it was the North. People forget or never knew the level of demonization and vilification and dehumanization that was part and parcel of being a person of African heritage living in this country up until the civil rights movement. I lived under that." In a family that had migrated from the Deep South, Smith heard about events like the murder of Emmett Till and the Montgomery Bus Boycott, as her parents remained attached to their southern roots and concerned about events there. The Smith family also attended Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland and

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<sup>152</sup> Sharon Raphael to Jan Griesinger, February 28, 2012; Sharon Raphael to author, March 12, 2012.

Barbara says her “religious experience was all tied up with social justice and with progressive political change.”<sup>153</sup>

She became involved with CORE in Cleveland, focusing on protests against school segregation. Smith recalls the death of Rev. Bruce Klunder in April, 1964. The minister lay down at a construction site to block the building of a segregated school and was crushed by a bulldozer. Smith joined demonstrations on the weekend and participated in the school boycott, which included setting up alternative Freedom Schools. She felt “that incredible exhilaration of being surrounded by people who at least for the moment seemed to feel and believed pretty much as you do and care about the same things that you care about.” Barbara Smith went on to Mount Holyoke College where she became involved with the Civil Actions Group, an organization focused on civil rights and ending the Vietnam War.<sup>154</sup>

Angela Davis was an important figure in the civil rights movement outside the South, though she was born in 1944 in Birmingham, Alabama. While her family was part of the black middle class, they were not immune from segregation and racial violence. In 1948, the Davis family moved into an area zoned for whites, which became known as “Dynamite Hill” as a result of the number of bombings. Her parents’ involvement in the civil rights movement provided a model for Angela. At 15, the American Friends Southern Negro Student Committee, a Quaker group that sponsored African American children from the South who wanted to attend school

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<sup>153</sup> Interview with Barbara Smith, interview by Loretta J. Ross, May 7-8, 2003, transcript p. 10, 41-42, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>154</sup> Smith interview, 41-44.

in the North, chose Angela. Living with Rev. William Howard Melish and his family, Angela was further radicalized. Biographer Regina Nadelson says, “At meals the movement was discussed, tactics considered, positions pondered.”<sup>155</sup>

At Elisabeth Irwin High School, the curriculum stressed consciousness about racial justice and other social and political issues. On Saturday mornings, the teachers regularly joined in the picketing of Woolworth’s, as did Angela and other students. At this time, Davis also met Bettina Aptheker, who Nadelson says “has taken part in almost every major Left-wing march.” Davis joined Aptheker’s Marxist youth group Advance and continued to work with mainstream organizations like the NAACP.<sup>156</sup>

After that, Davis remained politically inactive for a number of years. She spent a year in Paris and roughly two years in Frankfurt, Germany. Davis became reinvigorated at the Congress on the Dialectics of Liberation in London in the summer of 1967 where she met Stokely Carmichael and “found his new gospel a revelation.” When she arrived at the University of California-San Diego, she worked to form a black student union, a group focused on the creation of a “Third World College,” which would be dedicated to black and Latino students. Davis tried to work with US but opposed its ideology and male chauvinism. She worked with the Panthers for a time but left them as well. Because she believed the black freedom struggle and women’s liberation were part of the larger anti-capitalist movement,

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<sup>155</sup> Regina Nadelson, *Who Is Angela Davis? The Biography of a Revolutionary* (New York: Peter H. Wyden, Inc., 1972), 17-19, 22, 35, 45-46, 48, 52-55; Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 367-68; Sara Miles, “Angela at Our Table,” *Out* (Feb., 1998), 62-67.

<sup>156</sup> Nadelson, 61, 67, 70-71.



Davis found a home in the Che Lumumba All-Black Collective of the Communist Party of Southern California in 1968.<sup>157</sup>

Like her friend Angela Davis, Bettina Aptheker, a white lesbian, also continued to be involved in the black freedom struggle in California. In 1964, Aptheker and others launched the W.E.B. DuBois Clubs of America, a Marxist group dedicated to advancing civil rights, peace, labor organizing and other issues. Aptheker and the DuBois Clubs joined other organizations in civil rights sit-ins in the Bay Area in the fall of 1964. They picketed restaurants like Mel's Drive-In, which refused to hire black employees. Aptheker was also a part of the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination. She says, "...this coalition would help change the shape of politics in the San Francisco Bay Area for years to come." Aptheker also became one of the leaders of the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, which fought back against the university's attempts to silence advocacy for the civil rights movement on campus. She would later work on the campaign to free Angela Davis.<sup>158</sup>

### **The Literary World**

Many figures in the literary world provided support to the civil rights movement. In particular, two lesbian women, Lillian Smith and Lorraine Hansberry, and one gay man, James Baldwin, stand out. Lillian Smith is most noted for her works on racial discrimination in the U.S. South. *Strange Fruit* (1944), *Killers of the Dream* (1949), and *Now Is the Time* (1955) were important works by a white

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<sup>157</sup> Nadelson, 83, 91, 117-19, 123-36.

<sup>158</sup> Bettina F. Aptheker, *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech and Became a Feminist Rebel* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), 91-93, 112-13, 129, 248.

southern woman willing to speak out against white supremacy before the Civil Rights Movement galvanized in the 1950s and 1960s. Anne C. Loveland writes in her biography of Smith, “Of the small group of white southerners who enlisted in the civil rights movement in the 1930s, she is now hailed as one of the first to speak out publicly against racial segregation.” Sexual identity played into her understanding of racial issues. Loveland continues, “She defined segregation in the broadest possible sense, as encompassing all the modes of thought and behavior whereby human beings cut themselves off from alien ideas, emotions, or experiences. Thus in opposing segregation she protested not just racial separation but all forms of dehumanization that prevent mankind from realizing its full potential.”<sup>159</sup>

According to Margaret Rose Gladney, who created an oral history project about young women who attended a girls’ camp run by Smith and her partner Paula Snelling and ultimately edited Smith’s letters, Lillian Smith argued against all forms of arbitrary separation which divided people by race, gender, sexuality, and more. Moreover, Smith’s relationship with Paula Snelling was crucial to her life and work. The camp they ran worked to challenge notions of southern womanhood and the way it was used to preserve the racial and gender status quo.<sup>160</sup>

Since 1944, Lillian Smith had contemplated writing a nonfiction book on segregation and white supremacy. In 1947, she began work on what would become *Killers of the Dream* (1949). In this work, Smith described the “killers of the dream” which she identified as poverty, ignorance, corrupt political bargains to preserve

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<sup>159</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *Lillian Smith: A Southerner Confronting the South, A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 1-2.

<sup>160</sup> Gladney interview.

white supremacy, the trepidation of liberals and the “haunted children” of white southerners. She based much of her writing on her own experience of growing up and living in the segregated South. Smith identified the lessons on sin, sex and segregation which preserved the southern status quo. Historian Pete Daniel says the book “described with passion and clarity her struggle against southern racial and sexual proscription.” Smith wrote, “Neither the Negro nor sex was often discussed at length in our home. We were given no formal instruction in these difficult matters but we learned our lessons well.”<sup>161</sup>

In her assessment, Smith also used repressed homosexuality to explain racial hatred. While she did not write about it in *Killers of the Dream*, she later wrote in a letter, “...but there is more, more than I have as yet thought through, or said. I know one thing is that white men are deeply attracted to Negro boys and men, sexually; I know it is not Negro women but Negro men who have seduced white man’s feelings, not knowingly, but this has happened down here; and I know the sense of tabu [sic] has aroused deep anxiety in the white man (I speak of the South now) and he loathes himself for wanting something that he believes is unpardonably wrong for him to want, something that only the primitive sense of tabu [sic] can describe; not guilt as a rational man feels it, but the ancient guilt, the archaic sense of uncleanness: all this wells up in these white men, they are pulled too close, then jerked away by this primitive fear, and they hate themselves with a viciousness that is almost indescribable. Poverty? ignorance? lack of recreation? lack of a way to be

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<sup>161</sup> Loveland, 97-99; Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for Smithsonian National Museum of American History, 2000), 156; Lillian Smith, *Killers of the Dream* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1949), 27.

creative? these are but rational answers to a profoundly deep problem of the mythic mind.”<sup>162</sup>

Smith’s most important attack on segregation came with *Now Is the Time* (1955), which she hoped would compel southerners to comply with the Brown decision and begin to eliminate segregation beyond schools as well. According to Smith, complying with the decision would free both black and white children. In this tract, Smith argued that segregation contradicted the stated democratic ideals of America, which were important to winning hearts and minds in the Cold War. She also believed that school segregation discouraged children from believing in their own worth, cut off human relationships. One of Smith’s most important contributions with this work was encouraging other white southerners to speak up. She wrote, “Silence was our gift to the demagogue.”<sup>163</sup>

James Baldwin was also instrumental in encouraging people to think deeply about racial inequality. But, Baldwin and Smith differed in their civil rights activism. Smith believed Baldwin was more dangerous than Malcolm X because of his influence among young people in the movement. Smith resented Baldwin for never being on the frontlines of southern protest, though she admitted Baldwin helped rouse people from their complacency. Ultimately though, she believed he was too angry and would provoke violence that would overwhelm the gains of peaceful protest. This is contrary to the ways in which many other people read Baldwin. Biographer David Leeming writes, “Love is at the heart of the Baldwin philosophy.

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<sup>162</sup> Lillian Smith to Marv, December 11, 1964, in *How Am I to Be Heard?: Letters of Lillian Smith*, ed. by Margaret Rose Gladney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 316-17.

<sup>163</sup> Loveland, 121-22. Lillian Smith, *Now Is the Time* (New York: Viking Press, 1955), 9-10, 12, 51.

Love for Baldwin cannot be safe; it involves the risk of commitment, the risk of removing the masks and taboos placed on us by society. The philosophy applies to individual relationship as well as to more general ones. It encompasses sexuality as well as politics, economics, and race relations. And it emphasizes the dire consequences, for individuals and racial groups, of the refusal of love.” Though, even early on Baldwin questioned whether nonviolence would be enough to change the country. He was radicalized by Malcolm X’s death and came to believe that radicals like Stokely Carmichael, Floyd McKissick, Huey Newton, Eldridge Cleaver and Bobby Seale were the future of the black freedom struggle.<sup>164</sup>

Despite a frequent lack of confidence in his own abilities and his belief that he did little to promote change, Baldwin provided important intellectual contributions that advanced black civil rights. Though he rejected the thought of himself writing protest literature, “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American” and “Nobody Knows My Name” were important commentaries on racial injustice and national identity. *Another Country* offered a perspective on the connections between racism and sexuality and “Going to Meet the Man” told of a white sheriff whose own sexuality was imprisoned in myths about black sexuality. *Blues for Mister Charlie*, written the wake of the killing of Medgar Evers, provided a parable about race and American society, alluding to the killing of Emmett Till.

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<sup>164</sup> Loveland, 239; David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 120, 123, 132, 145, 257, 292.

Biographer David Leeming concludes that analyzing the destructive fear and guilt at the base of racism became Baldwin's trademark.<sup>165</sup>

Baldwin became friends and allies with Lorraine Hansberry, who was also important to the movement. Born in 1930, Hansberry was aware of the struggle for racial justice from a young age. Her father, Carl, was active in the NAACP and Urban League in Chicago and, in 1938, risked jail to challenge the city's restrictive housing covenants. Eventually, the case was decided in his favor by the Supreme Court. This story became the inspiration for her most famous work, *A Raisin in the Sun*.

Hansberry said of her father, "He died in 1945 at the age of 51 – of a cerebral hemorrhage, supposedly, but American racism helped kill him."<sup>166</sup>

As an adult, Lorraine Hansberry believed the most effective contribution she could make to the causes she believed in were through her writing. In 1951, she became the youngest member of the staff of *Freedom*, a magazine published by Paul Robeson which confronted Jim Crow laws, McCarthyism, exploitation and political developments in Africa, and more. Hansberry also aided in the production of SNCC's book *The Movement*, writing the text. She would often appear on television, give lectures, participate in debates and attend fund raisers to advance the cause of racial justice.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Leeming, 42, 81, 157, 201, 220, 241, 301, 342, 348. Baldwin opposed the term 'civil rights movement' which he felt was a term used by sentimental whites for a reality they preferred not to recognize.

<sup>166</sup> Leeming, 155; Steven R. Carter, *Hansberry's Drama: Commitment amid Complexity* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) 9-10; "Lorraine Hansberry, 34, Dies; Author of 'A Raisin in the Sun,'" *The New York Times*, January 13, 1965.

<sup>167</sup> Anne Cheney, *Lorraine Hansberry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 14; Carter, 10; Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee, *The Movement: Documentary of a Struggle for Equality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1964).

## Summary

At all levels and all stages of the African American civil rights movement, lesbians and gays participated to advance the cause of racial justice. While this chapter provides the basis for understanding what exactly their contribution was to the movement, future chapters will examine the impact that had on their sexual identity formation, the connections between black civil rights, women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation, the ways homosexuality was used against the civil rights movement, the role of religion for gays and lesbians in the black freedom struggle, and the effect the African American civil rights movement had their later activism for gay and lesbian liberation. During their time in the civil rights movement in the 1960s and earlier, gay and lesbian activists like Joan Nestle could not be open about their identities. But, by the 1980s, Joan Nestle wrote, "Now all the secrets are out, and I can march against apartheid with the Lesbian Herstory Archives banner carried proudly in the open air, and all around me are other gay men and women joining voices with thousands more to say no to a killing racism and yes to a new world of liberated lives."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Nestle, 67.

## CHAPTER TWO - "YOU DON'T FREE PART OF YOURSELF": IDENTITY FORMATION AND GAY MEN IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith open their introduction to *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* by saying, "The civil rights movement was primarily concerned with race, but it was also about personal identity."<sup>1</sup> They argue that, like other social movements, the critique of social conventions and received wisdom offered by activists in the civil rights movement provided a position from which to critique gender relations. The same might also be said of gay, lesbian and bisexual activists in the African American civil rights movement, whose experiences provided them with a framework to critique homophobia in American society.

Moreover, just as most women in the civil rights movement did not identify as feminists during their time in the movement, many gays and lesbians did not express gay liberationist sentiments until later years. For almost all gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement, the interconnectedness with the struggle for gay rights was not necessarily evident at the time. Further, many did not come to an understanding of gay identity until later years. Instead, the story of gay and lesbian identity formation in the civil rights movement is one of secrecy and inner struggle. It would not be until years later that they would come to understand the intersections of the two causes. Despite the liberal and radical ethos that permeated some civil rights groups, notions of equality rarely extended to homosexuality.

While a willingness to transgress sexual norms with regard to interracial relations

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<sup>1</sup> Peter J. Ling and Sharon Monteith, eds., *Gender and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1999, 2004), 1.



may have been acceptable in the movement, this did not apply to homosexuality. At the same time, there was no great hostility towards gays and lesbians in the movement. In most instances, homosexuals remained closeted and the issue was never discussed.

This chapter seeks to document the identity formation of gay or bisexual men before, during and after their time in the civil rights movement. There were great varieties of experience for men seeking to understand their own sexual orientation and then coming out to others. There are no broad explanatory principles which account for why some men were more accepting of gay identity or more likely to come out. Various factors, including age, location, and race provide no clear answers. Rather than attempt to make their lives conform to theories, this chapter presents the process of identity formation for gay men in the movement in all its rich multiplicity.

This is not to say, though, that there exist no general patterns among those gays and lesbians involved in the civil rights movement. Older gay activists like Bayard Rustin and James Baldwin, tended to consider sexual identity a private matter and would only very reluctantly and very late in life speak about gay equality. But, their more common experiences are always countered by the rare outlier, like Eddie Sandifer, who was out as a gay man in Mississippi in the 1940s before joining in the effort to advance black civil rights. Though younger activists in the civil rights movement were also closeted at the time, they were much more likely to come out in the early to mid-1970s and be active in supporting the cause of

LGBT rights, as Arthur Finn and Rodney Powell were. But they, too, are countered by other individuals who died having never come out.

This chapter will begin with an assessment of attitudes towards homosexuality in the pre-Stonewall era tracing the development of beliefs about gay sexuality as well as assessing any regional variations. I will then discuss the development of gay identity among activists in the civil rights movement, the secrecy and silence that persisted among activists in the struggle, the treatment of gays by their allies in the movement and the existence of communication networks among gay men in the movement. This section will focus on the role of gay men so as to not overlap with the following chapter, which discusses the role of lesbians in the civil rights movement and their subsequent involvement in women's liberation and lesbian liberation movements.

### **Views of Homosexuals in the Pre-Stonewall Era**

From the 1920s to the 1960s, there were important shifts in the understanding of homosexuality. Though, this did not mean a gradual improvement in the treatment of gays and lesbians. From the era of Prohibition when there was greater openness about homosexuality, America fell into the Great Depression clinging to gender and sexual norms. The dramatic changes produced by World War II brought many gays and lesbians together in homosocial environments and took them to new places, like San Francisco. But, the chill of McCarthyism and association between sexual "subversion" and disloyalty to one's

country led to retrenchment. It is, in part, these shifting attitudes which make it difficult to use age as a factor in accounting for identity formation and openness.

George Chauncey argues in his study of New York City in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century that during the 1920s, gay men and a smaller number of lesbians became highly visible in the city's social life. However, at the end of the decade, a powerful backlash against gays and lesbians occurred as part of a larger reaction to the cultural experimentation of the Prohibition Era and the disruption in traditional gender arrangements brought on by the Great Depression.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, John D'Emilio points out that, in the 1920s, the rising popularity of Freudian psychoanalysis increased public discussion of sexuality. However, any shifts in sexual morality were confined within the bounds of heterosexuality. While gays were more visible and more talked about in this era, that did not necessarily mean they were accepted as equals in American society. The disciples of Freud believed almost uniformly that homosexuality was pathological, based in the psyche, and could be cured through psychoanalysis. They believed that proper human sexual development adhered to traditional notions of masculinity and femininity, which were confused in homosexuals. Doctors like Richard von Krafft-Ebing also focused on gender differences. Krafft-Ebing argued that homosexuality switched the proper roles of men and women. However, D'Emilio believes that the medical model played only a small part in how the majority of people came to understand homosexuality prior to the 1940s.

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<sup>2</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 331.

The turning point came with the privileged role psychiatrists were given in World War II, screening inductees into the military. Information presenting anything beyond the harshest condemnation of homosexuality was restricted.<sup>3</sup> However, Allan Bérubé also finds that the dislocation caused by the war, which took young people away from family life and small, watchful communities, provided them with an opportunity to begin a coming-out process. It was also during this time that the meaning of “coming out” was re-defined from one’s first homosexual experience to meeting gay friends and discovering gay life.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, greater visibility meant greater repression. Bérubé finds that it was in the context of challenging their dishonorable discharges from the military that many gays and lesbians began to define their struggle in terms of justice and equal rights, laying the foundation for a political movement. In many ways, their struggle paralleled the African American “Double Victory” campaign over fascism abroad and racial injustice at home. Bérubé concludes, “...gay male and lesbian soldiers discovered that they were fighting two wars: one for America, democracy, and freedom; the other for their own survival as homosexuals within the military organization.”<sup>5</sup>

Following the Second World War, John D’Emilio observes, “The shifts that occurred in gay life during the 1940s were not paralleled by a growing social tolerance of homosexuality. The matrix of religious beliefs, laws, medical theories,

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<sup>3</sup> John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 40.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1990), 6.

<sup>5</sup> Bérubé, 7.

and popular attitudes that devalued and punished lesbians and homosexuals remained in tact.” Subsequently, from 1945-1960, more than half the states turned to psychiatrists for assistance in formulating statutes against sex crimes and passed legislation officially declaring homosexuality a disease. Medicine took its place next to religion and law as an authoritative source on homosexuality.<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, George Chauncey writes, “As Americans anxiously tried to come to terms with the disruptions in the gender and sexual order caused by the Depression and exacerbated by the Second World War, the ‘sex deviant’ became a symbol of the dangers posed by family instability, gender confusion, and unregulated male sexuality and violence.” The gay man went from an “effeminate fairy,” who should be mocked, to a psychopathic child molester, who should be feared and hated. American society became increasingly alert and increasingly hostile to the presence of gay men, identifying them in press coverage, police reports, and government service.<sup>7</sup>

The situation only worsened in the Cold War environment, when fear of Communism became the primary cause of attacks upon gays and lesbians. In *The Lavender Scare*, David K. Johnson documents the lesser-known but widespread attacks on gays in public service, which coincided with the Second Red Scare. He writes, “In 1950, many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists.”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 16-17, 40.

<sup>7</sup> Chauncey, 359-360.

<sup>8</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2.

In attempting to explain why historians have paid little attention to this event, Johnson argues that it cannot be attributed to the lack of discussion at the time. In fact, the 1950s witnessed a rise in journalistic and scholarly writing on “sexual perverts.” However, these writers frequently used euphemisms or coded language to discuss the topic, referring to “moral weaklings” or “sexual misfits,” rather than homosexuals or queers. In the government, gays were frequently referred to as “security risks,” who Johnson believes were somewhat distinct from Communists who were referred to as “disloyal.” A Communist would intentionally reveal secret information, making them disloyal, while a homosexual would do so because they were coerced, making them a security risk.<sup>9</sup>

While the US was entering the Cold War in the late 1940s, a group called Knights of the Clock began meeting in Los Angeles. The group’s function was primarily social; it was a safe space for interracial homosexual couples to meet.<sup>10</sup> The group was very secretive and little is known about the organization, but it is fair to say that as challenges to the prevailing order became increasingly suspect in the Cold War, a group that challenged both racial segregation and compulsory heterosexuality could not be sustained.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, repression against lesbians and gays worsened with the passage of “sexual psychopath” laws, which endangered even those who were never caught breaking the law. People could involuntarily commit family members to mental asylums where they might become subjects in experiments ranging from hypnosis to lobotomy. Moreover, in 1950, all but two states

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<sup>9</sup> Johnson, 6-7.

<sup>10</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 32.

criminalized homosexual contact, classifying sodomy as a felony. Though, the medical understanding of homosexuality could also serve to affirm gay identity and challenge these laws. Many used the argument that they were naturally homosexual to justify their desires.<sup>11</sup>

While hostility towards gay men rose, they were encouraged to find and forge stronger bonds with each other. Much of this took place in the expanding number of exclusively gay bars. D'Emilio finds, "...the spread of the gay bar contained the greatest potential for reshaping the consciousness of homosexuals and lesbians."<sup>12</sup> However, given the realities of segregation, it was unlikely that this would be a racially inclusive development.

The release of the Kinsey report on the sexual behavior of males in 1948 and women in 1953 had contradictory effects for gays and lesbians. On the one hand, it dispelled the myth that homosexuality was a rare form of perversion. Rather, Kinsey's research suggested that homosexual activity was quite common, undercut the justification for punishing such behavior, and generated feelings among homosexuals of group belonging. Alternatively, the Kinsey report may have raised fears of widespread perversion in the near term, perhaps generating increased hostility.<sup>13</sup>

It should be noted that Kinsey's reports did not include African Americans. It was not until 1979 that Kinsey's study of African American sexuality appeared. This lack of knowledge about black sexuality may have contributed to an unflinching

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<sup>11</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 14, 21.

<sup>12</sup> Chauncey, 358; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 32.

<sup>13</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 37.

acceptance of received wisdom which excluded the possibility that African Americans engaged in anything outside the most “mainstream” sexual practices. Even when the Kinsey study on African Americans was published, the presence of queer sexuality was not clear. Robert Staples of the University of California-San Francisco wrote, “Considering the greater involvement with women, it is reasonable to conclude that the incidence of homosexuality among Black males is less than among White men. Yet, there are no reliable or consistent data on the number of male homosexuals.” Even in the 1970 Kinsey Institute study on male homosexuals, Staples noted, the researchers failed to use an objective selection for black gay males.<sup>14</sup>

It was in this context of rather limited understanding of and outright hostility towards homosexuality, that many lesbians and gays who joined the struggle for black civil rights came of age. While they faced widespread homophobia and a lack of role models who served as examples of positive gay life, these activists did have models in African Americans and their allies of other races who challenged systemic racism. Though the connection was not immediately apparent at the time, for many lesbians and gays in the civil rights movement, that struggle would provide them with the consciousness and organizing skills to use in the pursuit of gay liberation. Others would continue to live closeted lives, forming connections between the two struggles later in life or not at all.

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<sup>14</sup> Robert Staples, “Black Male Sexuality: Has It Changed?” *Ebony* (August, 1983), 104-110.



## Identity Formation Among Gay Men in the Civil Rights Movement

Almost no gay men were out during their time in the movement. However, many were conscious of their desires for men and sought to conceal their identities in the movement. In rare instances, their sexual identities were made known and it became a point of conflict. The general experience of gays in the civil rights movement, though, was one of continued silence. While her work does not make these connections explicit, Margaret Cruikshank observes, “Many homosexuals who were later to identify as gay played active roles in civil rights, the anti-war movement, and women’s liberation before they took up the cause of gay rights. In other movements, they had usually felt compelled to conceal their identities. This was expedient and prudent when no alternative could be imagined, but it kept the heterosexual majority ignorant of the extent of homosexuality and helped perpetuate myths of its sinfulness and sickness.”<sup>15</sup>

The oldest and probably most well-known gay man in the civil rights movement was Bayard Rustin (b. 1912). Opinions vary somewhat, though, over how open Rustin was about his sexual orientation. In *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen*, Jervis Anderson writes, “Bayard was not ashamed of his homosexuality, but was quite out-front about it. He had a strong ego, so that he was willing to put himself out on the line. A part of him said, ‘I’m also a child of God. I also have a soul and a personality made in the image of God.’”<sup>16</sup> A recent piece in *The Washington Post* quotes Rachele Horowitz, who worked with Rustin as a transportation

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Cruikshank, *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 9.

<sup>16</sup> Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen, A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 169.

coordinator during the March on Washington, saying, “He absolutely didn’t hide it. He’d never heard there *was* a closet.”<sup>17</sup>

However, Rustin’s writings reveal a different view. Following his arrest on a “morals charge” in 1953 and his resignation from the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Rustin wrote, “...While sex is a very real problem and while it has colored my personality, I know that it has never been my basic problem. I know now that for me sex must be sublimated if I am to live with myself and in this world longer.”<sup>18</sup> As a result of his conviction, A.J. Muste recommended that Rustin start seeing a psychiatrist. Even in his sessions, Rustin was initially reluctant to admit what the issue was and said he had been framed for robbery. Rustin had very conflicted feelings about being gay. On the one hand, he believed that homosexuality was wrong. On the other, he did not want to change. The doctor deemed him, “an obligatory homosexual.”<sup>19</sup>

Rustin was often criticized within the movement for his homosexuality. However, a couple caveats need to be made. First, many in the movement firmly supported Rustin. Second, those who opposed Rustin did not do so solely because of his sexual orientation. They were also concerned about his prior involvement with the Young Communist League and his refusal to serve in World War II. Third, those who opposed him were primarily concerned about protecting the image of the

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<sup>17</sup> Steve Hendrix, “Bayard Rustin, organizer of the March on Washington, was crucial to the movement,” *The Washington Post*, August 21, 2011, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/bayard-rustin-organizer-of-the-march-on-washington-was-crucial-to-the-movement/2011/08/17/g1QA0oZ7UJ\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/bayard-rustin-organizer-of-the-march-on-washington-was-crucial-to-the-movement/2011/08/17/g1QA0oZ7UJ_story.html). Emphasis in original.

<sup>18</sup> Bayard Rustin to John Swomley, March 8, 1953, in *I Must Resist: Bayard Rustin’s Life in Letters*, ed. by Michael G. Long (San Francisco: City Lights, 2012), 155.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Levine, *Bayard Rustin and the Civil Rights Movement* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 73.

movement, which was always vulnerable to criticism. Rustin believed the same and, at one point, called for the removal of fellow activist Dave McReynolds from the War Resisters' League when he came out in the late 1960s. Fourth, those who were concerned about his sexuality were primarily concerned about it because he was caught having sex in public. They were not opposed to homosexuality *per se*.

Despite these caveats, Rustin's homosexuality did preclude him from the higher echelons of leadership that he might have reached had he not been gay. Moreover, he was restricted from these positions by people within the movement. The planning for the March on Washington in 1963 reveals this. A. Philip Randolph initiated the idea and asked Rustin to draft a blueprint. He believed that Rustin should be in charge. John Lewis of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee gave his unconditional endorsement and James Farmer of the Congress of Racial Equality supported it. However, Roy Wilkins of the NAACP believed Rustin should not be the organizer because of his Communist past, his imprisonment as a conscientious objector during World War II, and his homosexuality. When Martin Luther King, Jr. said he failed to see why Rustin's past should prevent him from directing the march, Wilkins "unleashed a tirade."<sup>20</sup>

Eventually, the group compromised by naming Randolph the official director, with Randolph then selecting Rustin to be his deputy. Despite objections to organizing the march, Rustin still carried on an amicable relationship with Roy Wilkins. Rustin understood that Wilkins' objection was for political reasons. Wilkins was right to believe that Rustin's past would be used against the movement.

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<sup>20</sup> Anderson, 239, 247.

Shortly thereafter, Strom Thurmond of South Carolina attacked Rustin's character, calling him a Communist, draft dodger and homosexual. At the same time, Wilkins was wrong to believe that this would have much impact on the movement.

Thurmond's character assassination amounted to little. Also, Wilkins should be given credit for publicly defending Rustin, telling people that he was doing an extraordinary job, which no one could surpass. Randolph also stood up Rustin affirming that they had no intention of getting rid of him.<sup>21</sup>

While this episode became a footnote in the March on Washington, it says much about the response of activists within the movement to homosexuality as well as how opposing forces attempted to use homosexuality against the movement. It shows that opposition to gays in the movement ostensibly resulted from a need to preserve the image of the movement. In the interest of gaining support for black civil rights, some leaders, like Wilkins, felt the need to capitulate to prevailing attitudes against homosexuality. Others, like Randolph, Lewis and King, chose to overlook or downplay the importance of homosexuality and keep the focus on black civil rights. If a civil rights activist who was gay, like Rustin, was essential to organizing efforts, that superseded concerns that homosexuality could be used against the movement.

Although Wilkins initially opposed Rustin's appointment as director of the March on Washington, he never resorted to the tactics Adam Clayton Powell had in 1960. As Martin Luther King, Jr. and Rustin were planning to protest the party conventions prior to the election of 1960, Powell responded with hostility. He and

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<sup>21</sup> Anderson, 251.

other black leaders strenuously objected to a protest of the Democratic National Convention. They did not want to hurt the relationship between black civil rights leaders and white liberals. Powell told King and Rustin to call off the protest and demanded Rustin leave the SCLC. If they did not, Powell threatened, he would tell the press the two were having a homosexual affair. The claim would have weight because of Rustin's prior "morals charge." Subsequently, the plans to protest the convention were abandoned. In this case, Rustin's sexual orientation was used against him and his allies in a sinister way. Moreover, the use of homosexuality against the movement, while drawing on prevailing attitudes, came from inside the circle of movement leaders.<sup>22</sup>

While Rustin experienced hostility and discrimination because of his sexual orientation during his time in the civil rights movement, he did not feel a connection to the emerging gay rights organizations and did not align himself with gay liberation until later in life. For example, in the early 1980s, Rustin wrote to Joseph Beam declining to submit a piece for the collection *In the Life*, a collection of writing by black gay men. Rustin said, "...I fundamentally consider sexual orientation to be a private matter. As such, it has not been a factor which has greatly influenced my role as an activist." But, in his biography of Rustin, John D'Emilio points out, "Though Rustin might have wished for a world in which sexuality remained sequestered in the private realm, he could not avoid the workings of gay oppression."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1, 298.

<sup>23</sup> D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 490-91.

Rustin's fellow traveler on the Journey of Reconciliation Igal Roodenko (b. 1917) also struggled with his sexual orientation in the 1930s. He says he became aware of being gay in high school and "...it was the most horrible experience." Roodenko believed that, if a cure was not found soon, he would kill himself. By his mid-twenties, he was able to accept his sexual orientation. He told himself, "...alright, you are not going to commit suicide, and this is you and this is what you have to live with, and this is what the world has to live with." He notes that understanding himself as a gay man "...gave me such a sense of being an outsider."<sup>24</sup>

Like Rustin, Aaron Henry (b. 1922) was a major figure in the movement, both in Mississippi and the Freedom Democratic Party's challenge nationally. Henry was never out during his life, which makes it difficult to assess the role of the civil rights movement on his identity formation as a gay man. During his time in the movement, he remained married to his wife, Noelle. With regard to identity issues generally, it seems that Henry believed difference did not matter. Henry often attempted to downplay the importance of race and believed economic conditions were a more important determinant of life experience.

Aaron Henry's childhood was very circumscribed by religious prohibitions and segregationist restrictions. Henry observed, "My parents actually put a lot of strength in the traditional morals and sex taboos [...] I found that my friends had gotten the same word – and emphatic '*don't*' when it came to sexual activity." Moreover, he found in the church, "The preachings were hellfire and damnation, and when you left you were sure you had no chance of getting to heaven." In the

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<sup>24</sup> Interview with Igal Roodenko, interview by Charlotte Adams et al., April 11, 1974, transcript p. 63-64, Southern Oral History Program (SOHP), University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

segregated South, reaching sexual maturity as a teenager meant Henry could not see his white male friends anymore. Henry had to separate from his closest childhood friend, Randolph, a white boy. He observes, "Randolph and I started drifting apart when we were thirteen or fourteen years old--the same time we started seeing girls. He and I accepted segregation as something that we just had to do--the way things were supposed to be." For Henry, segregation and sexual maturity meant being cut off from white males.<sup>25</sup>

Aaron Henry was drafted into the army in 1943 and stationed in Hawaii. World War II was a watershed period in American race relations and the development of homosexual identity. The global conflict was important to creating "a substantially new 'erotic situation' conducive both to the articulation of a homosexual identity and to the more rapid evolution of a gay subculture" and "the war temporarily weakened the patterns of daily life that channeled men and women toward heterosexuality and inhibited homosexual expression."<sup>26</sup> Though, Henry never spoke openly about this subject so one cannot know how this might have directly affected his own experience in the military.

Aaron Henry returned to Mississippi expecting to be treated as an equal. While the Mississippi legislature exempted returning veterans from paying the poll tax, this did not apply to Henry, a black man. However, he was able to take advantage of the G.I. Bill and attend pharmacy school at Xavier University in New Orleans. While there, he attended the National Student Association Congress in the

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<sup>25</sup> Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 6, 17, 25, 53.

<sup>26</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 24, 31.

Midwest and met Allard Lowenstein in 1949, who would later work with him on bringing volunteers to Mississippi. Following that, he returned to Clarksdale, Mississippi, where he opened a pharmacy and became active in the struggle for equal rights for African Americans.<sup>27</sup>

In 1962, Henry was accused of making sexual advances towards a young white man named Sterling Lee Eilert (an incident that will be discussed in depth in chapter four). Henry denied making any advances and later said, "I felt that the arrest was an attempt to prevent people, particularly the young men who were so very important to us, from participating in a movement where they might be accused of homosexuality." Rather than arguing that gay people in the movement might fear being outed for their activism, Henry argued that presumably straight people would not join the movement for fear of being falsely accused of homosexuality. Henry said whites had tired of making accusations of interracial sex, "So they picked a new charge—one detested equally by whites and Negroes—homosexuality."<sup>28</sup>

While he continually denied it, Constance Curry writes, "Aaron Henry's bisexuality was later assumed by his friends and associates. The essence of their interview comments was: 'We all knew it, it made no difference to us, and it had no impact on his political life nor on his contributions to the freedom movement.'" Though Henry was arrested at least four times for soliciting men for sex, he was

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<sup>27</sup> Henry with Curry, 58, 65.

<sup>28</sup> Henry with Curry, 121, 124.



perpetually backed and re-elected to positions within civil rights organizations and state political office.<sup>29</sup>

Despite being brought up on “morals charges,” Henry continued to receive support in the movement. This is at odds with Bayard Rustin’s experience. Rustin was also arrested for soliciting men for sex and was forced to play a behind-the-scenes role in the late 1950s and was ostracized from the movement in the early 1960s before being accepted back in. Perhaps because Aaron Henry repeatedly fought the charges and was married to a woman, people refused to believe he was gay or bisexual rather than accept him in spite of it. Little else is known about Henry’s experience as a gay or bisexual man in the civil rights movement as he remained silent about the subject.

Allard Lowenstein (b. 1929) faced many of the same internal struggles with his sexuality as his friend Aaron Henry. At age fourteen, he became keenly aware of his “difference” from others and concerned that society viewed him as deviant. He confided to his diary that he felt an attraction towards other boys that was “getting out-of-control.” Worse, he could not talk to anyone about it. He would not even tell his closest friend, Sandy Friedman, who had the same feelings and viewed them as a “source of tremendous shame.” His personal struggles played a part in his dynamic public life. Historian William H. Chafe writes, “Fearful of sharing with others the turbulence of his self-doubts, he escaped by immersing himself in his public role, creating through his hyperactivity such a presence that few people would see

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<sup>29</sup> Henry with Curry, 128; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 159-165.

behind the illusion to the gnawing anxiety he was afraid to confront. It was here that the personal and political were most closely connected...”<sup>30</sup>

Lowenstein was very politically engaged, yet found no allies in favor of gay rights. Chafe says this might be explained by the nature of gay rights organizations like the Mattachine Society in the 1950s. These groups were focused on maintaining respectability and never demanded public acknowledgement of the right to be gay. They were not open and affirming of homosexuality. In fact, the Mattachine Society was organized in a series of cells, modeled on Communist organizing, to limit the risk that the gay men involved would be exposed. Consequently, before the early 1970s, Lowenstein talked about his sexual preferences to very few people. It was not until 1974, when he had become weary of secrecy and increasingly concerned about how to explain to his wife and family that he was bisexual or gay, that he opened up to others.<sup>31</sup>

Malcolm Boyd (b. 1923) was a white Episcopal priest involved in the civil rights movement as a Freedom Rider and participant in the Selma to Montgomery March, among other things. Boyd had known since at least age 10 that he was gay. However, Boyd writes, “It would take a devastatingly long time before a concept of gay life as something furtive and melancholy would change for me into healthy, life-giving realities.” Even after college, when Boyd was living in Hollywood and working with gay men, he observed, “My image of homosexuality remained distasteful beyond redemption, so I utterly repressed my sex...I was not yet ready to

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<sup>30</sup> William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 24-25, 84.

<sup>31</sup> Chafe, 225, 409-10.

be myself. I looked down on homosexuals; they were to be held in contempt and laughed at without mercy. I despised softness in men. Two men together were suspect in my eyes.”<sup>32</sup>

In 1951, Boyd entered seminary in Berkeley and was astonished by the number of closeted gay men in the church. However, he was more dismayed by the indifference of white Christians to racial injustice and the call of the civil rights movement. When he graduated in 1961 and took a position at Wayne State University in Detroit, Boyd became a delegate to the National Conference on Religion and Race where Martin Luther King, Jr. gave the keynote. He became increasingly drawn to the cause of racial justice. Boyd writes, “As a closeted homosexual, I felt absolutely trapped. I could see no life-giving sexual alternatives. I embraced social activism, especially in civil rights, with which I associated the will of God for pressing problems of the world in which I lived.” He continues, “I felt that my participation was the will of Jesus Christ. I did not become an activist simply as a response to my sexual repression.” In fact, according to Boyd, “All the while my stated concern was to ‘help Negroes,’ I didn’t realize how much help I needed.”<sup>33</sup>

While Boyd’s sexual identity may not have moved him to become involved in the civil rights movement, he certainly viewed racism and homophobia through the same prism. When “confronted by an intransigent fundamentalism that denied God’s love to gay people,” Boyd recalled a publication from the American Book and Bible House called *The Negro a Beast* in 1900. It argued that black people were not

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<sup>32</sup> Malcolm Boyd, *Take Off the Masks: The Classic Spiritual Autobiography, Revised with a New Epilogue* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977, 1993), 11, 52, 58-59.

<sup>33</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 70, 106, 109, 113, 117; Malcolm Boyd, *As I Live and Breathe: Stages of an Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1969), 177.

descendants of Adam and Eve but mere beasts without souls. Further, Boyd applied the concept of the closet to segregation, writing, "Racial separation, or any form of human apartheid, means the existence of separate closets in which people dwell, hidden from each other, mere images going through the motions of communication."<sup>34</sup>

In June, 1976, Boyd delivered the sermon at the ecumenical religious service of Chicago's Gay Pride Week. Two months later, he gave the keynote address at the second annual Integrity convention, a gathering of gay Episcopalians and their allies in San Francisco. However, it would not be until the following year, 1977, that he came out publicly with the release of his book *Take Off the Masks*. Boyd felt that as a priest and a writer, he must be honest. He noted, "Reaction was violent, angry, and retributive. A couple friends who were famous liberals I never heard from again." Boyd moved to Los Angeles in the 1980s and began working in AIDS ministry.<sup>35</sup>

Together with Boyd, Grant Gallup traveled to Selma at the invitation of Martin Luther King, Jr., along with three other gay Episcopal priests. For three decades, Gallup, a white man, ran St. Andrew's Parish in an African American neighborhood on Chicago's west side and was heavily engaged in issues of racial justice. Gallup noted on more than one occasion that he and other white gay Episcopal priests "invested the energies that might have gone into our own struggle for liberation into the Civil Rights Movement in the 60's, knowing that it was

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<sup>34</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 164, 184.

<sup>35</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 137; Chris Freeman, "The Many Lives of Malcolm Boyd," *The Gay and Lesbian Review* 18:5 (Sept/Oct, 2011), 30.

legitimate to struggle for Black folks' rights, but illegitimate (and unsafe) to struggle for our own."<sup>36</sup>

Malcolm Boyd recalls in his autobiography reading *Giovanni's Room* by James Baldwin and identifying with the story of one male lover leaving another.<sup>37</sup> Baldwin (b. 1924), a gay man himself, likely influenced a number of gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement. James Baldwin was born and raised in Harlem. As a young man, he became fearful of his own sexuality, thinking himself a depraved boy and turning to religion as a corrective. He was also touched by a man at age 13 which may have contributed to this fear. Though Baldwin attended Frederick Douglass Junior High and was mentored by Countee Cullen, a black gay figure of the Harlem Renaissance, the two likely did not recognize each other as black gay men and Baldwin appears to have had no gay role models.<sup>38</sup>

For a long time, Baldwin continued to try to repress his homosexuality. He began training to be a preacher, in part, as a means for masking his repressed sexuality. In his late teens, Baldwin fell in love with a man who was in his late 30s. Biographer David Leeming observes that this positive feeling of love for another man led Baldwin to accept himself as a gay man. Moreover, Beauford Delaney, a Harlem Renaissance painter, became a mentor for Baldwin, showing him that a black gay man could function as a self-supporting artist. Leeming identifies Delaney

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<sup>36</sup> Grant M. Gallup to Louie Crew, "Re: Jon Daniels," September 30, 1996, Civil Rights Chapter folder, box 87, James T. Sears Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>37</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 96.

<sup>38</sup> David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 22-24.

as a father figure and the most important influence in Baldwin's life. Though, Delaney was often secretive and uncomfortable with his sexuality, as was Baldwin.<sup>39</sup>

Baldwin continued to be conflicted about his sexuality as a young man. He had many one-night stands and relationships with women, some of whom wanted to save him from homosexuality and others who wanted to experience sex with a black man. Even within Greenwich Village, Baldwin felt isolated as one of the few black gay men. For Baldwin, "Homosexuality involved 'violation.' It could take place only furtively with other 'outlaws' of the night." While he often wrote about race and sexuality, he was not very open about being gay. Instead, in the 1960s, Baldwin was "quietly known to be gay." In fact, only a few knew that figures like James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin were gay. Even into the 1980s, Baldwin avoided taking a public stance on gay rights and continued to believe that sexuality was a private matter.<sup>40</sup>

Eddie Sandifer (b. 1929) provides a sharp contrast to Baldwin's story, though he came of age around the same time. A white man, Sandifer was involved in gay rights activism in the South from an early age. Originally from Louisiana, Sandifer moved to McComb, Mississippi in 1945. A few years later, he realized that his sexual orientation differed from others and came out in 1948. At the same time, he was cognizant of the racial prejudice around him. He became involved in radical politics through the American Communist Party and was known as "a Commie, a queer, and a nigger lover." Sandifer was criticized for his views in the late 1940s. He recounts

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<sup>39</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, 25, 28, 30, 32; See also David Leeming, *Amazing Grace: A Life of Beauford Delaney* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> Leeming, *Baldwin*, 22, 24, 28, 45, 53, 358; Cruikshank, 62; Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 169.

the publisher of the McComb *Enterprise-Journal*, Oliver Emmerich, running a front-page editorial calling on people to tar and feather him. During the Korean War, Sandifer was drafted and had to fight to remain in the Army because of his sexual orientation.<sup>41</sup>

In 1958, at a New York meeting of the Mattachine Society, Eddie Sandifer met Randy Wicker, a white gay man. The following year, he opened up a branch of Wicker Research Studies (WRS) in Mississippi. Wicker Research Studies was a homophile organization similar to the Mattachine Society and Daughters of Bilitis. Unlike those groups, WRS was based in Austin, Texas. However, the organization quickly faded because few in the South would risk coming to meetings. Historian John Howard argues that this was the result of African American civil rights activism in Mississippi, which led to the targeting of homosexuals as real or perceived advocates of black civil rights. Except for rare instances, gay organizing ceased. In Sandifer's case, though it had been well known since the 1940s that he was gay, he was not harassed for his sexual orientation until the 1960s when he hosted Freedom Riders.<sup>42</sup>

Like Sandifer, David McReynolds (b. 1929) had brief contact with the homophile movement in the 1950s and devoted most of his efforts in the 1960s to civil rights and anti-war causes. However, McReynolds was born and raised in Los Angeles. Drawn in by Lincoln Steffen's muckraking autobiography, McReynolds

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<sup>41</sup> "Rebel With a Cause," p.1, Eddie Sandifer vertical file, Mississippi Department of Archives and History; Leesha Cooper, "Sandifer is a human rights activist, but foes just see him as being gay," *Jackson Clarion-Ledger*, March 3, 1991, A16; Howard, 234; Ken Lawrence and Dick Harger, "Persistence Is the Key," *Southern Exposure* (March-June, 1985), 121.

<sup>42</sup> Howard, 232.

became interested in social change. He was most influenced by the conservative progressives of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and started his life as an activist in the Prohibition Party. McReynolds took time off during his sophomore year at UCLA to travel to Kansas and fight the repeal of one of the remaining state prohibition laws.<sup>43</sup>

In the late 1940s, at age 19, McReynolds came out to his parents. Both were upset at the news and his father would never accept David's homosexuality. At the same time, though, he and his father continued to talk and would discuss the issue openly. Biographer and historian Martin Duberman says McReynolds would never cease to experience bouts of guilt about his sexual orientation, but more or less reached acceptance well before Stonewall.<sup>44</sup>

McReynolds was also out to the members of Los Angeles Socialist Party. But, this was not common in the Left at the time. In fact, one of his friends in the group had previously been expelled from the Socialist Youth League and other Marxist groups. This continual rejection led his friend to believe that homosexuality was an affliction he suffered and one which grew out of the bourgeois decadence of capitalism.<sup>45</sup>

In part, McReynolds himself was more accepting of and open about being gay in the pre-Stonewall era because he was able to meet people who served as models. David met Alvin Ailey while attending UCLA in 1949 and identifies him as a major influence because of his guilt-free attitude about being gay. In 1953, McReynolds met Bayard Rustin on a trip to New York. He and Rustin had a lengthy conversation

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<sup>43</sup> Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: The New Press, 2011), 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> Duberman, 30.

<sup>45</sup> Duberman, 33.



about homosexuality. McReynolds recalls Rustin telling him that sex with a man was no less “healthy” than sex with a woman. This helped assuage McReynolds’ guilt, but Rustin also told him he should keep his sexual orientation to himself.<sup>46</sup>

While McReynolds identified himself as a gay man, he did not connect the oppression of gays and the oppression of African Americans. McReynolds visited Bayard Rustin when he was jailed for his “morals charge” and noted how it broke Rustin to be imprisoned for something he did not believe in. Daniel Levine writes,

They talked about their inner conflict. They were, they were convinced, soldiers in a great moral crusade against war and violence. They were drawn into what seemed to them at the time something immoral, even dirty. They were not making the connection that the gay liberation movement made later, between civil rights for racial minorities and civil rights for people with divergent sexual orientations. It seemed to them at the time a contradiction.<sup>47</sup>

When David McReynolds came out publicly in 1971, Bayard Rustin called for him to be fired from his job. Rustin had previously been forced to resign from the Fellowship of Reconciliation and avoid a public role in the civil rights movement following his conviction on a “morals charge.” Rustin accepted his dismissal and continued to believe it was tactically appropriate to fire homosexuals who would draw negative attention to the cause in the early 1970s.<sup>48</sup>

Like McReynolds, Patrick A. Cusick (b. 1931) was born and raised during the Great Depression. However, he spent his youth in Gadsden, Alabama, and had a family history much more complicated by race. His great grandfather was a slave-owner, Confederate Army major, and founder of the Ku Klux Klan in Etowah County.

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<sup>46</sup> Duberman, 31, 36.

<sup>47</sup> Levine, 70-71.

<sup>48</sup> Levine, 72.

Though, Cusick also had a great great grandfather who was a Southern abolitionist and he clearly inherited that legacy. Pat remembers knowing black families in the area whose ancestors had been slaves of his great grandfather. The family's kitchen furniture had been hand-carved by slaves, which left Pat with a lot of guilt.<sup>49</sup>

After spending time in the U.S. Air Force in Germany, working at General Electric in Georgia, and attending Belmont Abbey College in North Carolina, Cusick transferred to Chapel Hill and became a leader in the civil rights movement there. Cusick was part of a trio of young gay men that led the desegregation efforts in the city. While Rustin had to see a psychiatrist because he was a homosexual, Cusick had to see a psychiatrist while in prison for civil rights activism "because obviously a white southerner taking these positions must be deranged."<sup>50</sup>

However, he was not interrogated for his sexual orientation because he was "deep, deep, deep in the closet at the time of the civil rights movement."

Consequently, Cusick told historian James T. Sears, "There were more gays than people ever realized in the Civil Rights Movement. But you wouldn't see it from the outside." Even after his time in the civil rights movement, Cusick remained in the closet for many years. He cites feelings of shame and guilt, which he attributes to his Catholic upbringing, in explaining why he remained closeted. Cusick says most of the people he was closest to knew he was gay, but he was not really out until 1984. Despite the time which passed between his time in the civil rights movement and his

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<sup>49</sup> Interview with Pat Cusick, interview by Pamela Dean, June 19, 1989, transcript p. 1-3, SOHP; Interview with Pat Cusick, interview by Lois Gillman, June 10, 1974, transcript p. 46, The North Carolina Civil Rights Movement, 1973-1978, 1992, Duke University Oral History Program Collection, 1973-1978, 1992.

<sup>50</sup> G. McLeod Bryan, *These Few Also Paid a Price: Southern Whites Who Fought for Civil Rights* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2001), 31; Cusick interview with Dean, 33.

coming out, Cusick believes the movement was important in shaping his identity.<sup>51</sup>

In a 1989 interview, he stated,

...it wasn't just for justice for black people. It also freed me. I mean, I was sick and tired of what the segregation system...did to me. So my being involved...was a process of freeing me, and I think you don't free part of yourself. I didn't realize that then. I often wonder if I'd not been in the civil rights movement if I would have ever come out of the closet...<sup>52</sup>

Alternatively, Quinton Baker, a black gay man who was also instrumental to the movement in Chapel Hill, says, "In some ways, I never tied the two issues—race and sexuality—together. Race during the time of segregation was about my right to have a fulfilled existence, to have a life that was not restricted. The sexual issue was about trying to understand what these feelings meant and how they fit into the context of human emotions." For Quinton Baker, the motivating factor in his participation in the movement was solely to expand black civil rights. He viewed the racial issue as a public dispute and sexual orientation as a private, interior issue. There was no thought of arguing for broader human rights inclusive of all races and sexual orientations.<sup>53</sup> In assessing the connection between gays and black civil rights activism overall, Baker finds that gay men were not widely supportive of the movement. He observed,

Some of the people who expressed the most overt racism were white gays. The people who have been the least involved were white gays—unless they had been radicalized. So I would have not made any connection with someone being gay and *any* affinity for human rights. Of course I wouldn't say that there were no gays in the movement—

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<sup>51</sup> Cusick interview with Dean, 63-65; James T. Sears, "Remembering Pat Cusick: A Key Civil Rights Organizer," *GayToday.com*, May 24, 2004, <http://www.gaytoday.com/people/052404pe.asp>.

<sup>52</sup> Cusick interview with Dean, 67.

<sup>53</sup> James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 127.

there were many—but the gays pretty much wanted to maintain the social structure as it was.<sup>54</sup>

Baker (b. 1942) grew up in Greenville, North Carolina. From a young age, his father was “scared to death” he was going to be “funny.” While he was not particularly effeminate, he did speak differently, focusing on correct pronunciation. He believes his mother knew he was gay, but they never talked about it. Throughout his life, Baker felt that he was not male enough for his father and his brothers. His siblings called him a “sissy,” which caused great pain. This also separated him from others because he was not good at the “traditional African American kinds of things”; he could not dance or play sports. At the same time, though, gay men in his town were not ostracized. For young boys, there was often “sexual fooling around” but that did not mean they were necessarily homosexual. There may have been some talking behind their backs, but there was no harsh rhetoric. Rather, it was simply quiet acceptance of black gay men in the community.<sup>55</sup>

As an adolescent in the mid-to-late 1950s, Baker did not really label himself. He might have thought of himself as “funny,” but did not identify as gay or homosexual. Baker was aware that he preferred intimacy with other boys, but may have thought of it as a phase. In high school, there was really no discussion of homosexuality, though there was one student named Lester who was rather flamboyant and was always ridiculed by the principal. While Quinton was bothered by the name-calling, he befriended Lester anyway. When Quinton attended college

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<sup>54</sup> Sears, *Lonely Hunters*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by James T. Sears, September 25, 1996, James T. Sears Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University; Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by Chris McGinnis, February 23, 2002, SOHP.

at North Carolina Central, there was a large gay population, he says. But, Quinton was reluctant to be associated with the most open and defiantly homosexual men.<sup>56</sup>

By the time Baker became involved in the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill, he was in a relationship with fellow civil rights activist John Dunne. Baker says, “The relationship with John was very important to me. And it was being in that relationship and our being in the movement together that was a real strong force in our lives together, because John was very active, we demonstrated together, we protected each other—we were there.” He says that his two-to-three year relationship with John Dunne was common knowledge in the early 1960s. The people at his college and in the activist community in Chapel Hill were aware of it.<sup>57</sup>

Baker joined the NAACP Commandos, who went around the state to assist various communities in using non-violent direct action. When Floyd McKissick left the NAACP and Charles McClain took over as state youth advisor, Baker says McClain complained to the national board that he was involved in a relationship with another man. Baker believes this was the driving force behind the complaint, though McClain also said Baker should be removed because he was being more loyal to CORE than the NAACP. Quinton Baker was friends with the National Youth Secretary of the NAACP, Laplois Ashford, who was also a black gay man. Ashford supported him through the complaint and inquiry. In the end, Baker was not removed from the Commandos.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Baker interview by Sears; Baker interview by McGinnis.

<sup>57</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis.

<sup>58</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis.

Like Baker and Ashford, Rodney Powell (b. 1935) was a black gay man who was involved in the African American freedom struggle. An activist in the Nashville Student Movement, Powell knew he was gay from age ten, but remained closeted for a long time. In fact, as a young black man growing up in Philadelphia, Powell felt he suffered more fear and anxiety as a result of his sexual identity than he did his race. While at Meharry Medical School in Nashville, he had homosexual experiences but kept them secret. He also worked to dissociate himself from those in his class he suspected were gay as they were “cruelly mocked and completely ostracized” by other students. Powell speculated that perhaps because many in the black community desired acceptance from the larger white society, they worked to push any African American who deviated from the norm back in line lest they jeopardize the prospects for integration.<sup>59</sup>

Powell, partly in hopes that he could move beyond homosexuality, married in 1960. He was further encouraged to suppress his attraction to other men when he traveled to Ethiopia. There, he felt a particularly strong religious and cultural prohibition against sexual nonconformity. However, by 1965, he was willing to accept that he was gay. Powell, like Cusick, attributes his coming out to his time in the civil rights movement. He writes, “It wasn’t until 1965, after my protests as a student in the civil rights movement in the South, when as a black American I had new language and positive ways to affirm my racial identity, that I found positive language to acknowledge my sexual orientation and affirm unconditionally who I

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<sup>59</sup> Rodney Powell, in *Crisis: 40 Stories Revealing the Personal, Social, and Religious Pain and Trauma of Growing Up Gay in America* ed. by Mitchell Gold with Mindy Drucker (Austin, TX: Greenleaf Book Group, 2008), 54, 58; David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 385-86, 592.

was. By then I was thirty years old, married, the father of two children with a third on the way. I found that courage in a three-letter word: gay.”<sup>60</sup>

Barney Frank (b. 1940) was a volunteer for Mississippi Freedom Summer recruited by Allard Lowenstein. He grew up in a non-religious Jewish household in Bayonne, New Jersey. Frank realized by age 13 that he was gay but did not want to tell anyone. With a lack of information about homosexuality and no gay role models, Frank found it difficult to come to terms with his sexuality. His biographer, Stuart Weisberg, writes, “Barney suffered the silent pain, fear, and loneliness of being homosexual during the 1950s.”<sup>61</sup>

Frank had an interest in government and remembers watching the Army-McCarthy Hearings in 1954 and the political conventions in 1956. However, government was especially hostile to the presence of homosexuals at the time. In 1950, Senate Report 241 was released documenting the “Employment of Homosexuals and Other Sex Perverts in Government.” In 1953, President Eisenhower issued Executive Order 10450 which declared “sexual perversion” grounds for blocking the hiring of homosexuals and terminating any gay federal employees. The following year, another executive order was issued labeling homosexuals “security risks.” That, combined with the limited opportunities for Jews in government service, meant a future for Frank in politics did not look bright.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Powell, 55; Halberstam, 369.

<sup>61</sup> Stuart E. Weisberg, *Barney Frank: The Story of America's Only Left-Handed, Gay, Jewish Congressman* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 38.

<sup>62</sup> Weisberg, 38-39.

Frank entered Harvard, a place where he says “homophobia was kind of the conversational coin of the realm,” as it was in many places. Frank was paired with a freshman from Aiken, South Carolina. While Frank had been moved by the injustice of the murder of Emmett Till, his roommate Hastings Wyman, Jr. was a reactionary, segregationist southerner. As it happened, Wyman also knew since age 13 that he was gay, but would not come out until the mid-1990s.<sup>63</sup>

In his junior year, Frank met Allard Lowenstein, who would become his role model and exert a strong influence on his life and political career. Frank has stated that, outside of his family, no single person made more of an impact on his life. After working as an organizer in the civil rights movement with Lowenstein, Frank returned to Boston and became involved in politics. As early as 1972, when he ran for Ward 5 State Representative in Massachusetts, Frank supported civil rights for homosexuals, calling for a repeal of laws which discriminated against gays or criminalized their behavior. The first piece of legislation he introduced was also the first gay rights bill in Massachusetts history. Though the legislation did not have much chance of passing, he suggested, “If we start now, maybe in twenty years it will change like civil rights.”<sup>64</sup>

Despite declaring his support for gay rights, Frank did not come out publicly. In 1979, he told a few close friends about his sexual orientation and the following year, he told his siblings. By the mid-1980s, Frank described himself as “half-in, half-out.” In 1986, when former Republican congressman Robert Bauman of Maryland pushed a book called *The Gentleman From Maryland: The Conscience of a*

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<sup>63</sup> Weisberg, 41-43.

<sup>64</sup> Weisberg, 45-46, 55-56, 102, 112-13, 153.



*Gay Conservative*, Frank told some of his colleagues he was gay. But, the book did not sell well and Frank refused to comment when he was asked about his sexuality. The following year when Stewart McKinney, a closeted bisexual congressman died of AIDS, Barney finally decided to come out because he was tired of the speculation about sexual orientation that McKinney's family had to go through and did not want people to think he was ashamed of being gay.<sup>65</sup>

Like Frank, Joseph Allen Herzenberg, II, was born in 1941 in New Jersey, joined the civil rights movement and ran for political office as an openly gay man. In college, he was active in the New Haven chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality. By 1964, Herzenberg was a history instructor at Tougaloo College when he volunteered for Freedom Summer. He had known in junior high school that he was gay but felt there was nothing he could do besides remain silent. Like others, Herzenberg looked around and found no positive gay role models. Though his parents were friends with a gay male couple, they were not viewed as "socially acceptable."<sup>66</sup>

After spending five years at Tougaloo College, Herzenberg moved to Chapel Hill in 1969. He remained closeted to almost everybody until the early 1970s. When his brother, five years younger, was drafted for the Vietnam War, he came out to the draft board. Two of his mother's cousins were on the draft board and word spread to his family quite quickly that his brother was gay. At that point, Joseph also

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<sup>65</sup> Weisberg, 328, 336-40.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with Joseph A. ("Joe") Herzenberg, interview by Joseph Mosnier, July 27, 1995, SOHP; Interview with Joseph A. Herzenberg, interview by Chris McGinnis, November 1, 2000, transcript p. 4, SOHP; "Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, Mississippi, Faculty and Staff, 1964 - 1965," Sovereignty Commission Online, SCR ID # 3-74-2-35-2-1-1.

came out to his family. His family was generally accepting that Joseph and his brother were gay. He does not recall ever hearing them say anything negative about homosexuality, though his parents were somewhat disappointed that they would probably not have grandchildren.<sup>67</sup>

Herzenberg does not recall anyone discriminating against or mistreating him because of his sexual orientation after he was out. He reflects, "...I think the only kind of discrimination I suffered was...my own...internalized homophobia."<sup>68</sup>

Herzenberg did not know any gay people in Chapel Hill until 1975. That year, the Carolina Gay Association was formed and persuaded the Chapel Hill Board of Aldermen to include gays in their non-discrimination ordinance. But, since Herzenberg was only out to his family and not out publicly, he did not join or even pay much attention to it.<sup>69</sup>

Arthur Finn (b. 1944), a white man, traveled to the 1963 March on Washington and spent a summer in Valley View, Mississippi, working with voter registration and building a community center.<sup>70</sup> For Finn, literature had an important impact on his thinking about homosexuality. He read *Giovanni's Room* (1956) by James Baldwin while in college and thought it incredible that there would be a book with gay characters. While it was nice to know there was someone like Baldwin writing about issues of gay identity and black civil rights, Finn did not really connect this to the movement and it did not make him want to come out. Any impact of Baldwin's work was overshadowed by books like *Advise and Consent*

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<sup>67</sup> Herzenberg interview by McGinnis, 4-5.

<sup>68</sup> Herzenberg interview by McGinnis, 5-6.

<sup>69</sup> Herzenberg interview by McGinnis, 7-8, 40.

<sup>70</sup> Interview with Arthur Finn, telephone interview by author, July 7, 2011.

(1959), the Pulitzer Prize-winning political novel by Alan Drury. Finn learned from reading this that a gay person could not be involved in politics and, if his homosexual identity was discovered, it would be used against him.<sup>71</sup>

During his time in the civil rights movement, Finn knew of no one else who was gay. Though he had been aware he was gay since age 12 or 13, he worked to hide his identity so he could remain involved in political life. When he attended Columbia Law School in the late 1960s, Finn remained deep in the closet. However, after he graduated in 1969, he decided to move to the West Coast and live in a commune in Oregon, where he felt more liberated from social pressures. At that point, he also met a man that he was attracted to. Finn came out and quickly became surrounded by the rising gay liberation movement of the early 1970s.<sup>72</sup>

Don Steele (b. 1946) was a white student at Southwestern College in Memphis, Tennessee, when he became involved with the Memphis garbage workers' strike. Steele did not identify as gay at the time. While he remembers being called a "queer" in high school and college because he was "effeminate," he "did not have enough clues to put it together that [he] was a gay man." However, Steele believes, "It's because I was gay that I was sensitive to other justice matters."<sup>73</sup>

Steele married in 1970, had kids and focused on his Presbyterian ministry for 24 years. As a minister, he recalls counseling gay and lesbian couples at a number of parishes throughout the South. By 1994, he was living in Berkeley and working on his doctorate at Graduate Theological Seminary. He was also working with a

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<sup>71</sup> Finn interview.

<sup>72</sup> Finn interview.

<sup>73</sup> Interview with Don Steele, telephone interview by author, July 6, 2011.

Franciscan ministry that counseled youth coming to terms with being gay. It was that year, in an environment where there were lots of gay people, when he had long come to terms with the idea that “gay is good,” that he finally came out.<sup>74</sup>

The trajectories of Arthur Finn and Don Steele’s lives provide useful counterpoints. Both were born around the same time. Both were raised in environments which, while not openly hostile to homosexuality, certainly presented a bleak view of it. Steele went into the ministry, though there were many gays and lesbians in churches and ministries. Moreover, Steele’s personal beliefs were affirming of gays and lesbians regardless of the church’s stance. Though both were of a younger generation that was active in the civil rights movement and came of age around the Stonewall Rebellion, Arthur Finn came out the year after gay liberation began and eventually became the head of the New York Pride Parade which marks the anniversary every year. Alternatively, Don Steele remained closeted for 25 years after Stonewall before coming out and becoming active in issues important to gay life.

The experiences identity formation among gay men in the Civil Rights Movement often varied considerably. The main unifying feature is that almost no gay man in the civil rights movement was voluntarily out. Bayard Rustin was out due to an arrest on “morals charges,” which he did not work to deny. James Baldwin was generally believed to be gay because of his writing on the subject but rarely spoke of his own sexual orientation. Eddie Sandifer, a white southern activist in many causes, appears to be the only person who voluntarily, publicly and explicitly

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<sup>74</sup> Steele interview.

declared himself to be gay in the civil rights movement in the pre-Stonewall era. Almost all other activists lived their time in the movement in silence.

There is a slight, though not significant generational difference. Older gay activists in the civil rights movement were more reluctant to speak out about the cause of gay liberation following Stonewall. Bayard Rustin, James Baldwin, and Allard Lowenstein only really embraced the cause of gay liberation in the 1980s and, in Aaron Henry's case, he never embraced it. For younger activists like Rodney Powell, Barney Frank, and Arthur Finn, gay liberation was a more pressing and important cause that they were quicker to become involved in. Though, there were certainly outliers. The older Eddie Sandifer embraced gay rights in the 1950s and the younger Don Steele was not out until the 1990s.

### **Communication Networks**

Many of the lesbians and gays in the civil rights movement had strong connections to each other. Martin Meeker observes in his work *Contacts Desired*, "Before people who erotically and emotionally preferred the same sex could organize to confront and challenge their antagonists, they have had to coalesce around an identity and gather themselves into collectivities, into communities, into specific places, and around certain ideas." He continues, "In seeking out information and contacts, these individuals reached out into a vast variety of established networks of communication, but they also helped expand and transform those networks and...even created entirely new ones."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Meeker, 1-2.

In the civil rights movement, many lesbians and gays were connected to each other and organized around the belief in equal rights and individual freedom. Yet despite the formation of communication networks within the civil rights movement, it is surprising that these networks of political activists were not utilized to advance the cause of gay rights. Meeker writes,

Sociologists, particularly those studying networks, have shown that preexisting networks influence newly forming ones. Such was the case of emerging homosexuality networks, which were built upon a dense and interlocking grid of already established social networks of gender, race, and class. Thus, the ground upon which homosexual communication networks was built already had an established history of patterns of racism, sexism, and economic inequality that would, in turn, play a role in structuring new networks.<sup>76</sup>

However, based on this research on gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement, what is more striking is that these pre-existing networks of gays and lesbians for black civil rights had almost no bearing on subsequent efforts for gay rights.

In Chapel Hill, there was a strong network of gay activists in the civil rights movement. Quinton Baker, Pat Cusick, and John Dunne were close to each other as gay men and as activists for black civil rights. In fact, Quinton Baker would later observe, "I've asked myself for years, 'Would things have been different were I not different?' I think that the fact that the three of us did have the same sexual orientation made it possible for there to develop a closer relationship for us to work together." In another interview, Baker observed, "There was dating, that was inter-movement. There was some marrying going on. There was some sleeping around going on...we were very close...I think the closeness often sustained us, the dynamic.

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<sup>76</sup> Meeker, 11.

The fact that we were always together, and that we were always involved with each other...kept the momentum going."<sup>77</sup>

While gay bars were important to connecting gay men at the time, Baker and Dunne became connected through civil rights activism. They also met other gay men in the area. For example, John Knowles, a white gay man and author of *A Separate Peace*, lived in Chapel Hill at the time Baker, Dunne and Cusick were organizing civil rights demonstrations. Knowles was a supporter of the movement and Baker and Dunne were often invited to gatherings at his house.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, the Chapel Hill group had connections with gay activists beyond the local movement. When the NAACP wanted Baker removed because he was in a relationship with Dunne, they received the assistance of a black gay man, Laplois Ashford, who was the National Youth Secretary of the NAACP. Through his connections in the Student Peace Union, Pat Cusick invited Dave McReynolds, a white gay activist, to speak.

McReynolds also formed an important connection to Bayard Rustin, who was connected to a number of gay activists in the movement. Rustin provided McReynolds with entrée to civil rights groups in New York and also counseled him on how to understand himself as a gay man at a time when homosexuals were embattled. McReynolds was also closely connected to Igal Roodenko, a white gay

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<sup>77</sup> Sears, *Lonely Hunters*, 161; Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by Larry Goodyn, June 2, 1974, The North Carolina Civil Rights Movement, 1973-1978, 1992, Duke University Oral History Program Collection, 1973-1978, 1992.

<sup>78</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis.

man active in the early civil rights movement, who helped him deal with personal problems.<sup>79</sup>

Bayard Rustin had a close professional and personal relationship with Tom Kahn. The two were a couple and worked together on a number of civil rights issues. Kahn was instrumental in assisting Rustin in planning the March on Washington and helped him write his most famous essay, "From Protest to Politics." Rustin was also connected to Igal Roodenko. Rustin and Roodenko were two of the sixteen men on the Journey of Reconciliation. The two lived together in New York at the time and served time together in North Carolina for their 1947 freedom ride. Tom Kahn was also connected to Roodenko as the latter was a printer and published Kahn's 1960 book on the sit-in movement called *Unfinished Revolution*. Rustin had also known Lillian Smith, a lesbian and supporter of the civil rights movement. Through the Fellowship of Reconciliation, the two had been connected for years.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Barney Frank and Allard Lowenstein were closely connected in the civil rights movement, with Frank citing Lowenstein as one of his most important and lasting political influences. However, the two did not recognize each other as gay men at the time. Lowenstein and Aaron Henry were also very close, though again, the secrecy that both of them kept about their sexual identities meant they likely never discussed the issue. They certainly never used their communication network in the African American civil rights movement to advance gay rights.

Pauli Murray and Lillian Smith often corresponded about civil rights issues. For example, following the announcement of the *Brown* decision in 1954, Murray

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<sup>79</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 179.

<sup>80</sup> Levine, 54, 60, 78, 130, 172.



wrote to Smith, "I do not know where you are, but I can bet you wept on Monday last and throughout the week. I did, unashamedly." The correspondence between Pauli Murray and Lillian Smith began as early as 1942, when Murray was a law student. The two worked closely together as the elder Smith helped Murray prepare her book. At one point, Smith wrote, "She [Pauli Murray] is a brilliant girl, a really brilliant one and maybe I can help."<sup>81</sup>

A writer and board member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, Smith helped arrange Bayard Rustin's first meeting with Martin Luther King, Jr. While she did not favor "northern experts" in non-violence traveling to the South because no one was an expert in non-violence, she believed Howard Thurman or Bayard Rustin would be of assistance. However, she specified that if Thurman assisted he could lead openly while Rustin "should give only quiet advice." This suggests that she was aware of Rustin's "morals charge" and did not want it to affect the movement.<sup>82</sup>

Lillian Smith and Jane Stembridge, the first full time staff member of SNCC, were also close for a time. Their correspondence began in September, 1960, when Stembridge invited Smith to give the closing speech at SNCC's fall meeting. This, incidentally, was the same meeting for which Stembridge's request that Bayard Rustin speak was rejected by the organization. Following the meeting, Smith invited Stembridge and other SNCC workers to her home on Old Screamer Mountain.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions*, 180; Lillian Smith to Paula Snelling, June 18, 1952, in *How Am I to Be Heard? Letters of Lillian Smith*, ed. by Margaret Rose Gladney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 134-5.

<sup>82</sup> Lillian Smith to Martin Luther King, Jr., March 10, 1956, in Gladney, 193-95; Howell Raines, *My Soul Is Rested: Movement Days in the Deep South Remembered* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983).

<sup>83</sup> Gladney, 256.

Smith wrote of Stembridge, “The fact that she is white, and is southern, and is so beautifully reared and educated gives her real influence and breeds respect among the young whites.” Enamored of Stembridge, Smith and Snelling invited her and her friend Donna McGinty to visit again. Stembridge wanted to share more of Smith’s life with Paula Snelling. However, Stembridge found that Smith was often unresponsive in their dialogue and their friendship was not one of equal concern for the other. Stembridge also felt that, despite her deep interest and outspokenness on the subject, Smith had failed to grasp the persistent problems in the South. The two broke off their friendship in 1964.<sup>84</sup>

Stembridge was also close to Barbara Deming and they knew each other as lesbian women. Stembridge recalls that Deming was a “wonderful human being.” Whenever Jane would find herself in some city trying to make a relationship work, but totally broke, Barbara would help her out. At the same time, Deming was a mentor to Stembridge as Deming had a great deal of activist experience. However, as Deming became involved in women’s liberation and lesbian feminism, Stembridge did not.<sup>85</sup>

Lorraine Hansberry also had a number of important connections to other gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement. She and James Baldwin were relatively close. Hansberry was present as Baldwin began workshopping *Giovanni’s Room* for the stage and loved it. Baldwin would later write a piece about Hansberry referring to her as “Sweet Lorraine.” Hansberry was also aware of the writing of David McReynolds and spotted him one day in Greenwich Village. She said she

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<sup>84</sup> Daniel, 292, 301.

<sup>85</sup> Stembridge interview.

appreciated his appeal for tolerance towards homosexuals and invited him over for her New Year's Eve party.<sup>86</sup>

At the same time, lesbians and gays in the civil rights movement came into conflict with each other. Pauli Murray wrote to Bayard Rustin expressing her disapproval that the dais at the March on Washington lacked any women, though they were foundational to the struggle. Murray wrote, "...I have not devoted the greater part of my adult life to the implementation of human rights to (now) condone any policy which is not inclusive."<sup>87</sup>

In another instance, Rustin argued that Dave McReynolds should be removed from his position at the War Resisters' League when he came out in 1970 because he believed it would damage the cause. Moreover, Lillian Smith was highly critical of James Baldwin, who she felt was late coming to the cause of civil rights and never put his body on the line for the movement. Despite these conflicts, there were none so significant that they would have prevented cooperation in the cause of gay liberation.<sup>88</sup>

While Martin Meeker argues that the 1950s saw a small number of homosexuals organizing and speaking loudly about sexual orientation and homophobia, there is little evidence that this affected the highly politicized lesbian and gay activists in the civil rights movement.<sup>89</sup> Part of this may have to do with the fact that many civil rights activists were based in the South and the homophile

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<sup>86</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 156.

<sup>87</sup> Weatherby, 144; Leeming, 155; Anderson, 259.

<sup>88</sup> Lillian Smith to SNCC, undated [Late December 1962 or January 1963], in Gladney, 302-3; Lillian Smith to Arthur R. Buckley, February 8, 1966, in Gladney, 347.

<sup>89</sup> Meeker, 29.

movement was a small group primarily located in San Francisco, Los Angeles and New York City. Another explanation may have to do with political strategy. While the leaders of the Mattachine Society had taken their organizational design from prior activity in the Communist Party, the strategy of homophile groups like Mattachine, Daughters of Bilitis and One was to emphasize middle class respectability, though the civil rights movement did so as well. However, homophile groups did not often engage in direct action and had little connection to other causes.

Though it may not have been safe to advocate for gay rights in the late 1950s and early 1960s, gay and lesbian activists do not seem to have drawn on these prior communication networks even after Stonewall. However, they did draw on the consciousness, strategies and tactics they had acquired. Given that they had formed multiple communication networks working for the cause of black civil rights, it is quite surprising that gays and lesbians in the movement did not use these connections to push for lesbian and gay rights.

### CHAPTER THREE - "ALL OF A PIECE": FROM BLACK CIVIL RIGHTS TO WOMEN'S LIBERATION TO LESBIAN LIBERATION

In 1983, civil rights activist and acclaimed writer Alice Walker published *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, in which she recast feminism to better reflect African American experience and to include multiple sexualities. Her definition of womanism read, in part:

1. From womanish. (Opp. Of "girlish," i.e. frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e. like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or *willful* behavior....

2. Also: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter)....Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female....<sup>1</sup>

Like Walker, many other lesbian and bisexual women active in the civil rights movement came to understand themselves as feminists or womanists, in part, as a result of their experiences in the movement. Similarly, their involvement in women's liberation helped lead them to understand themselves as women who love women. Just as lesbians and other women in the civil rights movement gained valuable experience and faced challenges as lesbians and women in the struggle, so too did those lesbians who went on to women's liberation gain valuable experience and face challenges as gay women. These challenges were accentuated for many

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<sup>1</sup> Evelyn C. White, *Alice Walker, A Life* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2004), 377. Emphasis in original.

women of color. As Walker did, they would push for a movement that was more inclusive of women of all races and sexualities.

This chapter seeks to document the role of sexual orientation in lesbian women's activism in the civil rights movement.<sup>2</sup> Like gay men, lesbian women in the movement largely kept their sexual identity secret and experienced inner struggle. Similarly, most did not widely believe the struggles based on racial and sexual identity were interconnected at the time. Like men, these women would not see the intersection of these two struggles or accept and disclose their sexual identities until years later. However, the key point departure for women was the role of the women's liberation movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s in contributing to their identity formation and decision to come out. While many lesbians in the civil rights movement believe that the struggle for black civil rights was instrumental to building their skills as activists, they point mainly to the feminist movement in developing their understanding and acceptance of lesbian identity.

Previous works, like Sara Evans' *Personal Politics*, have connected the African American civil rights movement to the women's movement by highlighting the role of women who were activists in both struggles. An assessment of the role of lesbians in the civil rights movement affords an opportunity to examine the longer history of activism, which connects all three movements by looking at the role of women who participated in the civil rights movement, came to an understanding of lesbian identity through feminism, and advanced the cause of lesbian rights.

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<sup>2</sup> The title of this chapter is drawn from my interview with Margaret Rose Gladney.

Yet, it is important to note that this pattern did not hold true for all lesbian women in the civil rights movement. Some came to an understanding and acceptance of lesbian identity before or during their time in the civil rights movement. Others pursued efforts for black civil rights and perhaps women's liberation, but never became active in the cause of lesbian liberation. Rather than make their stories conform to a single narrative, this chapter recognizes general patterns where they are present, but also remains true to the unique lives that each of these women lived. It is important to acknowledge that no single experience encapsulates the story of gay women in these movements.

This chapter will sketch the general pattern of lesbian history in America in the 20<sup>th</sup> century leading up to the emergence of the civil rights movement. In ways similar to the previous chapter, I will discuss the development of identity among lesbian activists in the civil rights movement, acknowledging the persistent secrecy and silence, assess the treatment of lesbian women by their allies in the movement and then examine how this longer trajectory from black civil rights to women's liberation to lesbian feminism contributes to our understanding of how social movements interact.

### **Views of Lesbian Women in the Pre-Stonewall Era**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, societal norms typically deemed romantic relationships between women friendships. Lillian Faderman observes in *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers* that, at the time, it was possible for women to love each other

without feeling they were “abnormal inverts.”<sup>3</sup> Women who had sex with each other were viewed by the larger society as perverts, however. For example, the most esteemed sexologists like Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis argued that lesbianism was common among prostitutes, reaching as high as 25 percent, because these women became “overly satiated with ‘normal sex’” and desired something different.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1920s, major changes occurred as the decade “witnessed a permissiveness among the more sophisticated to experiment not only with heterosexuality but with bisexuality as well--with erotic relationships that were more specifically genital than the romantic relationships of the Victorian era usually appear to have been.” This was primarily attributable to the distribution of material written by psychologists and sexologists, especially Sigmund Freud, which contributed to a broader understanding of sexual possibilities and practices. But, much of this took place in private as admission “to an aberrant sexual identity must not yet have been easy for any but the most brave, unconventional, committed, or desperate.” Moreover, Freud’s view of homosexuality was still a pathologized one, postulating that same-sex desire was the result of a problematic relationship with a parent.<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, the idea of homosexual identity was still in formation.

Faderman finds, “With an emerging homosexual consciousness, they began,

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<sup>3</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 48.

<sup>4</sup> George Chauncey, Jr., “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality: The Changing Medical Conceptualization of Female ‘Deviance,’” in *Passion and Power: Sexuality in History*, ed. by Kathy Peiss et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 101.

<sup>5</sup> Faderman, 62, 67; Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality,” 102.



probably for the first time in America, to see themselves as a minority that was not unlike racial minorities. They compared their social discomfort as homosexuals in the world at large with the discomfort of black people in the white world.”

However, the sexual freedom of the 1920s was reversed in the 1930s as the uncertainty of the Great Depression contributed to more conservative cultural attitudes and economic troubles meant fewer women were able to live without the support of men.<sup>6</sup>

However, World War II reversed that trend. As Allan Bérubé observes in *Coming Out Under Fire*,

The massive mobilization for World War II relaxed the social constraints of peacetime that had kept gay men and women unaware of themselves and each other, ‘bringing out’ many in the process. Gathered together in military camps, they often came to terms with their sexual desires, fell in love, made friends with other gay people, and began to name and talk about who they were.<sup>7</sup>

At the same time, it was during World War II that the state became increasingly concerned about policing homosexuality. In the process, Bérubé finds, gays and lesbians fought two wars: one for the survival of the free world and one for their own survival as homosexuals in the military akin to the “Double V” campaign of African Americans. Following the war, opposition to homosexuality rose as women were portrayed as “malevolent seducers of women and girls.” Twenty-one states passed sexual psychopath laws which targeted homosexuals and permitted their indefinite detention.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Faderman, 68, 93.

<sup>7</sup> Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York: Plume, 1990), 6.

<sup>8</sup> Bérubé, 7, 258-59.

At the same time, these attacks on homosexuality led to the creation of lesbianism as a sexual identity. In *The Straight State*, Margot Canaday argues that, in the first half of the twentieth century, the federal government was indifferent to lesbians and did not actively police mannishness or same-sex eroticism among women. But, when it began policing lesbianism in the early Cold War, Canaday observes, “the state’s identification of certain sexual behaviors, gender traits, and emotional ties as grounds for exclusion (from entering the country, serving in the military, or collecting benefits) was a catalyst in the formation of homosexual identity.”<sup>9</sup>

This identity construct was somewhat different from that of gay men, who were labeled homosexuals either because of sexual acts or effeminate behavior. Rather, government officials postulated that, for women, homosexuality “reveals itself...in the architecture of relationships, culture, and community.” Of particular relevance was the fact that the government developed “an entirely separate and quite elaborate methodology for investigating homosexuality among women. This methodology borrowed extensively from loyalty and other anticommunist investigations (which also uncovered a network among women, although one allegedly connected by political ideology rather than sexual desire).” But, I explore this dynamic of government reaction in greater detail in the following chapter. Here, it is important to note that at the same time the bureaucratic consensus about what constituted homosexuality and the danger it presented was cohering, the

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<sup>9</sup> Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 3, 174.

medical consensus which had equated same-sex acts with homosexual identity and labeled homosexuals psychopaths was beginning to break down.<sup>10</sup>

While authorities were instrumental to the creation of homosexual identity, George Chauncey, Jr. cautions against attributing too much power to official ideologies generated by the state, medical profession, religious institutions, and other sources of authority. Chauncey reminds us that we must find testimony from lesbians and gays themselves about how they understood homosexuality and formed their identities. He points out that many people resisted medical categories which labeled them perverts and referred to themselves as “fairies,” “queers” or otherwise.<sup>11</sup> In this way, they acknowledged, and sometimes accepted, their own difference.

The early Cold War, in which homosexuality was increasingly under attack, was also a time of burgeoning resistance. The beginning of the 1950s saw the emergence of a small, but important homophile movement with the Mattachine Society, a gay male group formed in 1950, and the Daughters of Bilitis, a lesbian organization formed in 1955. However, the homophile movement was largely disconnected from the lives of most lesbians and gays, which persisted into the next decade. Because of its limited geographical reach, secrecy, and upper middle-class sensibility, which focused on respectability and acceptance, the homophile movement did not attract a substantial membership.

For most lesbians of the 1960s, life continued as it had the previous decade. Lillian Faderman observes, “These lesbian subcultures that had proliferated in the

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<sup>10</sup> Canaday, 178, 194-95, 215.

<sup>11</sup> Chauncey, “From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality,” 87-88, 109.

1950s continued unchanged through most of the '60s. They were, each in their own way, more conservative than heterosexual society had become during the era of flower children, unisex, sexual revolution, and the civil rights movement...Middle-class lesbians generally had no conviction during that decade that, like other minority groups, they could demand their rights." However, Faderman argues that this changed by the end of the decade when those influenced by feminism and the civil rights movement were less willing to accept gender roles or the secrecy of homosexuality.<sup>12</sup>

A number of lesbians did not learn to challenge oppression from groups like the Mattachine Society or the Daughters of Bilitis. Instead, they learned to be activists in the civil rights movement, women's liberation movement, and went on to gay liberation. This can largely be explained by the fact that the homophile movement was isolated to a few areas of the country while the civil rights movement had national recognition. It can also be explained by the fact that the homophile movement had yet to embrace direct action. Homophile activists were focused on legal remedies (like securing their right to distribute materials), the push to get homosexuality removed from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, and cultivating greater cultural acceptance by presenting themselves as mainstream and respectable. Moreover, because most gays and lesbians did not yet identify as gay, they had also not developed a collective gay identity, a critical precursor to organized political action.

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<sup>12</sup> Faderman, 186.

## Identity Formation Among Lesbian Women in the Civil Rights Movement

The oldest lesbian activist in the civil rights movement was probably Lillian Smith. Born in 1897, her life experience varies from that of most other activists we know of, many of whom were born in the 1940s. Smith was never publicly identified as a lesbian and passed away before the rise of women's liberation or gay liberation. While Smith began a relationship with Paula Snelling in the early 1930s that continued for the rest of her life, she remained closeted to most everyone else. Lillian Smith seemed to have conflicted feelings about lesbianism and never came out publicly. At the end of her life, Smith burned her letters to Snelling.<sup>13</sup> However, some still survive and appear in her edited collection of letters. In one, she wrote to Snelling,

The picture of you swung me back through the years. You were so darned cute and attractive. You are 'sweeter,' 'finer' now but you had something then that was so *young* and—nice, that bi-sexual charm which no one dares admit is seductive—except in real life. I am sorry my letters are burned, that is my ambivalence. My shame about something different and completely good. It has been that shame that has destroyed the keen edge of a pattern of love that was creative and good. Blurring it, dulling it...<sup>14</sup>

One of the contradictions many note in Smith's life is that she exerted so much effort calling on southerners to come out in favor of racial justice and emphasized the roots of racism in sexual repression, yet did not apply those beliefs to sexual orientation. At one point, Eleanor Roosevelt asked for Smith's help in the case of a Georgia man who had been handed a sentence of 35 years in prison for

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<sup>13</sup> Pete Daniel, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 156.

<sup>14</sup> Lillian Smith to Paula Snelling, June 19, 1952, in *How Am I to Be Heard? Letters of Lillian Smith*, ed. by Margaret Rose Gladney (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 136-37. Emphasis in original.

homosexuality. Smith denied the request, saying she was already working on problems of segregation and mental illness and could not deal with homosexuality. Similarly, historian Pete Daniel observes that Smith privately made derogatory comments about homosexuals, presumably in an effort to cover up her own sexuality in a society that condemned it.<sup>15</sup> This may have been a strategic choice, though her letter to Snelling indicates that she did feel guilt as a lesbian.

At the time the civil rights movement was building in the early 1960s, Smith suffered from lung cancer. She wrote to the members of SNCC that she hoped to beat it so she could help more. But, in her incapacitated state, she would always be happy to write. Smith died in 1966 and did not see the rise of women's liberation. However, she was an early model for women's liberation activism, particularly for southern white women. For example, activist Dorothy Dawson Burlage says that Smith's book *Killers of the Dream* provided her with a deeper understanding of the role of white women in maintaining segregation and the problems of how women were socialized.<sup>16</sup>

Another lesbian forerunner in the civil rights movement was Pauli Murray (b. 1910). Throughout her time challenging segregated transportation, sitting in, and preparing briefs for court challenges to "separate but equal" laws, Murray was questioning her sexual orientation. On trips through the South, Murray would often present herself as a man. She changed her name from Anna Pauline to the more

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel, 156-57.

<sup>16</sup> Lillian Smith to SNCC, undated [Late December 1962 or January 1963], in Gladney, 302-303; Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 48; Constance Curry et al., *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 119.

gender-neutral Pauli. Because she came of age and confronted her sexual orientation in an earlier era, she had to deal with more amorphous concepts of gender and sexuality and confront the ways in which her sexual identity was medicalized and pathologized more than other lesbian activists for black civil rights.

Murray did not identify herself as a homosexual. She consulted literature on the subject and believed the best explanation for her attraction to women was that she was actually a man. So, she referred to herself variously as a “pseudo-hermaphrodite” or “a male-identified woman who loved other women.” She experimented with cross-dressing not only because she felt it was her most appropriate gender expression, but also because, in a patriarchal society, it provided her with a greater level of protection when travelling by herself.<sup>17</sup>

Murray frequently sought information from medical professionals to explain her condition. The way in which her sexual identity troubled her is revealed in a list of questions she prepared in December, 1937. She wanted a thorough internal examination for embryological development, a hormone test, and a determination of whether she was a pseudo-hermaphrodite. Murray wrote,

8. Where could I go to get an answer? What fields are doing experimentation and have the equipment?
9. Why this nervous exciteable [sic] condition all [triple underlined] my life and the very natural falling in love with the female sex? Terrific breakdowns after each love affair that has become unsuccessful? Why the willingness to fight instead of running away in this instance? [...]
11. Why cannot I accept the homosexual method of sex expression but insist on the normal first? [...]

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<sup>17</sup> Sara Azaransky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4, 11, 22-23.

12. Why is it that I believe that psychiatry does not have the answer to true homosexuality, but that experimental science does? (Don't know)
13. Why do I desire monogamous married life as a completion?<sup>18</sup>

Murray sought all sorts of biological explanations. The doctors apparently told her that glands explained her instinct for wearing pants, wanting to be like a man and "hating to be dominated by women unless I like them." Murray asked, "Why is it that when men try to make love to me, something in me fights?" and was told glands explained that as well. Murray also thought it odd that "many other homosexuals irritate me instead of causing a bond of sympathy," perhaps reflecting an internalized self-hatred. But one of the most telling questions was one in which she addressed her attitude toward sexuality and her attitude toward race. Murray asked, "If it is a question of race conflict, submission to authority, being hemmed in by restrictions, why is [it] I am proud of my Negro blood, that I do submit to authority as far as I am able, until I am proven wrong, or my point of view is accepted; also that I do a capable and efficient job in spurts until this conflict becomes too great for me."<sup>19</sup>

Murray took heart when she read in the *New York Amsterdam News* in 1939, that, "A synthetic white tablet [testosterone] is being hailed today in medical circles as the magic formula that transforms effeminate males into normal men, strong and virile; a scientific achievement designed to have far reaching influence and effect in

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<sup>18</sup> "Questions prepared for Dr. Titley," December 17, 1937, p. 1, Pauli Murray file, box 181, James T. Sears Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>19</sup> "Interview with Dr. \_\_\_\_ (German Psychiatrist) (Some of these questions asked Dr. Holz)," December 16, no year given, p. 1-2, Pauli Murray file; "Questions prepared for Dr. Titley," December 17, 1937, p. 2, Pauli Murray file.



the human race.” Doctors “marveled at the potency and properties of the cure for homosexuality.”<sup>20</sup> In response to the article, Murray’s friend and fellow civil rights activist Adelene McBean wrote a letter to the editor. In her message, she said that the inability to find a cure for homosexuality was an even worse problem for African Americans who lacked the same access to experimental medicine. McBean wrote,

The tragedy of the thing is that the individuals beset with these problems are in conflict not only with themselves, but with society at large. They are the minority of minorities, misunderstood by their family and friends, condemned without trial by social custom, isolated, excluded and made to endure a ‘living death.’ Our own racial group, perhaps more than any other, is guilty of great ignorance on this subject. We have almost no psychiatrists or neurologists among Negro physicians, and the bars of racial prejudice couple with economic difficulties have made further scientific experimentation almost an impossibility.<sup>21</sup>

While she and McBean lamented the way their race was excluded from scientific developments which might cure homosexuality, Murray remained optimistic. She wrote to her doctor, “Certainly, if this experiment has progressed this far, there ought to be some hope for me.” However, between 1937 and 1947, Murray was hospitalized three times for emotional breakdowns. In 1947, a doctor prescribed her with male hormones. In 1954, she had surgery on her abdomen to see if she might be biologically male. Some question whether Murray may have been cooperating in her own pathologization by working with physicians and mental health professionals in these ways.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Sex Tablets Stir Medics,” *New York Amsterdam News*, November 11, 1939, p. 1, Pauli Murray file.

<sup>21</sup> A. McBean to the Editor of the *New York Amsterdam News*, November 9, 1939, p. 1, Pauli Murray file. There is a slight discrepancy in timing since the article from the *Amsterdam News* is dated two days after the date McBean placed at the top of her letter responding to the article.

<sup>22</sup> Pauli Murray to Dr. Richards, November 4, 1939, Pauli Murray file. Murray wrote her letter to Dr. Richards after an article on testosterone curing male homosexuality was first published in the *New York World-Telegram* on November 3, 1939; Azaransky, 22-23, 31.

At the same time Murray was attempting to explain or alter her sexual identity, Murray was not entirely accepting of the gender categories and other forms of identity society had constructed. Historian Sara Azaransky argues that part of the importance of Murray's work was in the way she challenged identity and showed how unstable and complex it really was. Still, Murray did not publicly address her sexuality, even when her contemporaries like James Baldwin and Audre Lorde did so. In the same way she straddled the gender divide, Murray felt troubled by the great racial divide. Azaransky notes, "Murray felt misunderstood by a white audience, nor did she identify with blackness. She equated not fitting clearly into the racial construct of black or white with the experience of brutal public execution."<sup>23</sup>

While Murray was an important activist in the civil rights movement, she also made key contributions to the feminist movement. At Howard, Murray dealt with gender discrimination as she was not allowed to join the law fraternity because it was an organization strictly for males. Howard also had a program that they organized with Harvard where the person who was first in their law class at Howard would have the opportunity to spend a year studying at Harvard. Murray reached the top of her class and would have been that individual. However, because she was a woman, she was denied this prestigious opportunity. Out of these experiences, Murray and others generated the feminist notion of Jane Crow. Murray asked, "What does it profit me personally to fight fifty years of my life for the civil rights of Negroes only to have to turn around and fight another fifty years so that I and my

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<sup>23</sup> Azaransky, 5, 13, 119. While Murray did not publicly address her sexual orientation, she did intentionally leave files regarding her sexuality in the archives that she organized.

sex may benefit from the earlier struggle?” And in response, she said, “One thing is crystal clear. The negro woman can no longer postpone or subordinate the fight against discrimination because of sex to the civil rights struggle but must carry on both fights simultaneously. She must insist upon a partnership role in the integration movement...”<sup>24</sup>

Murray also confronted gender discrimination within the civil rights movement. In 1963, Murray wrote a letter to A. Philip Randolph about the lack of women in the March on Washington. She also wrote to numerous senators about the importance of adding protections against sex discrimination in the Civil Rights Act. Murray argued that one should not create a false dilemma about whose rights to protect. She found that it was often difficult to tell if black women were being discriminated against because of their race, gender, or both. In this way, she stood as an important forerunner for womanism and critical race feminism and was an early advocate for women’s rights under the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>25</sup>

In the early 1960s, Murray was appointed to John F. Kennedy’s President’s Commission on the Status of Women, with Eleanor Roosevelt as chair. This group worked to provide an alternative to the protective legislation formulated in 1923, the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). They developed a strategy based on court action which would allow differential treatment based on gender only if it was

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<sup>24</sup> Azaransky, 34; Lynne Olson, *Freedom’s Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 286-87.

<sup>25</sup> Azaransky, 62, 64-66.

designed to protect a woman's maternal or family function, offered a valid health reason, and did not imply the inferiority or single out women as a class.<sup>26</sup>

That same year, Murray, along with Betty Friedan and 13 others founded the National Organization for Women (NOW). However, she soon questioned their priorities and became disillusioned with the organization as it was led by and directed towards the concerns of white women. In turn, Murray became more closely associated with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and joined their board of directors in 1965. Her focus was expanding the right of women to serve on juries. She became close with Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who would attach Murray's name to a brief for *Reed v. Reed*, in which the US Supreme Court first ruled that discrimination on the basis of sex constituted a denial of equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>27</sup> Despite her involvement in the feminist movement, there is no evidence that Murray openly confronted issues of sexual identity. Unlike a number of other activists, she did not come out in the women's movement.

Like Murray, Barbara Deming (b. 1917) was also an important activist who left her mark on a number of movements. Historian Martin Duberman has deemed her "among the leading theorists of secular nonviolence." Deming got her start as an activist working for unilateral nuclear disarmament, then joined the civil rights movement, became a radical feminist and advanced the cause of lesbian rights. Born well before many of the younger civil rights activists, Deming also came out to her family in an earlier era. In the early 1930s, Deming fell in love Norma Millay, a woman who was her mother's best friend. She confided in her journal, "I am a

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<sup>26</sup> Azaransky, 59-61.

<sup>27</sup> Azaransky, 66-68.

lesbian. I must face it." Deming then told her mother that she and Millay were lovers and her mother accepted it.<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, though, Deming thought lesbianism as merely a phase that she would outgrow, reflecting one of the predominant theories of the time: that homosexual behavior was childish, a sign of stunted growth or immaturity. However, she and Millay remained lovers until she left for Bennington College in 1934. While there, she became involved with another woman, Dorothy "Casey" Case. After graduating and moving to Greenwich Village, Deming had an affair with Lotte Lenya, an entertainer, and then spent seven years with Vida Ginsburg. Despite her prediction that homosexuality was just a phase, Deming's romantic love of women remained. But, Deming also experienced shame when she denied the sexual advances to men. Martin Duberman writes, "To experience shame at one's refusal of 'normal' sexuality—and on top of that, shame at one's actual desires—was an intrinsic part of being homosexual in those years, and to some significant degree, it still is."<sup>29</sup>

Deming became interested in feminism in 1970 after reading Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics*, which was published that year. In 1972, she spent much of the year recovering from a near-death accident and devoted much time to reading feminist literature. She was further radicalized by Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) and Mary Daly's *The Church and the Second Sex* (1968). Deming also formulated a somewhat original interpretation of feminism which praised

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<sup>28</sup> Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: The New Press, 2011), 9, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 10-11, 18.

androgyny as the ideal state. She argued that both genders should reclaim aggression and compassion, blending the two. She then connected this to non-violence. Deming argued that the effectiveness of non-violent direct action was the way in which it brought together the gendered impulses of self-assertion (male) and sympathy (female) into an androgynous combination. However, Deming's theory was losing out in both the black freedom struggle, which was moving away from non-violence, and the women's liberation movement, in which cultural feminists who emphasized the essential differences between men and women held sway.<sup>30</sup>

During the 1950s, Deming wrote about lesbianism, at times, disguising her personal voice by assuming the third person. However, her work was continually rejected as it violated the mores of the time. Instead, much of her work on sexuality would find publication in the 1970s. In July, 1974, Deming came out publicly. She said revealing that she was a lesbian publicly was among the most difficult things she had ever done in her life. While her mother knew she was a lesbian, she did not feel Barbara should "flaunt" her personal life and disapproved of a lesbian and gay movement.<sup>31</sup>

Unlike Deming, Lorraine Hansberry (b. 1930) died at a relatively young age and little is known about when she came to identify as a lesbian, if, in fact, that is how she saw herself. Hansberry was pressured by her mother to marry a man. In 1951, she met Robert Nemiroff at a protest of the exclusion of African Americans from the New York University basketball team. Anne Cheney says the two joined in an interracial marriage, which was illegal in 30 states at the time, and were

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<sup>30</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 159-60, 166-67.

<sup>31</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 19, 158.

“committed to a life together--a life of writing, music, ‘changing the world,’ with a dash of frivolity.” Moreover, “no one can dispute the joy of her near symbiosis with Robert Nemiroff.” When the two split, Cheney says it was the result of the tensions from publicity and a lack of time. While the two shared an affinity for art and social change, Nemiroff later acknowledged that Hansberry’s homosexuality was a central part of her life and “contributed significantly on many levels to the sensitivity and complexity of her view of human beings and the world.”<sup>32</sup>

Hansberry attempted to reach out to gays and lesbians by writing somewhat anonymous letters to homophile publications *One* and *The Ladder*, signing only her initials L.N. or L.H.N. Steven R. Carter writes, “Appalled by the massive devaluation and suppression of women and homosexuals (as well as blacks and many others) in society, Hansberry was convinced that every aspect of society must be reexamined with an eye toward change.” However, she never really glimpsed that change. Hansberry suffered from cancer of the duodenum and was sick from April, 1963, onward. She died at just 34 years old, in 1965.<sup>33</sup>

Before her death that year, though, Hansberry had been influenced by writings of women’s liberation. Anne Cheney says that Hansberry was a feminist in the most general sense as she applauded the accomplishments of women. More specifically, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) had an important effect on Hansberry. Cheryl Higashida observes, “Beauvoir helped Hansberry question

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<sup>32</sup> Anne Cheney, *Lorraine Hansberry* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984), 20-21, 24, 29; Steven R. Carter, *Hansberry’s Drama: Commitment Amid Complexity* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 6-7.

<sup>33</sup> Carter, 7; Cheney, 31; “Lorraine Hansberry, 34, Dies; Author of ‘A Raisin in the Sun,’” *The New York Times*, January 13, 1965.

dominant views of tragic lesbians, represent lesbianism as an existential choice, and critique heteropatriarchal norms.” Hansberry believed *The Second Sex* was perhaps the most important work of the century, studying it for months, and later published a commentary on it in 1957.<sup>34</sup>

In 1955, Hansberry finished two plays which were influenced by Beauvoir: *The Apples of Autumn* and *Flowers for the General*. In *The Apples of Autumn*, Hansberry portrayed lesbianism as “a limited, even perverse rebellion.” In her notes, she wrote that lesbianism was a “social problem” and drew comparisons to addiction and prostitution. Alternatively, in *Flowers for the General*, Hansberry portrayed a lesbian character who was a visionary poet. Cheryl Higashida says that the negative portrayal in *Apples* was not an attempt to denigrate lesbianism. Rather, the two plays worked together to affirm Beauvoir’s assertion about varied lesbian experience. Beauvoir wrote of lesbianism, “Like all human behavior, this will involve playacting, imbalance, failure, or lies, or, on the other hand, it will be the source of fruitful experiences, depending on whether it is lived in bad faith, laziness, and inauthenticity or in lucidity, generosity, and freedom.”<sup>35</sup>

In 1958, Hansberry began writing her first play with a set of characters who were all lesbians called *Andromeda the Thief*, though, the work was never published. Hansberry also wrote *Les Blancs*, which did not explore homosexuality as much as her prior works and included no lesbian characters. However, Higashida argues that Hansberry did use the gay male characters to continue her dismantling of

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<sup>34</sup> Cheney, 17; Cheryl Higashida, “To Be(come) Young, Gay, and Black: Lorraine Hansberry’s Existentialist Routes to Anticolonialism,” *American Quarterly* 60:4 (Dec., 2008), 905.

<sup>35</sup> Higashida, 907-8; Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York: A Borzoi Book, 1949, r2009), 436.



heteropatriarchy. She quotes Hansberry's notes in which the playwright wrote, "I suppose also that homosexual males revolt from the artificial imposition of what is or is not 'feminine' or 'masculine' as set down by society."<sup>36</sup> While Hansberry may have presented rather dim depictions of gay men and removed lesbian characters from her later work, Cheryl Higashida explains this by saying,

...the pervasive homophobia of cold war America, which extended to anticommunists, communists, African Americans, and countercultural artists...engendered silences and contradictions in Hansberry's work. Yet the fact remains that in the face of such repression, Hansberry continued to create gay characters.<sup>37</sup>

Hansberry's writing in the pre-Stonewall era also emphasized the importance of seeing the connections between different types of oppression. Her 1964 play *The Sign in Sidney Brustein's Window* featured an openly homosexual character and confronted issues of race and freedom. However, unlike James Baldwin, it does not seem that Hansberry's writing about homosexuality led to her being identified as a lesbian author. In fact, one critic at the time thought *Sidney Brustein* showed evidence of Hansberry's hostility towards homosexuals. Anne Cheney disagrees arguing that the gay character in *Sidney Brustein*, David Ragin, is the most complex character in the play and the one "whose sexuality is the most meaningful and integrated." She continues, "David the artist and David the lover merge into one of the few characters in *Sidney Brustein* who are committed, involved, and caring." The play also included a character named Mavis, who must confront her bigotry. Cheney concludes, "...just as she [Mavis] had become more accepting of Sidney's Jewish heritage, she will eventually understand Alton's

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<sup>36</sup> Higashida, 909, 914-15, 918.

<sup>37</sup> Higashida, 912-13.

blackness and David's sexuality."<sup>38</sup> The last work of Hansberry's life, *Sidney Brustein* showed evidence of the author increasingly using her artistic output to confront multiple oppressions, especially racism, sexism and homophobia, pushing for an intersectional understanding and response.

Jane Stembridge (b. 1936), a white woman and the first member of SNCC's staff, also wanted to pursue activism through art. She recalls from as young as age five having strong feelings towards women. She says, "I think it was rebellion that a lot of the girls took on who turned out later to be straight women. But within me maybe it was a little bit more fierce because I was such a tomboy." Stembridge had a good friend named George at that time and she desired strongly to be just like him, asking her parents that they call her George as well. Jane experienced no harassment for breaking gender norms. Because she was a minister's daughter and very assertive, she believes she was tolerated if not admired by other children.<sup>39</sup>

Jane graduated from Meredith College, a women's school in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1958. She had a number of "tentative gay relationships" in college, but her first serious relationship with a woman came immediately after graduation. She stayed in Raleigh for a year before the two decided to split up and she left for divinity school in New York. After spending a year at Union Theological Seminary, Jane decided to join SNCC.<sup>40</sup>

Jane ran into her first disagreement with the newly-formed group when she invited Bayard Rustin to give the keynote at their October, 1960, conference. When

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Bronski, *A Queer History of the United States* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2011), 202; Cheney, 72, 80, 82-83, 87.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Jane Stembridge, telephone interview by author, March 4, 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Stembridge interview.

people found out she had invited Rustin, they became concerned because Rustin was a homosexual and they could not be associated with him. Jane said that if she had to call Rustin and tell him he was un-invited, she would leave SNCC...and she did. However, Jane's absence was not a permanent one. She rejoined the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee after a spending some time with her partner in Alaska. Correspondingly, the movement allowed Rustin back in, which Jane attributes to mere practicality, rather than any deep change of heart. The movement needed someone of Rustin's abilities. The movement also needed an organizer like Jane.<sup>41</sup>

Jane felt SNCC was a place where she could not be open about her identity as a lesbian. Though she was out to Bob Moses, Casey Hayden, Connie Curry, and a few others, she felt she had to separate her personal life from her life in the movement. But, she says she was as strong a believer in civil rights for African Americans as she was for gays, and so felt compelled to return to the movement and go to Mississippi in 1961. Jane was already cognizant of her sexual identity and a believer in the rights of lesbians during her time in the movement and envisioned freedom more broadly in that era.<sup>42</sup>

In late 1966 or early 1967, Jane and a number of other volunteers in Mississippi moved to San Francisco. Arriving in the Haight-Ashbury was an entirely different experience. Jane says "a loving, embracing community was in place" before hard drugs had begun to destroy it. She enjoyed being surrounded by the counterculture and says she just hung out for a time. Eventually, she desperately

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<sup>41</sup> Stembridge interview.

<sup>42</sup> Stembridge interview.

needed a job and began working with students with disabilities in San Francisco. Jane never became involved in women's liberation or gay and lesbian liberation. Given her experience in the civil rights movement, Jane acknowledges that it is somewhat surprising that she was never a part of those groups. But, Jane says, she was never really a "joiner." In fact, she feels she is more of a loner, though "not in a tragic, painful way." Since her time in the civil rights movement, Jane says, "I think I've been busy seeing to my own wounds and my own healing."<sup>43</sup>

Saundra Tignor (b. 1937), an African American, was raised in Washington, D.C. and, like Stembridge, involved in the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Saundra says she had long had an instinctive attraction to women but had little guidance in naming or understanding what it meant. Specifically, during her time at summer camp, she felt a strong attraction to some of the older female campers and counselors. She valued her time with them and coveted their attention. But, this feeling had little meaning beyond that. After graduating high school, Saundra decided to attend nursing school in New York because of a desire both to experience a racially integrated situation and to live away from home. During her time there, she married a man and they lived together on Long Island. However, the marriage did not work well and Saundra did not like the cooking, cleaning and housework associated with being a housewife. She ended the marriage, though it was mutually agreeable.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Stembridge interview.

<sup>44</sup> Saundra Tignor to author, July 10, 2012, 2; Arden Eversmeyer and Margaret Purcell, *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories* (Houston, TX: Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project, 2012), 287.

After divorcing, Sandra returned to the dorms at Bellevue while she finished her nursing degree. This allowed her to renew her friendship with one of the white students she had lost touch with since her move to Long Island. One night, Sandra was sitting in the lobby and her friend returned from a date. She told Sandra that the date had not gone well and, more generally, she could not stand men. She admitted, in fact, that she liked women. Sandra was surprised and intrigued by this, but the discussion did not go much further. However, the two became close friends and eventually their relationship became a romantic one.<sup>45</sup>

Up until the 1960s, Sandra had been questioning her sexual orientation. But, it was not until the sixties that she began to identify herself as a lesbian. In 1961, she and her first long-term partner, a white woman named Edie, drove across the country from New York City to Los Angeles on Route 66. She recalls this trip as a time when the role of both race and sexual orientation became increasingly apparent to her. Each night, her partner would be the one to secure lodging for the couple. Sandra began to notice this pattern, which was likely a result of both not wanting to run the risk of being identified as a lesbian couple and not wanting to be refused lodging because Sandra was black.<sup>46</sup>

In the mid-1960s, Sandra joined the Medical Committee for Civil Rights and traveled to the South. She utilized her training as a nurse in a unique and important service to the civil rights struggle. During her time in the movement, Sandra knew of no one else who was lesbian or gay and the issue was never discussed. She first came out in late 1966 or early 1967 primarily as a result of individual circumstances

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<sup>45</sup> Eversmeyer and Purcell, 288-89.

<sup>46</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, p. 2; Sandra Tignor to author, July 10, 2012, p. 1.

rather than any broader changes in sentiment about homosexuality. In 1966, her brother committed suicide and Sandra and her mother were making efforts to establish a closer relationship. It was at this point that Sandra decided to come out to her family. Her father had died of cancer, so she could not tell him, though, he may have suspected Sandra was a lesbian as others in her family had.<sup>47</sup>

Joan Nestle (b. 1940), a white woman, participated in the sit-ins of the early 1960s and traveled to Selma in 1965. In contrast to Sandra, she came out in the Sea Colony, a working-class lesbian bar in New York City, in 1958, before her time as an activist for black civil rights. She says the Sea Colony was a “very tense, heightened, and dramatic place, and as a young woman searching for touch in a certain sense, it was there that I learned how to love women, and there that we all learned what we had to do in order to find each other.”<sup>48</sup>

Nestle writes in detail about the role of her racial and sexual identity in civil rights protests, drawing a parallel between the police opposition to both demonstrations for integrated restaurants and segregated lesbian bars. She believes,

I wore a double mask in these early sixties years, in those white restaurants. My first deception was to the enemy: the pose of a nice white person who could be let in and would sit down and eat in quiet tones, ignoring the battle for human dignity that was happening outside the windows. The second was to my friends: the pose of straightness, the invisibility of my queerness. They did not know that when the police entered, with their sneers and itchy fingers, I was meeting old antagonists. Perhaps their uniforms were a different color, but in the Lesbian bars of my other world I had met these forces

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<sup>47</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, p. 2-3; Eversmeyer and Purcell, 289.

<sup>48</sup> David Deitcher, ed. *The Question of Equality: Lesbian and Gay Politics in America Since Stonewall* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 73. Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987), 37, 42.

of the state. I never told my comrades that I was different because a secret seemed a little thing in such a time in history.<sup>49</sup>

After participating in the sit-ins, Nestle traveled to Alabama to work on voter registration in 1965. Though her reasons are unclear, Nestle became involved with a black divinity student, Ajax, whom she had met during her time in Selma. Her relationship with Ajax was passionate, but short-lived. She recalls him saying, “The one group of people I hate are homosexuals.” They talked of marriage and opening an interracial orphanage. But, Joan soon revealed that she was attracted to women and never heard from him again.<sup>50</sup>

For Nestle, her hidden sexual orientation continued to be significant during her time in the civil rights movement. She writes of applying to be in the second round of protests at Edmund Pettus Bridge, “I did not put the word Lesbian on my card. I put Jewish and feminist. I wrote about SANE and CORE. I did not talk about the bars I went to and the knowledge about bigotry I had gained from being a queer.” On the march to Montgomery, she recalls being told they had to sleep in sex-segregated tents because of rumors being spread that the marchers would have orgies at night. As a lesbian, she found this approach rather futile, but carefully observed these formalities, which were intended to protect the integrity of the movement.<sup>51</sup>

While Nestle came out to some extent before her time in the civil rights movement, Betty Powell (b. 1940), a black woman, would take a number of years

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<sup>49</sup> Nestle, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Charles Kaiser, *The Gay Metropolis: The Landmark History of Gay Life in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 136; Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 116; Nestle, 56, 66.

<sup>51</sup> Nestle, 61-62.

before coming to identify as a lesbian. She says, "...as I went on to live my life after that and be more and more informed by the feminist movement, I found myself falling in love with a woman which, again, I didn't recognize it until I had to kind of confront myself. Literally confront myself in a mirror. What are you doing? Feeling so excited about going out with a woman." Betty had been a strict Catholic and, as she says, was "a heterosexually formed little creature" with a buried lesbian persona that almost never revealed itself.<sup>52</sup>

Betty had just one experience with a woman before she married Bill Powell. Her husband also came from a Catholic tradition, which Betty says, taught that, "If I get married, this will go away." Betty had completed her M.A. and was teaching, while Bill worked at Chemical Bank. Eventually, after just a short time, silence had fallen over the marriage. Though the two loved each other, there was a tension in the marriage, which Bill finally broke by admitting that he was gay. However, Betty continued to identify as heterosexual.<sup>53</sup>

Powell came out as a lesbian at age 30. Though she was not formally a member of any feminist organization, she says, "I felt so empowered by the fact that this was in the air and this was...a possibility, not just for women in the abstract but for myself." She continues, "the feminist movement and the impact of that on me was, unbeknownst to me, in a sense, was opening my heart up to where I could be really free to recognize love for me, you know, however it came." At the same time, Powell says she began to recognize systemic oppression of people based on gender,

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<sup>52</sup> Interview with Achebe Betty Powell, interview by Kelly Anderson, July 6, 2004, transcript p. 36, 44, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>53</sup> Powell interview, 42-44.



race, and class, and “then when I embraced my lesbianism at the age of 30, I found myself having landed in the same territory.” During her “heterosexual mode,” Powell did not see the mistreatment of lesbians and gays as part of a continuum of human oppression. It only came together for her after accepting her own sexual identity. While the women’s movement was important to Powell, she notes that lesbian-baiting was “rampant” and there was a great deal of “betrayal of lesbians within the feminist movement.”<sup>54</sup>

When Betty Powell disclosed her lesbianism by hosting a conference of the Gay Academic Union in New York, she received a chilly response from many colleagues. Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney write in *Out for Good* that “Powell found anti-homosexual sentiment in the black movement overwhelming.” Subsequently, she left the Association of Afro-American Teachers. Clendinen and Nagourney observe that many African Americans rejected any comparisons between black civil rights and gay civil rights and felt that their association with homosexuals would weaken their political influence.<sup>55</sup>

However, Powell continued to bring together the causes of African Americans, women and gays and lesbians. In April, 1979, she was one of two featured speakers at “We Are Everywhere,” the third annual conference of the National Organization for Women’s Sexuality Task Force in Washington, D.C. Her thesis was that feminists needed to forge stronger bonds with other anti-oppression movements. A writer for *Off Our Backs* covering the conference said, “Those

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<sup>54</sup> Powell interview, 40-44, 59.

<sup>55</sup> Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 496.

involved in the feminist movement and black people involved in the fight against racism, according to Betty, often fail to see the connection between the two movements. Each side fails to realize that all forms of oppression must be eliminated.” The conference also featured a workshop for black lesbians. Many felt a sense of isolation from each other, larger black communities and the larger women’s movement. But, rather than lament, they resolved to create support networks which would put black lesbians in closer contact with each other.<sup>56</sup>

Like Betty Powell, Joan Steinau Lester (b. 1940), a white woman, was not aware of her attraction to women until later in life. The only time she can recall hearing about homosexuality was when her parents helped a man at Black Mountain College in North Carolina leave town in the early 1940’s when he was caught having sex with another man. Other than that, Joan says that, even in college, she was “rather clueless” and that gay people were “shockingly invisible.” Joan was, however, very aware of gender disparities. One of the reasons she chose to attend Antioch College in the late 1950s was that the campus did not have curfews for women as many others did. At the same time, she does not believe she was conscious of the systematic nature of patriarchy until her friend, Eleanor Holmes Norton, gave her a copy of *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir in the early 1960s.<sup>57</sup>

Joan was involved in the civil rights movement through the NAACP at Antioch and CORE in New Haven. Married in the early 1960s, she and her husband, Julius,

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<sup>56</sup> Diana Onley-Campbell, “Stronger Links,” *Off Our Backs* 9:7 (Jul., 1979), 18; Diana Onley-Campbell, “Black Lesbian Workshop,” *Off Our Backs* 9:7 (Jul., 1979), 18.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Joan Steinau Lester, telephone interview by author, July 11, 2012.

were both involved in SNCC in New York. However, since they were in an interracial marriage and had children to care for, they could not both travel South without great danger. Julius went South, but Joan stayed in New York and was very involved in SNCC's office there. It was during her time working for civil rights that Joan became more conscious of women's rights. Joan says, "I mean, you had to be totally impaired as a woman not to see, you know, we're talking about equal rights and civil rights and then, the many, many inequities for women." Though at the same time, she observes that gays and lesbians remained invisible to her, so she can understand how the scope of equality might have remained narrow even for deeply involved activists.<sup>58</sup>

Joan gained organizing experience working with women in a boycott of a supermarket in New York. This particular store, like many others, was charging more in the city than in the suburbs. Because women often were the ones who shopped for groceries and because more women were available in the day to picket, Joan worked to organize them to protest price gouging. The group was successful and Joan recalls it as an empowering moment for women.<sup>59</sup>

Her experience working for civil rights in the New York office while her husband traveled the South also contributed to her feminist consciousness. Joan stayed home to care for their daughter and was providing most of the financial support for the family as SNCC salaries were minimal. In 1967, she and a couple of friends started the group New Women. Their circle was composed primarily of women who were active in the civil rights movement or had partners who were

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<sup>58</sup> Lester interview.

<sup>59</sup> Lester interview.

active. Joan believes that activism for black civil rights served as a template for the group in analyzing and opposing sexism.<sup>60</sup>

In the Fall of 1968, Joan served as a representative of New Women to the Thanksgiving conference of the Women's Liberation Work Group and Detroit Area People Against Racism (PAR). The Detroit group had been meeting and developed an interest in women's liberation organizing. They believed that because of their subordinate status as women, they had not reached their full political potential. The group called for discussion, mutual support, a redefinition of family roles so women with children could be politically active, better understanding of the relationship between the exploitation of African Americans and women, and more. Linda Seese and Charlotte Bunch, mentioned later, attended the conference as well.<sup>61</sup>

While feminism was important to Joan's life, she remained unaware of lesbian issues. She does not recall being aware of Stonewall at the time. Instead, it was a few people who brought Joan to understand herself as a lesbian. Joan's sister, who was about seven years younger, was an out lesbian in the late 1960's and lived on a lesbian separatist commune in New York. Joan would occasionally visit her sister, but never really identified with the group as she was older and had two children. She says, "I didn't feel any continuity between myself and them."<sup>62</sup>

Around 1977, one of her friends began to get involved in lesbian circles and introduced Joan to a number of people. At the same time, her sister moved to

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<sup>60</sup> Lester interview.

<sup>61</sup> Women's Liberation Work Group, Detroit Area People Against Racism, November 26, 1968, 1, and "Conference Participants," Sara Evans Papers, 1958-2005, box 30, Personal Politics - Research Files, 1968-1969, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>62</sup> Lester interview.

Minneapolis and became an editor for *The Lesbian Insider*. She was also introducing Joan to many lesbians. More and more, it seemed, Joan began to meet lesbians that she did connect to. But, perhaps the most important point was meeting her partner of now more than 30 years at Amherst in 1980. It was together that the two became involved in promoting lesbian and gay rights, in part, through marches, but primarily through their Equity Institute. Their organization became a national non-profit, training people in anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-homophobia.<sup>63</sup>

Cathy Cade (b. 1942) was also a white activist in SNCC who went on to be involved in women's liberation and lesbian organizing. She got her start in the civil rights movement when she participated in a college exchange program between her home institution, Carleton, in Minnesota, and Spelman in Atlanta. She recalls,

...everybody knew that everybody was sexual, and there was even a fair amount of lesbian stuff going on at Spelman, which I had never run into -- well, I hadn't been very conscious of lesbian stuff. Actually of course, once I came out I looked back and I saw all these different places in my life where I had encountered lesbianism, but I wasn't conscious of it at all.<sup>64</sup>

After she graduated from Carleton in 1963, Cade worked in Albany, Georgia; Jackson and North Gulfport, Mississippi; and New Orleans, Louisiana. Cade recalls that, in the movement, there was much discussion around sexuality, particularly relationships between black men and white women. Conversely, relationships between white men and black women remained taboo because of the history of rape. Cade observes that relationships between black men and white women caused hostility between white and black women, at least in her experience. She

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<sup>63</sup> Lester interview.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Cathy Cade, interview by Ronald J. Grele, January 5, 1985, transcript p. 22, Student Movements of the 1960s Oral History Project, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University.

remembers being very afraid of black women and, in an oral history in the early 1970s, observed that she still found it difficult to relate to black women.<sup>65</sup>

At the same time, women in SNCC helped propel Cade into women's liberation. The group's Waveland Conference in 1964 included a presentation on "Women in the Movement." Among their grievances was the way in which women were relegated to clerical work and funneled into jobs which were not commensurate with their abilities. From Cade's standpoint, though, she did not believe that women were forced into sex-stereotyped jobs. Women joined in voter registration and canvassing. In fact, there were many women who had been organizing since a young age and were very capable. Despite that point of disagreement, Cade says the memo "turned her on" to feminism and that is when the women's liberation movement began for her.<sup>66</sup>

During her time in SNCC, Cade had a sustained relationship with a black man. She says that black men first made her feel sexually attractive. She had always believed that she was too large to be attractive to white men, but black men seemed to appreciate her more. However, her long-term relationship with a black man, Sidney, was not what she first expected. She thought that because, as a white woman, she was viewed as a second-class citizen and because, as a black man, he was viewed as a second-class citizen, that they would be equals in the relationship. However, she recalls him saying at one point, "I know what's wrong with you. You think you're equal." Cade became particularly incensed when her friend, Ed, pointed

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<sup>65</sup> Interview with Cathy Cade, interview by Sara Evans, July 21, 1973, Sara Evans Papers, 1959-2005, box 28, Personal Politics, Interview Transcripts, 1972-73, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>66</sup> Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee Position Paper, "Women in the Movement," November, 1964; Cade interview by Evans.

out that she believed she was a liberated woman but continued to put up with Sidney's sexist treatment. She saw the truth in that statement and the two split in 1967.<sup>67</sup>

In the mid-1960s, Cade decided to enroll in graduate school at Tulane. The head of the Sociology Department at Carleton said he would give her a good recommendation, but that Tulane, like many schools, would not give a scholarship to a woman. After hearing this, Cade recalls walking across campus angry, not at the system of higher education, but at her mother, who had always told her she could take any path in life and instilled feminist ideas in her. Despite being told that her opportunities were limited, Cade enrolled in graduate school anyway.<sup>68</sup>

In the summer of 1966, she and fellow Tulane graduate student Peggy Dobbins decided to teach a 'Sociology of Women' course at the free university. Cade had been influenced by books like *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan and *Thinking About Women* by Mary Ellman. She had also been radicalized by her experiences in graduate school. At one point, she recalls students receiving a memo from the Dean that the graduate school was working to improve its academic reputation. According to him, the school had too high a percentage of women, supposedly a clear sign of weakness, and they would remedy this by enrolling more men. While she was becoming involved in women's organizing, Cade continued to be active in civil rights work through Students for Integration. In 1965, the group

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<sup>67</sup> Cade interview by Grele, 18; Cade interview by Evans.

<sup>68</sup> Cade interview by Grele.

worked to ensure compliance with the Civil Rights Act of the previous year by testing various public accommodations.<sup>69</sup>

Like Joan Lester, Cathy Cade became involved in a feminist group composed largely of former civil rights activists. She says after 1964, various people who had been active in Mississippi came to New Orleans and Dottie Zellner brought them together in a consciousness raising group. Dottie's husband, Bob, was traveling around the country working on issues of racial justice while she remained home with one child and another on the way. Cade recalls in the first meeting the question of whether their oppression could really be compared to that of African Americans. But, they decided to continue meeting and discussing. Each of them told their story of how the men they lived with opposed their participation in a consciousness raising group, which in itself served as evidence of a problem.<sup>70</sup>

At the time, Cathy was dating a male psychologist who advised against the meetings, saying that he needed to accept that he was a man and she needed to accept that she was a woman. Cade soon broke up with him. She believes that she was able to become more liberated as a woman because she did not have a committed relationship with any man. She also found, as more people started coming to meetings, that she had more women friends, which she cites as an incredible change in her life. In January, 1970, Cade decided to move to San

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<sup>69</sup> Cade interview by Evans; Gregg L. Michel, *The Struggle for a Better South: The Southern Student Organizing Committee, 1964-1969* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 34, 38; "Cathy Cade," Civil Rights Movement Veterans' Website, last modified May 27, 2012, accessed August 23, 2012. <http://www.crmvet.org/vet/cade.htm>

<sup>70</sup> Cade interview by Evans.



Francisco to a place where there were more women and she could work full time in the women's liberation movement.<sup>71</sup>

In San Francisco, Cade already knew Kathy Barrett and Pam Parker Allen from the civil rights movement and they connected her to the local women's movement. Cade helped found a women's liberation school called Breakaway, which held discussion forums, taught self-defense and more. She lived in a big house and on Fridays a lesbian liberation group would meet there. Cade began hanging out with them. A month later, she attended a women's conference which included a workshop on sexuality. She found two things appealing about the lesbians there: the close connection among the women and their belief in sex without subservience. However, Cade remained unsure whether she was a lesbian and could not envision being with a woman. In April, 1971, at a large anti-Vietnam War march, she met another woman, Ruth, who was also questioning. That night, they made love. The two remained together for a year and, in this context, Cade was able to come out.<sup>72</sup> Like Joan Lester, Cade cites falling in love with a particular woman as the paramount reason for identifying as a lesbian and coming out.

Like Cathy Cade, Linda Seese (b. 1942) was a white SNCC volunteer in Mississippi, primarily in Indianola, who went on to the women's liberation movement. During her time organizing for black civil rights, she was closeted and there was never a discussion of sexual orientation. After leaving Mississippi, Linda spent a few months organizing with a Native American group in Northern Canada before moving to Toronto. There, she began working with the Student Union for

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<sup>71</sup> Cade interview by Evans.

<sup>72</sup> Cade interview by Grele, 64-65.

Peace Action. She and three other women produced a paper called "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers....Listen..." which became important in starting the women's movement in Canada.<sup>73</sup>

In the document, she, Judi Bernstein, Peggy Morton and Myrna Wood hoped to spark a discussion about the role of women in society. The document has various influences. The role of Marxism is quite clear. But, ideas about black freedom are also present. In this way, it parallels the SNCC position paper on "Women in the Movement" in the US, which drew a comparison between the treatment of African Americans and women as well. In "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers....Listen...." Seese and others wrote, "In the same way that poor whites have been controlled by teaching them superiority to black people, men have been controlled by giving them a role superior to that of women." Despite the prominence of men in the movement, they observed that the majority of members and leaders in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union and the Poor People's Campaign were women.<sup>74</sup>

In their statement, Linda and others also addressed the role of sexuality. In their estimation, "The role accorded to women in the sexual act is inseparable from the values taught to people about how to treat one another, and to the possibility or impossibility of a human relationship between men and women." Because women were forced to surrender in sex, love and understanding between men and women remained elusive. While sexual liberation was important to equality, it had only

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<sup>73</sup> Interview with Linda Seese (Spes Dolphin), telephone interview by author, February 22, 2012.

<sup>74</sup> Judi Bernstein et al., "Sisters, Brothers, Lovers....Listen..." p. 3-4, Sara Evans Papers, 1959-2005, box 34, Research Files, 1967-1994, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

produced both men and women who treated each other as objects, in their estimation. It remained essential that people unlearn social roles which alienate people from each other. They concluded, "We have the frustration of being excluded to force us to do this. We are realizing that we have brains. That we can be political. It is the liberating feeling that black folk have when they discover that being black is beautiful and therefore they are beautiful. It is a feeling of beauty and power."<sup>75</sup>

In the context of the women's movement, Linda fell in love with a woman who repeatedly questioned whether a lesbian relationship was appropriate. Linda did not know any other lesbians in the women's movement besides her partner, who was questioning, and remained closeted for much of the time. In 1968, when her lover got into law school at the University of Chicago, they again relocated. There, Linda became involved in the Chicago Women's Liberation Union. Eventually, she came out in the women's liberation movement, shortly before Stonewall. Though she still experienced fear and felt shame about her sexuality, the events at the Stonewall Inn in 1969 and the knowledge that there were other gay people was very affirming and helped her come out to more people.<sup>76</sup>

Nancy Stoller (b. 1942), a white woman who had been involved with SNCC in Arkansas, also defined herself as straight until her late 20's. Growing up, Nancy had little sense of homosexuality. She knew homosexuals existed, but had never seen or known anything about them. Nancy believed they were different, but was not taught that lesbians and gays were evil or bad. While she attended a women's college, Wellesley, she was not aware until after the fact that some of the women

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<sup>75</sup> Bernstein et al., 4.

<sup>76</sup> Seese interview.

were lesbians. During her time in SNCC, she also had no sense that there were gay men or lesbians in the movement. In 1966, she married a fellow activist, Donald, and the two lived in Boston where she remained active in civil rights efforts with a chapter of People Against Racism.<sup>77</sup>

While in Boston, Nancy went to a talk by Betty Friedan and, shortly thereafter, helped found the local chapter of the National Organization for Women. She says one of their primary goals was to start a daycare center, which would be non-sexist and non-racist. They planned to offer children a range of images, which did not emphasize traditional gender roles, and provide multicultural education. But, Nancy says, despite their efforts, the group continued to face racial problems. She also was part of a consciousness raising group with fellow graduate students, but Nancy did not really connect with them. She was frustrated that the group was all-white and that they were critical of her marriage. Beyond that, Nancy also worked with the Boston Women's Health Collective and helped develop some of the first "Our Bodies, Ourselves" courses.<sup>78</sup>

In the early 1970s, Nancy recalls that one of her cousins came to visit with her girlfriend, though, Nancy was not aware that they were lesbians. She says, "I had the feeling that she was trying to talk about something, but I couldn't figure out what it was." Not long after that, Nancy's uncle found the letters that her cousin and girlfriend had exchanged. He then had her cousin placed in a mental hospital, where she received shock treatment and psychotropic medicine. Following her

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with Nancy Stoller, telephone interview by author, September 15, 2011.

<sup>78</sup> Stoller interview by author; Interview with Nancy Stoller, interview by Jesse Silva, January 24, 2002 and May 15, 2002, Out in the Redwoods Oral History Project, University of California-Santa Cruz.

involuntary commitment, Nancy's cousin attempted suicide, but survived. Then, she attempted it again and killed herself. Nancy reflects, "After she died, it came out in the family, and I felt terrible. It was horrible to hear what had happened to her and how she'd been treated, but it also reminded me how, especially after I myself got involved with women, just how invisible people were who could have been right in front of me all the time."<sup>79</sup>

It was in the early 1970s that Nancy developed a crush on a female friend. Though the sentiment was unrequited, it became clear to Nancy that she was a lesbian. Around the same time, she met an openly lesbian woman for the first time. One of the campuses in Cambridge had a vacant building that she and other women occupied to push the university to turn it into a women's center. During the takeover, Nancy met an African American woman who was very out. Nancy remembers being impressed not only with her leadership but with her self-acceptance and candor. Nancy says, "Before then, I used to think about lesbians: they lived in these dark apartments where you walked inside and you could sort of look and see a bedroom, in shadow. And here's this woman who had stepped out of this shadowy bedroom and was one of the leaders of the occupation of this building."<sup>80</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Nancy took a job at the University of California-Santa Cruz in the summer of 1973. Within a week of her arrival, Nancy met three women who were politically active out lesbians and became the lover of one. This was her first relationship with a woman. For the next couple of years, she occasionally dated

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<sup>79</sup> Stoller interview by Silva.

<sup>80</sup> Stoller interview by author; Stoller interview by Silva.

men, but gradually settled into being exclusively lesbian. Nancy describes coming out as less a statement about wanting to be a lesbian and more as a continuation of something she had always believed: that she had the right to do what she wanted with her body. She says,

My orientation towards being a lesbian my entire life has been really about the rights that we have to our own bodies. And...some of that attitude that I bring to my personal sexuality is an attitude that I got from the Civil Rights Movement or was reinforced in my work, which is the idea that all we have, really, each of us, is our own bodies.<sup>81</sup>

Faith Holsaert (b. 1943), a white woman who had worked with SNCC in Albany, Georgia, came out around the same time Nancy did. Like Nancy, she also married a man. The two moved to New Mexico in 1966, Michigan in 1969, and then West Virginia in 1972. During her time in Michigan and then in West Virginia, Faith was part of a feminist study group. She had also become a board member of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), which became the Southern Student Organizing Committee (SSOC), and women would occasionally meet separately and discuss issues and exchange papers. Beyond that, she became involved with the Women's Health Center of West Virginia in Charles Town.<sup>82</sup>

Around 1973, Faith began to identify as a lesbian. She does not attribute her realization of her identity as a lesbian primarily to the women's movement or the civil rights movement, though. She says that, at least with respect to the groups she was involved in, the women's movement was not a place where lesbian issues were discussed in the early 1970s. However, in one of her group meetings in West Virginia, two women who lived in a nearby rural community joined and there was

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<sup>81</sup> Stoller interview by author.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Faith Holsaert, telephone interview by author, July 13, 2011.

whispering that they were a couple. There were also local women in the mining community that Faith believed were probably lesbian. But, the group did not actively concern itself with lesbian issues. Rather, like Joan Steinau Lester, Cathy Cade, Linda Seese and Nancy Stoller, Faith observes, "...I think it was partly an individual woman, falling in love with a particular woman...and maybe the times giving me permission to easily consider that possibility about myself."<sup>83</sup> All of these women give primacy to the experience of falling in love with a particular woman in coming to identify as lesbians, while acknowledging the role of changing cultural norms and political circumstances.

Faith was also very conscious of what Stonewall meant for gays and lesbians. It happened just blocks from where she went to elementary school and her mother, a lesbian woman, was still alive and living in New York. Subsequently, cultural production around lesbian issues rose in the 1970s. Faith recalls the importance of *Up From Under*, a New York-based periodical "by, for and about women," Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon's book *Lesbian/Woman* (1972) and Ladyslipper Music, a group focused on expanding recordings by women formed in North Carolina in 1976. Faith and her partner became a part of a lesbian social group in Charles Town, West Virginia. She also became involved with Integrity, a gay-affirming group in the Episcopal Church. When she moved to Washington, DC, she and her partner joined a discussion group at Whitman-Walker Clinic, which was her first experience being in a large, open, and multiracial community.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Holsaert interview.

<sup>84</sup> Holsaert interview.

Jan Griesinger (b. 1944) had been active in the civil rights movement at DePauw University and in Cincinnati and Dayton and also attributes coming out as a lesbian to a relationship with a particular woman. Griesinger knew in college that she wanted to be a minister's wife and became one. At the same time, she became active in the struggle for racial justice and, increasingly, in protests against the Vietnam War. She joined Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam, participated in Vietnam Summer in 1967, and helped found and chair Cincinnati Action for Peace. At the same time, her marriage was not doing well. Rather than trying to organize in her husband's church in Cincinnati, which was resistant to cross-racial alliances, she began attending United Theological Seminary in Dayton. Over the next couple years, as ideas about women's liberation began to circulate, Jan remained somewhat resistant, believing she had already achieved liberation and shown herself capable of matching men at seminary.<sup>85</sup>

However, Jan and others were eventually persuaded by Cheryl Radican to hold a meeting to discuss women's liberation. A group of about twenty women met in Dayton in September, 1969. They shared their stories of unfair treatment and discovered many similar patterns. The result of the meeting was the formation of the Dayton Women's Liberation Movement. The group incorporated the study of feminism, the use of consciousness raising groups and direct action.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Judith Ezekiel, *Feminism in the Heartland* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2002), 5-6; Jan Griesinger, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975*, ed. by Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 193.

<sup>86</sup> Ezekiel, 6-7.



In her study of women's liberation in Dayton, Judith Ezekiel writes, "By the middle of the decade, the civil rights movement was changing as young blacks nationwide began to see power, not rights, as the issue. These changes were to have a profound effect on the emerging New Left in Dayton and subsequently on the women's liberation movement." Ezekiel finds that women's liberation drew on the struggle for racial justice, particularly its emphasis on eliminating internalized oppression and the need for autonomous organizing.<sup>87</sup>

While Jan had been active in efforts for black civil rights, Dayton Women's Liberation was almost entirely white. However, Jan played a key role in keeping the group cognizant of racial justice issues. For example, she kept the organization conscious of the locations it chose for events so that they would draw women of all races, rather than choosing places where only white women would go. She was also careful to point out in her writing and public speeches the double oppression faced by African American women. At the same time, Judith Ezekiel points out that there was no talk in Dayton Women's Liberation about recruiting black members and little outreach to black communities. As time passed, the group paid less attention to issues of race.<sup>88</sup>

Jan became very involved in a number of women's liberation issues, working primarily through religious organizations. In the early 1970s, she started a Dayton branch of the Clergy Consultation Service on Abortion. Griesinger believed that, "...sexual freedom meant that men can enjoy sex anytime, anywhere, leaving the woman to worry about and bear the consequences of conception." Through Clergy

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<sup>87</sup> Ezekiel, xviii.

<sup>88</sup> Ezekiel, 58-59.

Consultation Service, a non-profit national organization with many local chapters, women could find abortionists who were skilled and reputable, provided quality care, and charged reasonable prices. A few years later, Jan helped start the Dayton Women's Health Center. Though, the group faced problems with the doctors it hired and went through internal disputes over pricing their services.<sup>89</sup>

Jan took a particular interest in women's liberation in a global context, especially in her role in the World Student Christian Federation. The organization, at the suggestion of Charlotte Bunch, chose Jan to compile and edit a book on international feminism, which became *Women in the Struggle for Liberation* (1974). At the same time, Jan and other students at United Theological Seminary acquired funds from the Methodist Church to form a group to study women's liberation across the globe, which became *Women Here and There*.<sup>90</sup>

The women's liberation movement was extremely important in Jan's life. She says, "I learned how to be powerful and strong. I learned and learned and learned...It was the beginning of really, really strong relationships with women." At the same time, she recognizes, "The labor movement and the civil rights movements had blazed the trail. These movements taught me about the nature of power in this country and made clear who was calling the shots and who was benefiting."<sup>91</sup>

Jan became conscious of her lesbian identity through feminism. She did not feel same-sex attraction from a young age. At the same time, the issue of lesbianism was not discussed in Dayton Women's Liberation in its early years. According to

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<sup>89</sup> Ezekiel, 42, 44, 117, 123-26.

<sup>90</sup> Ezekiel, 70-71; Jan Griesinger, *Women in the Struggle for Liberation* (Geneva: World Student Christian Federation, 1974).

<sup>91</sup> Ezekiel, 115; Griesinger, *Journeys*, 197.

Jan, there were no out-lesbians who were involved in founding the group, though, some did come out a few years later. Even then, there was little discussion of lesbian and gay rights. But, by the late 1960s and early 1970s, Jan began meeting lesbians in the women's liberation movement and she began to understand herself as a lesbian as well. Jan began reading feminist theory and lesbian writings that were being produced at the time. However, much of this took place outside her group in Dayton. Rather than learning about lesbianism through her local women's liberation group, Jan says she came to an understanding of her sexual orientation primarily through reading Charlotte Bunch and The Furies, who were based in Washington, D.C.<sup>92</sup>

Eventually, Jan came to identify as a lesbian herself. She does not really recall hearing about Stonewall. While she probably knew something about it, the rebellion in 1969 did not have a major impact on her. Rather, the event that made Jan's same-sex attraction clear occurred in 1976 when she had to leave Dayton to take a new job. She realized that the one person that she could not cope with leaving was a woman who had also been involved in the movement since 1968.<sup>93</sup> Like many other women, Jan came to identify as a lesbian because of her love for a particular woman in a changing cultural environment which was more accepting of that love.

Jan cites Charlotte Bunch (b. 1944) as an important influence in understanding lesbian feminism, and Bunch herself had been an activist in the civil rights movement. A white woman, she became involved in the struggle for black

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Jan Griesinger, telephone interview by author, March 14, 2012.

<sup>93</sup> Griesinger interview.

civil rights while at the Women's College of Duke University at a time when the school was being racially integrated. She participated in local pray-ins and other demonstrations, working primarily through the Methodist Student Movement. While working for civil rights, Bunch was becoming more conscious of women's issues. She says,

The women's college and the campus YWCA gave me a women-only space to learn about myself and develop leadership skills with other women, without the dominating presence of men who assumed that those roles were their prerogative. At the same time, I was also operating in a mixed-sex university setting. Most of my classes were co-ed, and the Methodist Student Center offered me a wider world in which to exercise my leadership.<sup>94</sup>

With the rise of black power, Bunch felt it was more appropriate for her to continue to challenge white supremacy by organizing and educating white communities about racism.<sup>95</sup>

Feminism became increasingly important in Bunch's life in the late 1960s. At that time, she began working at the Institute for Policy Studies, a progressive think tank in Washington, D.C. She was shocked and angry in repeatedly seeing her ideas ignored and discounted, or accepted once they were put forth by men. Bunch reflects, "I probably became a feminist more quickly, precisely because I was not used to such treatment." Bunch attended a meeting of radical women in D.C. in January, 1968, and immediately thereafter gave a speech on young women's views of imperialism at the Jeanette Rankin Women's Brigade for Peace march. She and other women worked out of the basement of the Institute for Policy Studies to

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<sup>94</sup> Charlotte Bunch, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975*, ed. by Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 130.

<sup>95</sup> Bunch, *Journeys*, 131.

organize the first national women's liberation movement conference, which was held over Thanksgiving, 1968, in Lake Villa, Illinois.<sup>96</sup>

Bunch continued to work with Methodist organizations, particularly the staff of  *motive*  magazine. In March, 1969, the group published one of the first women's liberation anthologies, which furthered the connection between women in the church and the women's liberation movement. During this time, Bunch was also exploring her sexuality. She and her husband separated and she came out in 1971. Bunch was involved in the publication of the final two issues of  *motive* , both focused on the lesbian and gay movement. She then broke with the church over the issue of homosexuality and became a principal figure in The Furies, a lesbian separatist group formed in Washington, D.C., in 1971. While the student Christian movement played an important role in training her as an activist for black civil rights and women's rights, it no longer provided her with the support in advocating equality.<sup>97</sup>

Rose Gladney (b. 1945) had been active in the push for school integration in Memphis, Tennessee, as a student at Southwestern at Memphis (now Rhodes College). She became somewhat conscious of feminism in her senior year at Rhodes. Rose heard people talking about the ideas of Betty Friedan, but did not read  *The Feminine Mystique* . She remembers agreeing with many feminist principles, but not on any deep level. In her applications to graduate school, Rose had her first memorable sexist experience when she was rejected at Duke because the Graduate School did not accept women.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Bunch,  *Journeys* , 134-36.

<sup>97</sup> Bunch,  *Journeys* , 136-39.

<sup>98</sup> Interview with Margaret Rose Gladney, telephone interview by author, June 28-29, 2011.

Instead, Rose moved to the University of New Mexico to work on her Ph.D. She enrolled in the first women's studies classes being offered through the American studies program. Rose's introduction to feminism was instrumental to her fully realizing her identity as a lesbian, though, the civil rights movement was also important. For Rose, issues of race, class, gender and sexuality were all tied together. During her time in New Mexico, Rose met with others in the women's movement who had been active around issues of racial equality, especially in Hispanic and Native American groups.<sup>99</sup>

It was during her time in graduate school in New Mexico in the early 1970s that Rose became much more aware of lesbian women who were out. One of the most important figures in Rose's life was Lillian Smith, who tied together issues of race, gender, and sexuality. In 1972, Rose first began reading Lillian Smith's work and, in 1974, she started researching Smith. Smith's work, especially with the Laurel Falls Camp for Girls, helped shape southern white women who challenged the racial, gender and sexual status quo. Smith was a model of a southern white lesbian woman who challenged racial and gender hierarchies. Rose studied Smith's life and work, eventually editing her letters. In her own life, Rose developed close relationships with women from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s and finally came out when she was 40 years old.<sup>100</sup>

Nina Boal (b. 1946) had been active in the civil rights movement in Mississippi. Following her time in the South, she joined the anti-Vietnam War

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<sup>99</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>100</sup> Gladney interview.

movement and the women's liberation movement in Chicago, as Linda Seese did.

Nina cites black power as a source of inspiration for women, saying,

...as soon as they started saying black power, some of the women started saying...woman power, women's liberation. We're tired of serving coffee. We're tired of typing. We want equality. And also that's when I started to find out that a lesbian is just a woman who likes other women. They're not monsters. They're not perverts. They're not women who want to be men. They're just women who like other women.<sup>101</sup>

During her time in the women's movement, Nina identified with the political lesbians, rather than the "real lesbians." She believes this was a result of continuing internalized homophobia. As a political lesbian, she felt she would be accepted if she loved women as a matter of choice, rather than because of some innate difference from others. She recognized the importance of the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969 and admired the lesbian and gay resistance. However, she still was not identifying as a lesbian, though, she did begin to have sexual experiences with women and found she loved it. She desired women in a way she never had men.<sup>102</sup>

Eventually, Nina came out in the early 1970s. At the same time, she continued to struggle with drinking and drugs, as she had sporadically during her time in the civil rights movement. She worked with the Chicago Women's Liberation Union, but acknowledges that, as she became more dependent on drugs and alcohol, she became much less involved in movement activism. In 1982, she finally got sober and became involved with gay-identified AA.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Nina Boal, telephone interview by author, July 9, 2011.

<sup>102</sup> Boal interview.

<sup>103</sup> Boal interview.

Amber Hollibaugh (b. 1946), a white woman, worked in the civil rights movement in a variety of capacities, traveling to Mississippi and assisting the Black Panthers in the Bay Area, among other things. Hollibaugh grew up a poor community in Oildale, California, the daughter of an Irish mother and Romany father. Hollibaugh did not know from a young age that she was gay. She remembers that she “found sex profoundly confusing, and attraction very bewildering.” Her understanding of sexuality was complicated by a variety of factors. As a young girl, she was molested by her father. Around age 12, she started seeing older men, which was rather typical in her community, as her mother was married at 14. She believed by dating older men (in one instance, a 32-year old man) it would halt her father’s advances, though, she did not feel much attraction them. Hollibaugh observes, “I was enormously interested in love that could save you. And that looked to me, heterosexual. And so, I was kind of obsessed with romantic love, but not very obsessed with boys.”<sup>104</sup>

Hollibaugh was also a sex worker for a time, in order to escape poverty and factory life. By that time, it was clear to her that she was attracted to women. But, she was not sure if she was also attracted to men. She observes, “it is confusing when you are [a] hooker, because you are doing it for work, and so you don’t know whether you would--how that’s affecting you--whether women look good because they aren’t men, or whether you are actually independently attracted to women.” Hollibaugh married for a short time, perhaps nine months, to a man who was

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<sup>104</sup> Interview with Amber Hollibaugh, interview by Kelly Anderson, December 15-16, 2003, and January 20, 2004, transcript p. 44, 49-52, 56-60, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.



avoiding military conscription. She also believes the man she married was gay. While she was living with him in Canada and working at McGill University where he was attending graduate school, Hollibaugh fell in love with another woman who was also married to a graduate student.<sup>105</sup>

At the same time, Hollibaugh, like Linda Seese, became involved in the women's liberation movement in Canada. However, Hollibaugh remained closeted during her time in the Toronto women's movement.<sup>106</sup> Bryan D. Palmer observes of the movement in Canada,

Gays and lesbians...were neither very visible in the New Left of the 1960s, nor were they accorded much sensitive treatment in the movement, either theoretically or practically. Even the New Feminists that emerged out of the TWLM [Toronto Women's Liberation Movement], and that contained lesbian members, did not handle the issue adequately in their public presentation of the group's concerns and purposes. Yet in spite of this less than admirable history, new doors would open...When, eventually, a gay and lesbian liberation movement did emerge in Canada it would surface, in part, in circles originating in the late 1960s.<sup>107</sup>

When Hollibaugh returned to the United States, she continued to be involved in women's liberation. At the same time, she was working with the Black Panther Party and would frequently commute from Berkeley across the border into Canada, transporting Panthers who needed to travel outside the country. Despite working for multiple causes at the same time, Hollibaugh did not really see a connection between women's liberation and other struggles. She argues that the issues of justice and liberation that the New Left and civil rights movement confronted were

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<sup>105</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 56-60, 64.

<sup>106</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 68-71.

<sup>107</sup> Bryan D. Palmer, "New Left Liberations: The Poetics, Praxis and Politics of Youth Radicalism," in *The Sixties in Canada: A Turbulent and Creative Decade*, ed. by M. Athena Palaeologu (Montreal: Black Rose Books Ltd., 2009), 127.

faced by earlier social movements. But, women's liberation confronted profoundly personal issues that had not been politicized before. Early feminists like Susan B. Anthony and Emma Goldman did not provide a clear framework for dealing with many issues in second wave feminism. Moreover, she recalls many women being insulted and belittled for being in the women's movement. Hollibaugh says most did not want to be a part of women's liberation. It was not viewed as a serious and revolutionary movement in its early years and it tended to separate women from their erstwhile allies.<sup>108</sup>

Hollibaugh continued to remain closeted in the women's movement back in the U.S. She observes, "the women's movement was really ferociously homophobic, and brutal about it." This was, in part, to avoid being labeled a lesbian movement, which was a terrible and derogatory association. For example, Hollibaugh recalls that when women's conferences were held, the women were instructed not to room together to avoid people assuming they were lesbians. Hollibaugh says that, at the time, she did not view her lesbian relationships as political. Rather, she thought it was an unfortunate circumstance at best, and a serious problem at worst, that she found herself attracted to women.<sup>109</sup>

After Stonewall, though, she better understood the politics of lesbianism. She recalls reading as much as she could in the underground press about lesbian liberation and wanting to be a part of the movement. Eventually, Hollibaugh moved to Boston for a year. She believes that the gay liberation movement was more prominent there than New York or any other place. Hollibaugh says she worked on

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<sup>108</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 77, 87-88, 102, 105.

<sup>109</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 73-74, 77.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves*, as did Joan Steinau Lester, and recalled a major dispute over whether to include lesbians, which they eventually did.<sup>110</sup> In the section on homosexuality, the group concluded,

...some of us may just decide to chuck the whole thing and express our love and sexuality with each other. It may be that what we need to do in order to maintain our integrity as human beings is to move freely through these and other choices given the circumstances of our lives at any particular time, and not be bound by myths and taboos that keep us from doing what is right for us at each moment."<sup>111</sup>

Despite this perhaps tepid reception, Hollibaugh observes that homosexuality only alienated one from the women's movement which was already alienated from other left movements. She says, "it became pretty clear pretty quickly that you were not going to be popular in those movements that were already marginalized from the movements that you were leaving in order to be in women's liberation if you claimed a lesbian identity."<sup>112</sup>

One also had to confront possible alienation from family. Amber's father, whom she attempted to reconcile with, and her mother responded to her coming out in very different ways. Her father's best friend from high school was a gay man who married and started a family. He then came out and occasionally took Amber's father along to gay bars. Though, he ultimately committed suicide. Amber's father said he did not want her to follow the path of his friend and said she could have a

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<sup>110</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 111-13. Hollibaugh is not listed as an author in *Women and Their Bodies*, but the document includes thanks to "all the other women who took the course and read the papers." Boston Women's Health Collective, *Women and Their Bodies: A Course* (Boston: Boston Women's Health Collective, 1970), 4.

<sup>111</sup> Boston Women's Health Collective, 34.

<sup>112</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 111.

good life as a lesbian. Amber's mother responded much differently; she was appalled that Amber was a lesbian.<sup>113</sup>

Mary Jo Osgood (b. 1947), a white SNCC volunteer who spent a great deal of time working in Mississippi from 1965 to 1968, was not out to anyone in the movement. Though she believes she figured out she was gay when she was eight years old, Mary Jo continued to repress her feelings for two decades. Osgood reflects that there were almost certainly plenty of other gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement. But, everyone, including her, was closeted. Mary Jo continued to date men and hoped her feelings for women were "just a phase that would go away." Moreover, she believes it would have negated the work they were doing if homosexuality in the movement had been visible.<sup>114</sup>

Unlike many other female activists in the civil rights movement, Mary Jo did not become involved in the women's movement. She did not feel drawn to women's liberation and is not sure what might explain that. Mary Jo observes that she had never been married and never really had to answer to a man, so perhaps she did not feel the same motivation that other women did. Similarly, she did not feel much of a connection to any lesbian groups. Even with the Stonewall Rebellion, Mary Jo did not believe homosexuality was very visible. Living in Denver, events in New York City had little effect on her and she does not recall ever hearing of Stonewall at the time. Mary Jo never acted on her desires until she was 27 and came out in 1975. By the time gay liberation had become increasingly visible, Mary Jo was older and had become more focused on building her career and personal life. She says, "there

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<sup>113</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 29.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Mary Jo Osgood, telephone interview by author, July 10, 2011.

wasn't that intrinsic connection....that emotional-psychological connection with the women's movement or the gay movement as there was in the civil rights movement."<sup>115</sup>

Like Mary Jo, Jewelle Gomez (b. 1948), who is African American and Native American, knew she was a lesbian from an early age. Jewelle recalls gay people in her South End Boston neighborhood during her childhood who were well accepted in the community, which was "emotionally sustaining." This working-class neighborhood was populated with jazz clubs, restaurants and bars in the 1940s and 1950s. Her father was a bartender and her mother cooked in a club. As a child, Jewelle remembers a black queen named Miss K. who gave her clothes. She also recalls a gay man named Mr. Maurice who was friends with her father. In her opinion, these people were open and felt welcome.<sup>116</sup>

The situation was different at school, though. In high school, a girl alluded to the fact that Jewelle and one of her friends were lesbians. Jewelle quickly shot down this claim and went forth knowing that if she came out as a lesbian she would not be accepted at her high school. She continued to remain closeted in college, but was increasingly aware of lesbianism. Jewelle recalls seeing an ad in her college newspaper for the Daughters of Bilitis and knew it was a lesbian organization. Each week, she checked the classified ads to see if their posting was still there. Though she never attended their meetings, she felt better knowing that, if she wanted to, she could go to their meetings and be accepted.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Osgood interview.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Jewelle Gomez, telephone interview by author, July 12, 2011.

<sup>117</sup> Gomez interview.

Jewelle wrote in *The Question of Equality* that she recognized herself as a lesbian at age 14 after reading *The Well of Loneliness* and identifying with the main character, Stephen, a male-identified woman. She said,

...I heard within the story a philosophical parallel to the civil rights movement I'd watched on television and then participated in when it touched Boston's black community in the 1960s. In my naiveté I didn't then understand why black leaders didn't take up the call, which would have included women like Stephen and me. In fact they seemed determined to squelch any attempts to recognize black gay life.<sup>118</sup>

During her time working on *Say Brother* covering the civil rights movement in Boston, she knew that "being gay was not open to discussion." She recalls people using the word "faggot" and making other offhand remarks about lesbians and gays. The way most people working on the program exhibited a disgusted response to anything about homosexuality made it clear to Jewelle that she should remain closeted. At the same time, reading the works of James Baldwin helped Jewelle "open a door to [her]self." She recalls reading *Another Country* at age 14. Later, she went back and read *Giovanni's Room*. Though she had read literature about lesbian life, like *The Well of Loneliness*, Jewelle says, "to have it be an African American author meant the world to me." Baldwin himself felt the same way, telling Julius Lester at one point, that "many white writers were remote for him, not relevant to his experience."<sup>119</sup>

Living in Boston, Jewelle recalls the Stonewall Rebellion being a tiny blip in the newspapers and not being broadcast on TV. Issues of racial justice were still dominating the news at the time. By way of comparison, Jewelle recalls hearing

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<sup>118</sup> Jewelle Gomez, in *The Question of Equality*, 19.

<sup>119</sup> Gomez interview; Weatherby, 173.

much more about the occupation of Alcatraz that year than the uprising at Stonewall. Shortly thereafter, Jewelle moved to New York to attend the Columbia School of Journalism. During graduate school, Jewelle taught theater at an art center in West Chester with two feminist women. They offered her books which helped build her consciousness about patriarchy and feminism. At the same time, Jewelle was working on a TV program in New York with some people she believed were gay, which may have helped her feel like she was in a more welcoming environment for people of all sexual orientations.<sup>120</sup>

Living in Greenwich Village in 1971, Jewelle felt much more comfortable about her sexuality, though, she was quite shy and did not know anyone. The following year, she attended the Pride Parade and found it was a great way to connect with people. Shortly thereafter, she moved to Manhattan and worked in a theater meeting many gays and lesbians. She joined Salsa Soul Sisters, a lesbian womanist social organization that did some activist work. She also met Joan Nestle and Deb Edel of the Lesbian Herstory Archives and marched with them during Pride. By that point, she was out as a lesbian.<sup>121</sup>

Mandy Carter (b. 1948) knew there was “something different” about her sexual orientation in high school in the early 1960s. She recalls lacking any language to describe it except, perhaps, homosexual. Mandy looked through the card file in the library and, just as Jewelle did, found books like *The Well of Loneliness* to try to better comprehend this difference. She also recalls hearing rumors that artists like Janis Joplin and Joan Baez were bisexual which gave her an

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<sup>120</sup> Gomez interview.

<sup>121</sup> Gomez interview.

inking that there may be other women like her. When she was 18, Mandy got on a bus and traveled to New York City to go to a lesbian bar. Still, she does not believe she truly accepted herself as a lesbian until she moved to San Francisco at age 21. For Mandy, identifying as a lesbian came as a result of a direct connection with lesbians, rather than through the women's movement.<sup>122</sup>

### **Intersections**

For many lesbian activists, there was no direct line from organizing in the civil rights movement to advocating for lesbian and gay rights. There were very few openly lesbian and gay civil rights workers and some had not even come to identify as lesbian or gay on a personal level. Identity formation is a constant process and many civil rights activists were young and still in the process of exploring and discovering their sexual identities. For many, the women's liberation movement was an important part of that process. Numerous civil rights activists who later identified as lesbian were active in the women's liberation movement. What stands out in these women's experiences is the sheer diversity. Women's liberation was important for many women to better understand their lesbian identity. However, women arrived at a better understanding of themselves as lesbians in a variety of ways.

Historian Sara Evans has described the process by which feminism emerged from the struggle for black civil rights in *Personal Politics* (1979). Evans argues that,

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<sup>122</sup> Carter interview.



in comparison to the larger society, the civil rights movement looked relatively egalitarian. But, at the same time,

The civil rights movement was made up of children of the fifties whose beliefs had been shaped by the feminine mystique. Like their mothers who had left the home for paid work, these young women found that the social role of housewife had followed them even as they transcended many of their former expectations. Such contradictory experiences finally generated a feminist response from those who felt the reality of their new strength in an old world. The same women who explored new skills and talents and grew in self-respect also experienced a cultural undertow of expectations that they would perform traditional feminine tasks.<sup>123</sup>

While she discusses a number of groups, her analysis of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) is representative of the experience of most (white) women in the civil rights movement. In terms of placement, women were sent more often to teach than do voter registration. At the Waveland Conference in November, 1964, the paper on women in the movement was ignored and ridiculed. However, Evans argues that the civil rights movement helped women develop self-confidence and self-respect. She concludes, "they confronted this dilemma with the tools the movement itself had given them: a language to name and describe oppression; a deep belief in freedom, equality, and community--soon to be translated into 'sisterhood'; a willingness to question and challenge any social institution that failed to meet human needs; and the ability to organize."<sup>124</sup>

There have been a number of works since Evans' which generally affirm her conclusion that women's experiences in the civil rights movement were formative and led to women's liberation. In *Freedom's Daughters*, Lynne Olson finds, "It is true

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<sup>123</sup> Evans, 76.

<sup>124</sup> Evans, 77, 85-87, 100.

that as SNCC and other civil rights groups were disintegrating in the late 1960s and black nationalism was on the rise, women were expected to play increasingly subordinate roles. But in SNCC's early years, at the height of its influence, its female activists, including Hayden, King, and others who were white, felt an unparalleled sense of empowerment."<sup>125</sup>

Belinda Robnett highlights the ways in which white women in the civil rights movement were radicalized after seeing and experiencing the treatment of black women in the South. For example, she writes of the experience of Joni Rabinowitz and Joyce Barrett, who were arrested for passing around leaflets in Albany, Georgia. Thereafter, they were taken to jail and stripped naked in view of male prisoners. The next day, Faith Holsaert was arrested for demonstrating and fondled while being searched. Robnett says the practices that had been used on black women for decades were used on white women in the southern civil rights movement.<sup>126</sup>

While Evans' work remains important, there have also been important challenges. For example, Evans does not really acknowledge the way former civil rights activists may have avoided the women's liberation movement. Penny Patch observes,

I identified with the women's movement: finally, here was something that was mine. I remember the relief. But when it came down to it, I did not spend much time working in local feminist organizations. All the women were white (particularly in northern Vermont, where I lived), and many were relatively unaware of racism as an issue that affected their lives. Eventually I found exceptions to this rule, especially among lesbian women, who had a keen sense of oppression,

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<sup>125</sup> Lynne Olson, *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 338.

<sup>126</sup> Belinda Robnett, *How Long? How Long? African-American Women in the Struggle for Civil Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 134.

their own and other people's. But for years I felt alien. Power and community for me continued to reside in the black world. Racism for me trumped sexism. Even all these years later, although I have always counted myself a serious feminist, it still does. I don't walk into a room, ever, without assessing the racial balance.<sup>127</sup>

While Patch avoided many feminist groups because of the lack of racial diversity, others felt too strong a connection to the civil rights movement to focus on women's liberation. Elaine DeLott Baker writes,

...it was always the freedom struggle that held me. To shift my identity, commitment, and energy from the freedom struggle to the women's struggle was not something I could do, especially at a time when I was still grieving over my separation from the movement. The freedom struggle was the flame; all else was shadow.<sup>128</sup>

Moreover, Casey Hayden saw women's liberation as an imitation of black nationalism and found the separatist sentiment in both unattractive.<sup>129</sup>

Evans work also makes mention of a number of lesbian activists in the black civil rights and women's liberation movement, but does not address their experiences as lesbians. She acknowledges the role of civil rights activist Pauli Murray in working with other feminists like Betty Friedan, Rep. Martha Griffiths, and Mary Eastwood to create the National Organization of Women (NOW). She also recognizes the role of Lillian Smith as one of the southern white women who were the first to link racial and sexual oppression and discusses the activism of women like Cathy Cade and Jane Stembridge. Moreover, Evans criticizes the heteronormativity of the New Left, pointing out that the New Left's concern for sexual freedom was couched in heterosexual terms, with a bias against

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<sup>127</sup> Penny Patch, in *Deep in Our Hearts: Nine White Women in the Freedom Movement*, ed. by Constance Curry et al. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2000), 165-66.

<sup>128</sup> Elaine DeLott Baker, in *Deep in Our Hearts*, 279-80.

<sup>129</sup> Casey Hayden, in *Deep in Our Hearts*, 371.

homosexuality only slightly less harsh than American culture in general. But, while Evans identifies the role of a number of lesbian activists for black civil rights and makes mention of homosexuality, she does not address their role as lesbian women or how the civil rights and women's liberation movement contributed to their identity formation and activism as lesbians.<sup>130</sup>

Examining the role of lesbian women in the civil rights movement allows us to see the longer trajectory as most went from the civil rights movement to women's liberation and drew on those experiences in working for lesbian and gay liberation. This particular focus generally affirms Evans' argument: activists for black civil rights were shaped by their experiences as women in the movement and went on to important roles in women's liberation. For lesbian women in the civil rights movement, most went on to play a key part in women's liberation before becoming involved in lesbian and gay liberation.

At the same time, looking at the role of lesbian women helps us better understand the ways in which they were marginalized in both the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement. Almost no one was out in the civil rights movement. For lesbian women, many were influenced by the struggle for women's liberation. But, even then, they were not out. Although, being hidden or marginalized within those movements did not mean these lesbian women did not learn important lessons and gain valuable experience in these struggles.

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<sup>130</sup> Evans, 18-19, 25, 28, 35-36, 48, 53, 124, 199, 205. The claim that southern white women were the first to link racial and sexual oppression in the 1960s has been challenged by the recent work of Danielle McGuire in *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance - a New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010).

A few women like Rose Gladney and Nina Boal say they came to an understanding of lesbianism through the women's liberation movement. Many others were involved in women's liberation, but offer a number of caveats about its influence on their identity formation as lesbians. Barbara Deming felt women's liberation was an important movement, but she was out to a number of people before her time in the women's movement. Moreover, she was marginalized in the women's movement for advocating androgyny at a time when cultural feminists held sway. Similarly, Joan Nestle had already come out in the lesbian bar scene in New York before her time in the civil rights movement. Lorraine Hansberry was also influenced by feminism, particularly the work of Simone de Beauvoir, but was never out and passed away before the women's movement gained prominence. Likewise, Pauli Murray was involved in the women's movement, but never came out.

Quite significantly, a number of women elevate personal relationships over broader social changes. Cathy Cade, Jan Griesinger, Faith Holsaert, Joan Lester, Linda Seese and Nancy Stoller all say it was really the experience of falling in love with a particular woman that led them to understand themselves as lesbians. Though, a romantic and sexual relationship between two women was, in part, a result of broader social changes which made that possible. At the same time, a number of these women say lesbianism was not really discussed in the women's liberation movement. Still others, like Betty Powell and Jewelle Gomez, mention that feminism was important but it really was not central to their experience.

There were also a number of lesbian women who were involved in the civil rights movement, but did not connect with the women's liberation movement.

Lillian Smith was an example to many feminists, but not involved in the women's movement before her death in 1966. Younger women, like Jane Stembridge and Mary Jo Osgood, were not involved in the women's liberation movement either. Finally, women like Betty Powell and Amber Hollibaugh were involved in the women's liberation movement but emphasize how despised lesbians were within that struggle and how lesbianism would alienate a woman from a movement that was already alienated from other New Left struggles.

These women's stories help us understand the broader trajectory that took lesbian women from the civil rights movement to women's liberation to lesbian and gay liberation. While many of the lesbian women in the civil rights movement were also involved in women's liberation, they often found that the silence surrounding their sexual identity in the black freedom struggle continued in the women's struggle. The double-sided nature of their experience in the civil rights movement was often replicated in women's liberation. In the civil rights movement, they experienced marginalization as women and lesbians, but also found many examples of assertive and strong women and were themselves stronger and more assertive as a result. Similarly, in the women's liberation movement, they experienced marginalization as lesbians and, for black women, marginalization because of their race, but also gained more activist experience. These experiences would help lay the groundwork for their activism for lesbian and gay liberation.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - "DISCREET INQUIRIES" AND OUTLANDISH STORIES: ATTACKS ON GAYS AND LESBIANS IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT**

The civil rights movement was persistently under attack from forces seeking to discredit the cause. African Americans and their allies seeking to advance racial justice had to maintain an image of respectability to advance the movement. A study of the role of gays and lesbians in the African American civil rights movement raises the question of how opposing forces used real or perceived homosexuality against the struggle as well as how movement leaders responded. Moreover, it affords an opportunity to examine how attempts to tarnish the movement by highlighting "deviant sexuality" intersected with other criticism of movement activism. Accusations of communist influence and homosexuality had been linked since the early Cold War and intersected in segregationist attacks on the civil rights movement. Beyond that, homosexuality often blended with attacks on interracial sex and formed a part of the broader criticism of the civil rights movement for bringing about "moral degeneration."

While there is no evidence of a concerted effort to discredit the civil rights movement by linking it to homosexuality, there are a number of references which make clear that this accusation of "sexual deviance" was an important tool alongside accusations of Communist subversion and "miscegenation." A passage in the FBI file of Tom Kahn, a gay activist for black civil rights who worked closely with Bayard Rustin and was, at one point, his partner, succinctly summarizes the FBI's strategy. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover wrote,

Kahn is a known homosexual. New York, Los Angeles, and Washington Field Office should make discreet inquiries to determine if Kahn has ever come to the attention of pertinent police authority in their respective areas for charges involving morals. In the event a record for Kahn is located, determine whether it is of a public source nature or if it can be made public. This investigation is closely related with the investigation of individuals under communist influence who are active in the Negro freedom movement. It is imperative that the utmost discretion be exercised so that the individuals involved do not become aware of the Bureau's interest. No action should be taken that could cause the Bureau any embarrassment and contacts should be made only with established reliable sources. No counterintelligence action should be initiated without specific Bureau authority.<sup>1</sup>

A note appended to another document made clear the purpose of investigating Kahn. While he was an important activist in his own right, the Bureau had a larger target. The Director wrote, "Kahn, the 'boy friend' of Bayard Rustin, is included on the Reserve Index of the New York Office...We are endeavoring to develop evidence of his known homosexuality for possible use in discrediting Rustin, a known homosexual who is active in the Negro movement."<sup>2</sup>

This chapter examines the attempts by surveillance agencies like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, segregationist opponents of the civil rights movement, and those within the civil rights movement to use accusations of homosexuality to discredit the cause or remove their opponents. This opposition to the civil rights movement was wide in scope, drawing together a variety of fears and a host of enemies. While the central concern of this work is the use of homosexuality against the civil rights movement, discussion of

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<sup>1</sup> Director, FBI (100-3-104-34) to SAC, New York (100-129802), "Communist Party, USA; Counterintelligence Program; Internal Security-C; (Bayard Rustin)," March 26, 1964, p. 1-2, Tom Kahn file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>2</sup> Director, FBI (100-3-104-34) to SAC, New York (100-129802), "Communist Party, USA; Counterintelligence Program; Internal Security-C; (Bayard Rustin)," April 21, 1964, p. 1-2, Tom Kahn file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.



homosexuality, or “perversion,” intersected with anti-Communism, concerns about moral decline, and more.

Other scholars have begun to examine how concerns about Communism intersected with race and sexuality. Stacy Braukman’s work on the Johns Committee in Florida has shown how massive resistance to integration segued into a broader conservative cultural movement focused on issues of race, sexuality, youth and education. Braukman points out that McCarthyism was driven not just by opposition to Communism, but also concerns about threats to “traditional” sexual and gender regimes. She finds, “anti-Communism shaped ways of thinking about other forms of subversion and allowed southern conservatives to construct other enemies in those terms: homosexuals as secret infiltrators, polluters, and corrupters, and integrationists as secret race mixers and statists.” Moreover, Braukman says, “A major component of the attack on racial progressives was the implication of sexual deviance” and “race and sexuality...are central rather than peripheral to our understanding of domestic anti-Communism, particularly as southern segregationists employed it.”<sup>3</sup>

The work of David K. Johnson has also shown that concern about homosexuals was a major part of the Second Red Scare. Johnson argues, “In 1950, many politicians, journalists, and citizens thought that homosexuals posed more of a threat to national security than Communists.” He finds that the historiography has been too focused on McCarthy, who was not the principal advocate of homosexual purges. However, Republican leaders pushed McCarthy to devote more attention to

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<sup>3</sup> Stacy Braukman, *Communists and Perverts Under the Palms: The Johns Committee in Florida, 1956-1965* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2012), 4, 9, 11.

homosexuals in government and had expressed concerns about gays in the State Department since 1947. Johnson also points out that the issue was widely covered by the press in the 1950s. Though “homosexual” and “sexual pervert” were the favored terms, discussion of gays could be cloaked in euphemism.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Federal Bureau of Investigation**

A number of influential scholars have also shown how J. Edgar Hoover’s concerns about Communism and changing sexual mores as well as his opposition to the civil rights movement drove many FBI investigations. In Tim Weiner’s history of the FBI, he writes,

Reflecting on the past lives of the British spies at Cambridge in the 1930s, Hoover conflated their communism with their homosexuality. The connection seemed self-evident to him. Homosexuality and communism were causes for instant dismissal from American government service—and most other categories of employment. Communists and homosexuals both had clandestine and compartmented lives. They inhabited secret underground communities. They used coded language. Hoover believed, as did his peers, that both were uniquely susceptible to sexual entrapment and blackmail by foreign intelligence services.<sup>5</sup>

Following the discovery that the KGB agent that was stationed at the British Embassy in Washington was a Communist and a homosexual, Hoover escalated the FBI’s Sex Deviates Program in June of 1951. The FBI spread the word of this threat to every police department, government body and institution of higher education and motivated them to find and remove homosexuals in their midst. For the next 25

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<sup>4</sup> David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 2, 4-7. Other terms included people who have “weakness” or “peculiarities,” “such individuals,” people with “morals problems,” “moral weaklings,” “sexual misfits,” “moral risks,” “misfits,” “undesirables,” persons with “unusual morals,” and “security risks.”

<sup>5</sup> Tim Weiner, *Enemies: A History of the FBI* (New York: Random House, 2012), 175.

years, the FBI compiled 300,000 pages of documentation on homosexuals and subsequently destroyed them in 1977.<sup>6</sup>

While Hoover saw homosexuals as potential Communist subversives, both vulnerable to blackmail and capable of carrying on hidden lives, he also saw the civil rights movement as a major government concern. In their study of the FBI's investigation of Martin Luther King, Jr., Michael Friedly and David Gallen write that Hoover's suspicion of Communist infiltration had been the main reason for him to oppose King. At the same time, "sexual behavior was a major piece of intelligence that Hoover collected." Evidence of King's sex life became a reason for Hoover to hate him more and a weapon to use against the civil rights movement. They write, "He [Hoover] objected to the open display of sexuality and professed to be offended by what he regarded as the abnormal use of sex. The Director was keenly interested in the sexual activities of those in the public spotlight, and he instructed his agents to go to great lengths in order to determine their sexual deviances." In defining "deviance," they further explain, "Homosexuality, sexual excess, miscegenation, and sex with the wrong people (e.g., communists) were all used by Hoover in order to defame or blackmail those around them."<sup>7</sup>

Hoover was also driven by his racial worldview. In his analysis of the FBI's investigation of the civil rights movement, David Garrow believes, "Hoover's racism is so widely documented as to require no extended comment here. Further, the fact that much of the Bureau was hostile to blacks and that very, very few blacks actually

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<sup>6</sup> Weiner, 174-76.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Friedly and David Gallen, *Martin Luther King, Jr.: The FBI File* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1993), 67-68.

worked as FBI agents until the early 1970s is also well proven.” At the same time, Garrow feels that is an insufficient explanation for the way they went after King. He points out, for example, that the FBI was not hostile to all African American civil rights leaders.<sup>8</sup>

Instead, Garrow finds that the FBI investigation itself, once begun, continued on a different trajectory based on what agents found. Initially, the Bureau was concerned about King’s connection to Stanley Levison, who had previous associations with Communist and Communist-front organizations. However, in December, 1963, the concern about the Levison connection declined greatly and interest in sexual activities rose. Garrow concludes, “At bottom, the hostility of Sullivan, Hoover, and other Bureau officials toward King was motivated largely by their feelings about Dr. King’s private life and especially his sexual activities.”<sup>9</sup>

Garrow looks closely at the role of both Hoover and William Sullivan at the FBI. He finds that Hoover’s primary fascination with sex was an interest in homosexuality, but he was also eager to hear reports of interracial sex and group sex. This kind of information served many purposes. Garrow believes that Hoover enjoyed this type of material because it could be used to entertain others. He writes, this information

...seems to have been grounded more in a simple enjoyment of titillating others with that which titillated himself than it was in a consciously planned design to destroy King’s reputation within the government or to win bureaucratic prestige for the FBI as an organization. No doubt some admixture of all three of these motives

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<sup>8</sup> David J. Garrow, *The FBI and Martin Luther King, Jr.: From “Solo” to Memphis* (New York: WW Norton & Co., 1981), 153, 155.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 160.

was present, but entertainment likely was predominant over destruction or bureaucratic self-promotion.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, the information could be of use in promoting the prestige of the Bureau by showing how much its investigations could find out about people's private lives.<sup>11</sup>

While interest in Martin Luther King, Jr. revolved around his heterosexual extramarital affairs, the case of King is instructive because it shows that the FBI was willing to pursue information about sexual activities at the expense of resources which would have gone towards directly investigating Communist affiliations. However, both were, at bottom, an attempt to discredit the civil rights movement. If the FBI believed the movement to be inspired or infiltrated by Communists, discrediting the movement by revealing information about sexual activities among the leadership would have the effect of reducing Communist influence. Or, in the case of homosexuals, their sexual orientation was a sign that they were Communists. Perhaps, in the minds of Hoover and Bureau officials, the investigation of sexual activities among civil rights activists was, at heart, an anti-Communist crusade.

However, an examination of the files (or un-redacted portions of files) on gay and lesbian activists for black civil rights reveals that the FBI was able to uncover little about their sexual orientation, let alone use it against the movement. James Campbell's assessment of James Baldwin's FBI file is representative of many cases. He notes the repeated duplication and mistakes in Baldwin's file - getting his street wrong, listing him at an address when he moved out, mis-stating the titles of his

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<sup>10</sup> Garrow, 165-66.

<sup>11</sup> Garrow, 166.

books. But, perhaps more importantly, the Bureau was reluctant to arrive at conclusions. As late as 1966, the FBI still could not definitively state whether they thought James Baldwin was gay. Rather than use any piece of evidence they could find to smear Baldwin, the Bureau showed timidity and reluctance.<sup>12</sup>

One of the gay activists that the FBI most sought to discredit was Bayard Rustin. Their investigation of him initially began as a direct attempt to find Communist infiltration in the civil rights movement. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover requested electronic surveillance on Bayard Rustin's apartment in New York on October 28, 1963. A confidential source informed Hoover that Rustin and Benjamin J. Davis, National Secretary of the Communist Party, USA, were working together to increase black support for Communism.<sup>13</sup> Every six months, Hoover requested an extension of the surveillance indicating information it uncovered which was important to the Bureau. By June 4, 1965, Hoover declared, "This technical surveillance has provided much valuable intelligence concerning communist influences in the civil rights movement, particularly through specific communist influences upon King."<sup>14</sup> Requests to extend surveillance emphasized Rustin's prior membership in the Young Communist League, his association with the Communist Party, USA, and his leadership role in the civil rights movement, particularly his counsel to Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>15</sup> By 1966, the request for extension included an

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<sup>12</sup> James Campbell, "James Baldwin and the FBI," *The Threepenny Review* 77 (Spring, 1999), 11.

<sup>13</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "Memorandum for the Attorney General Re: Communist Party, USA; Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial matters; Internal Security - C," October 28, 1963, Bayard Rustin file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>14</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, "Memorandum for the Attorney General Re: Bayard Rustin; Security Matter - Communist," June 4, 1965, Rustin file.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*; J. Edgar Hoover, "Memorandum for the Attorney General Re: Bayard Rustin; Security Matter - Communist," November 26, 1965, Rustin file.

added reason for surveillance: "He is a known sexual pervert."<sup>16</sup> Though the Bureau had known this years before, it was not until this later date that it was explicitly stated.

At the same time, the New York office seems to have disagreed with Hoover about the value of this information. In its December, 1963, report, the New York Special Agent in Charge (SAC) found "there has been no information from this source which would indicate that Bayard Rustin has come under the influence of the Communist Party in connection with his civil rights activities."<sup>17</sup> The following month, the agent concluded, "It is felt that the information which has been received from this source has not been of sufficient value to warrant its being continued."<sup>18</sup> Still, surveillance remained for years after that.

Besides its agents and wiretaps, the Bureau relied on other sources, especially informants, to maintain surveillance on Rustin into the mid- and late-1960s. However, these individuals were often unreliable. For example, in January, 1967, an informant told the FBI that, under Rustin's stewardship, "the March to Washington was organized with arrangements with the Soviets." Rustin also supposedly aided some Soviet nationals who were arrested in New York in the Fall of 1963. This informant was incredibly misinformed, though, as the report noted,

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<sup>16</sup> F.J. Baumgardner to Mr. W.C. Sullivan, "Bayard Rustin; Security Matter - C," January 25, 1966, Rustin file.

<sup>17</sup> SAC, New York to Director, FBI, "Justification for Continuation of Technical or Microphone Surveillance," January 13, 1964, p. 3, Rustin file.

<sup>18</sup> SAC, New York to Director, FBI, "CPUSA-Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters," January 13, 1964, p. 3, Rustin file.

“Source thought that Bayard was this individual’s family name but he stated in any event that this individual was a well-known personality.”<sup>19</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, there is clear evidence in Rustin’s FBI file that the Bureau sought to use accusations of homosexuality against him. One document makes clear,

It will also be recalled that this source furnished information on 11-15-63 which contained details of Rustin’s homosexual proclivities which information was not available from any other source. It was of such value that Mr. Tolson noted, and the Director concurred, “Evans might show enclosure to AG [Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy] when an opportunity presents itself to show up Rustin for what he is.”<sup>20</sup>

However, there is also evidence of belated research into material the Bureau might have found useful. For example, it does not appear that before 1969 the FBI records included reference to New York City Police Records of an arrest on October 25, 1946, in Harlem for violating Section 722 of the New York Penal Code, “offering to commit a lewd or indecent act.”<sup>21</sup>

While incomplete, this evidence was also not often used despite the Bureau’s stated intentions. For example, legislators wrote to the Bureau seeking derogatory information on Rustin. However, the only inquiries in Rustin’s file date from 1969 and 1970 and do not relate to his involvement in the civil rights movement. In one instance, Congressman John J. Rooney, a representative from New York and Chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee requested a copy of Rustin’s criminal record and was interested in Rustin’s morals arrest that Hoover entered

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<sup>19</sup> SA [redacted] to SAC, New York, “Bayard Rustin; SM-C,” April 3, 1967, Rustin file.

<sup>20</sup> SAC, New York to Director, FBI, “Communist Party, USA; Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters; Internal Security – C,” January 23, 1964, p. 2, Rustin file.

<sup>21</sup> “Bayard Rustin,” November 21, 1969, p. 1, Rustin file.



into the congressional record in the 1967 appropriations request.<sup>22</sup> Rooney became more concerned about Rustin “morals arrest” when he found out Rustin had been appointed to the board of trustees at the University of Notre Dame. The congressman wanted to share this matter with friends in the clergy to see what might be done about removing Rustin from the board.<sup>23</sup>

Evidence in the file indicates in Rustin’s case and others that Hoover would not share any materials held by the FBI that were not already publicly available, such as newspaper clippings or Hoover’s congressional testimony. Hoover responded a request from Senator James B. Allen of Alabama saying that such information was confidential and could not be provided.<sup>24</sup> In the case of Rustin’s appointment at Notre Dame, the Bureau sent out an article to interested parties, which mentioned that Rustin was imprisoned as a conscientious objector during World War II. However, someone wrote in the margin “also convicted for sodomy.”<sup>25</sup> At the same time, it is certainly possible, even probable, that other requests for information were made and fulfilled with evidence of the exchange subsequently removed. For example, it has been said that Strom Thurmond was a frequent recipient of information from the FBI and he was a known opponent of Bayard Rustin, but no evidence of that appears in available Bureau files.<sup>26</sup>

Moreover, when Hoover and Thurmond entered information about Rustin’s “morals

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<sup>22</sup> N.P. Callahan to Mr. Mohr, “Bayard Rustin; Civil Rights Activist,” September 19, 1968, p. 1, Rustin file.

<sup>23</sup> N.P. Callahan to Mr. Mohr, “Bayard Rustin,” November 21, 1969, p. 1, Bayard Rustin file, FBI.

<sup>24</sup> J. Edgar Hoover to James B. Allen, July 21, 1970, p. 1, Rustin file.

<sup>25</sup> “Rustin Named,” *The Washington Post and Times-Herald*, November 4, 1969, no page given, Rustin file.

<sup>26</sup> John D’Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 346.

arrest” in the time leading up the March on Washington, civil rights leaders supported Rustin, reporters did not press the issue, and Tom Kahn concluded that it “seems to have done us more good than harm.”<sup>27</sup>

FBI records also contain information about other groups who attempted to use Communism and homosexuality against Rustin. In January, 1965, the San Francisco Office reported that the Minutemen, an anti-Communist organization, had become aware of “the criminal record of Bayard Rustin as a homosexual” because of his arrest in Pasadena. The office informed the Bureau of this because they wanted to make it known that the Minutemen had access to police and identification records. However, the document does not make clear how the organization planned to use this information against Rustin.<sup>28</sup>

By June, 1967, the FBI was becoming less concerned about Rustin. Their memorandum noted that King rarely consulted Rustin since he was working as full-time director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute. Their relationship had “diminished to almost nothing.” Moreover, the memorandum observed that there was no information indicating contact between Rustin and members of the CPUSA other than Levison, and, “Levison and Rustin do not have a fondness for each other.”<sup>29</sup> In 1968, when Rustin was named to coordinate the Poor People’s Campaign demonstration in Washington, D.C., to be held in June, the FBI took a renewed interest in him.<sup>30</sup> But, that was rather short-lived.

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<sup>27</sup> D’Emilio, 348-49.

<sup>28</sup> SAC, San Francisco to Director, FBI, “Bayard Rustin, SM – C,” January 12, 1965, Rustin file.

<sup>29</sup> SAC, New York to Director, FBI, “Bayard Rustin; SM – C,” June 12, 1967, p. 1-2, Rustin file.

<sup>30</sup> Director, FBI to SAC, New York, “Bayard Rustin; Racial Matters – Black Nationalist,” May 27, 1968, p. 1, Rustin file.

Rustin's partner, Tom Kahn, was also a person of interest to the FBI. Beginning sometime around late 1956, the FBI began investigating Kahn because of his involvement in the Young Socialist League (later Young People's Socialist League) and the Eugene V. Debs Society. By 1958, he was added to the Security Index.<sup>31</sup> He aroused further suspicion by using aliases like "Philip Evans," "Donald Newman," "Tom Marcel" and "Jack" when registering at hotels.<sup>32</sup>

As mentioned at the opening of the chapter, it was, in part, through the relationship between Kahn and Rustin that the FBI hoped to discredit the movement. One document noted, "We are endeavoring to develop evidence of his [Kahn's] known homosexuality for possible use in discrediting Rustin, a known homosexual who is active in the Negro movement."<sup>33</sup> Moreover, the FBI explicitly stated that their investigation into homosexuality was "closely related" to the investigation of Communist infiltration of the civil rights movement. However, at least in the pages from the file that have been released, the FBI was unable to uncover much. The Bureau checked with the New York City Police Department and failed to find any information that Kahn had been arrested for a morals charge or been the subject of an investigation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> SAC, New York (100-130250) to Director, FBI (100-425266), "Subject: Thomas David Kahn, SM-ISL," January 7, 1958, p. 2, Tom Kahn file, FBI.

<sup>32</sup> SAC, New York (100-130250) to Director, FBI (100-425266), "Thomas David Kahn; SM-ISL," May 8, 1958, Kahn file, Federal Bureau of Investigation; SAC, New York (100-130250) to Director, FBI (100-425-266), "Thomas David Kahn, was., Tom Marcel; SM-ISL," December 9, 1958, Kahn file, FBI; SAC, New York (100-133062) to Director, FBI (100-427566), "[redacted]; SM-ISL; Thomas David Kahn; SM-ISL," April 28, 1958, Kahn file.

<sup>33</sup> Director, FBI (100-3-104-34) to SAC, New York (100-129802), "Communist Party, USA; Counterintelligence Program; Internal Security-C; (Bayard Rustin)", April 21, 1964, Kahn file.

<sup>34</sup> Director, FBI to SAC, New York, April 21, 1964, Kahn file.

Hoover also instructed agents to check into Kahn's Selective Service records. He wrote, "Be particularly alert to determine if mental or physical examinations have been afforded him and if any data has been developed regarding his homosexuality."<sup>35</sup> But, as with the other inquiries, there is no evidence that they were able to find any information. Moreover, there is no documentation showing the FBI investigated other areas Kahn had lived. He attended Howard University, but there is no order to check for police records in Washington, D.C. He also lived for a short time in West Covina, California, but no investigation was pursued there either. It seems while the Bureau stated in no uncertain terms that it wanted evidence on Kahn's sexual orientation to discredit Rustin and the civil rights movement more generally, they did not explore all possible sources to obtain such evidence.

Given his prominence as a writer and civil rights activist, James Baldwin also faced intrusion and harassment from the FBI. This grew both from his association with groups the FBI considered Communist or Communist-front organizations as well as his criticism of the Bureau. To illustrate how quick the Bureau was to label a group Communist or a Communist-front, they followed Baldwin for supporting the Fair Play for Cuba Committee, Civil Rights Defense Committee, the Liberation Committee for Africa, National Lawyers Guild, the Committee to Aid the Monroe Defendants, supporting the magazine *Freedomways*, attending a rally to abolish the House Committee on Un-American Activities, criticizing the war in Vietnam, attempting to travel to Cuba, and more. Beyond that, the attempts to paint Baldwin

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<sup>35</sup> Director, FBI to SAC, New York, April 21, 1964, Kahn file.

as a Communist continued despite the fact that the FBI quoted him saying in public speeches that Communists offered no solution.<sup>36</sup> They likely took this to be a cover for his true subversive intentions.

Baldwin also drew attention for criticizing the Bureau and Hoover. One document cited *The New York Times* of September 19, 1963, in which Baldwin said, "I blame J. Edgar Hoover in part for events in Alabama. Negroes have no cause to have faith in the FBI."<sup>37</sup> Baldwin also appeared on the USIA television program in which he said, "Part of the problem in the civil rights movement is J. Edgar Hoover."<sup>38</sup> In a public speech to the National Lawyers Guild, Baldwin accused the FBI saying, they "...stood by while Negroes were mis-treated and beaten in many places in the south."<sup>39</sup> The FBI became even more concerned when it became known that Baldwin had been contracted for four books with Dial Press, one of which was *The FBI - South*, which would depict the Bureau's response to the southern civil rights movement.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, *The New Yorker* planned to publish a lengthy article by Baldwin on the way the Bureau treated African Americans called "The Blood Counters."<sup>41</sup> Naturally, the FBI strongly desired to obtain copies of these publications before they were released to the public and discredit Baldwin.

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<sup>36</sup> New York Office, "James Arthur Baldwin," March 26, 1964, p. 7, James Baldwin file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>37</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "James Baldwin; Racial Matters; Security Matter - C," September 24, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>38</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "James Baldwin; Racial Matters; Security Matter - C," September 24, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>39</sup> SA [redacted] to SAC, New York (100-10769), "National Lawyers Guild; IS-C," October 31, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>40</sup> Supervisor [redacted] #12 to SAC, New York, "James Baldwin; Proposed Book; FBI - South," July 8, 1964, p. 1, Baldwin file.

<sup>41</sup> SAC, New York (100-146553) to Director, FBI, "'The FBI and the South' by James Baldwin; Proposed Book," July 17, 1964, Baldwin file.

The Bureau considered Baldwin a very important target. Or, at least they said as much in order to justify continuing to follow his activities. One document may be taken as representative when it noted, "The unauthorized disclosure of this source could seriously impair the investigation of subversive matters and thereby endanger the national defense interests of the U.S."<sup>42</sup> In early December, 1963, Hoover was presented information on Baldwin and replied to the New York Office in charge of investigating Baldwin that he was following it closely.<sup>43</sup> The document requesting Baldwin be included in the Security Index said he was "...a dangerous individual who could be expected to commit acts inimical to the national defense and public safety of the United States in time of an emergency."<sup>44</sup> By the end of the month, the FBI listed James Baldwin as a Communist and added him to their Security Index.<sup>45</sup>

In May of 1963, the FBI had discovered related information with which to discredit James Baldwin. An unnamed supervisor wrote, "Information has been developed by the Bureau that BALDWIN is a homosexual, and on a recent occasion made derogatory remarks in reference to the Bureau."<sup>46</sup> The following July, 1964, Hoover indicated an interest in Baldwin's sex life, asking, "Isn't Baldwin a well known pervert?" An agent replied, "While it is not possible to state that he is a pervert, he has expressed a sympathetic viewpoint about homosexuality on several

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<sup>42</sup> SAC, New York (100-151548) to Director, FBI (100-3-116), "CPUSA; Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters; IS-C," October 7, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>43</sup> Mr. [redacted] to Mr. W.C. Sullivan, "James A. Baldwin; Security Matter - C; Racial Matters," December 10, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>44</sup> Director, FBI (62-108763) to SAC, New York (100-146553), "James Arthur Baldwin; Security Matter - C," December 18, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>45</sup> Baldwin file.

<sup>46</sup> [redacted], Supervisor, #12 to SAC, NY (100-16553), "James Arthur Baldwin Information Concerning," May 29, 1963, Baldwin file.

occasions, and a very definite hostility toward the revulsion of the American public regarding it."<sup>47</sup> But, even by 1966, they still could not say definitively. An agent wrote, "It has been heard that BALDWIN may be a homosexual and he appeared as if he may be one."<sup>48</sup>

Their suspicions were raised again in January, 1967, when they found out from a source in Istanbul, where Baldwin was living, that he "...was evicted by the landlord for having homosexual parties."<sup>49</sup> But, they were thrown into confusion that December when Baldwin's sister Paula told an agent she was his wife.<sup>50</sup> The FBI consulted marriage records and found nothing and it took a couple months until they determined that Paula was his sibling.<sup>51</sup>

At one point, the Bureau attempted to find evidence that James Baldwin and Jack O'Dell (Hunter Pitts O'Dell) were in a relationship. One New York agent, listening to their phone conversation, said, "It is noted that in greeting O'DELL, BALDWIN stated 'Hello, baby, how are you' and in closing the conversation stated that 'It's good to hear from you, baby'."<sup>52</sup> The agent presumed this was evidence of a homosexual relationship and stated its significance. He wrote, "This is being set forth because it is noted that in the obscene log sent to the Bureau relating to BAYARD RUSTIN, RUSTIN was in telephonic conversation with another degenerate

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<sup>47</sup> M. A. Jones to Mr. DeLoach, "James Arthur Baldwin; Information Concerning," July 20, 1964, Baldwin file.

<sup>48</sup> NY 100-146553, no title information, March 29, 1966, Baldwin file.

<sup>49</sup> [redacted], "James Arthur Baldwin," May 26, 1967, p. 3, Baldwin file.

<sup>50</sup> SAC, New York (100-146553) to Director, FBI, "James Arthur Baldwin; SM-C," December 28, 1967, Baldwin file.

<sup>51</sup> New York Office, "James Arthur Baldwin," February 12, 1968, Baldwin file.

<sup>52</sup> SAC, New York (100-151548) (100-91330) to Director, FBI (100-38116) (100-358916), "CP, USA - Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters; IS - C; Hunter Pitts O'Dell; IS-C," January 3, 1963, Baldwin file.

named [redacted] (LNU)."<sup>53</sup> A couple weeks later, an agent (perhaps the same one) wrote, "JACK O'DELL contacted JIMMY BALDWIN and said he had a good time the night before. BALDWIN said he enjoyed it too, and O'DELL said he would contact BALDWIN later."<sup>54</sup> These comments are repeated verbatim to show just how slim the evidence was that these two men had a relationship. The agents perhaps realized this as no other portions of Baldwin's sizeable file attempt to insinuate a homosexual relationship between he and O'Dell or any other activist. As with their attempts to discredit Rustin and Kahn, there is nothing to suggest the FBI was effective.

The FBI also maintained a significant file on Lorraine Hansberry and included her on their Security Index for a number of years. While they stated their intention to obtain "all available background material on the subject, any derogatory information contained therein..." their efforts from 1952 to 1965 turned up little on Communist affiliations and nothing on lesbianism. They initially followed Hansberry because of her participation in the Montevideo Intercontinental Peace Congress and her work on the staff of Paul Robeson's *Freedom* magazine. For this, in 1953, they added Hansberry to the Security Index, listing her as a Communist.<sup>55</sup> However, by 1955, the Bureau doubted her placement on the Security Index saying that there was no reliable information placing her in the Communist Party for five years and her involvement in organizations the agency considered Communist

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<sup>53</sup> SAC, New York to Director, FBI, January 3, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>54</sup> SA [redacted] to SAC (100-144189), "Freedomways Associates, Incorporated; IS-C," January 22, 1964, p. 2, Baldwin file.

<sup>55</sup> SAC, New York (100-107297) to Director, FBI, "Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Nemiroff," December 18, 1953, Lorraine Hansberry file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.



fronts did not amount to leadership or substantial participation.<sup>56</sup> But, the following year, when Hansberry began working for People's Artists, Inc., she was added again.<sup>57</sup>

The Bureau showed it was often unsure of how to classify people as Communist or non-Communist and what degree of involvement in an organization was necessary to be considered substantial. This was the same kind of doubt they often showed in determining whether one was homosexual or heterosexual. However, for Lorraine Hansberry, the Bureau never uncovered evidence to question her sexual orientation. At one point, an agent wrote, "Her main occupation, other than housewife, is playwright..."<sup>58</sup>

The file on Barbara Deming is quite limited and also makes no mention of homosexuality, though Deming was more open about her sexual orientation than Hansberry. The FBI was interested in Deming primarily because of the Committee for Non-Violent Action's Walk for Peace from Quebec to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and Deming's trip with three other women to North Vietnam to meet with Ho Chi Minh. The only mention of Deming and her partner came when her partner became embroiled in a custody battle with her ex-husband. The ex-husband's lawyer contacted the FBI seeking derogatory information about Deming, but was not given any. The lawyer mentioned that the man's former wife was living with Deming, but

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<sup>56</sup> SAC, New York (100-107297) to Director, FBI (100-393031), "Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Nemiroff was.; SM-C," August 13, 1955, Hansberry file.

<sup>57</sup> SAC, New York (100-107297) to Director, FBI (100-393031), "Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Nemiroff was.; SM-C," August 10, 1956, Hansberry file.

<sup>58</sup> SAC, New York (100-107297) to Director, FBI (100-393031), "Lorraine Vivian Hansberry Nemiroff," May 11, 1964, Hansberry file.

there was no suggestion that the two were romantically connected and the FBI had no interest in the matter.<sup>59</sup>

Allard Lowenstein's file is lengthier, but there is very little that concerns his extensive civil rights activities. The FBI was primarily concerned about his work with the Spanish opposition to Franco and Americans for Reappraisal of Far Eastern Policy. Lowenstein was also involved in dispute with the FBI, which makes up the bulk of the file. Around 1974, it was alleged that the FBI may have provided Congressman John Rooney, who Lowenstein ran against in 1972, with derogatory information about Lowenstein. But, there is no mention of Lowenstein being gay or bisexual.<sup>60</sup>

The portion of the FBI file on Aaron Henry released thus far does not begin until April, 1970. Evidence that he was investigated during the 1960s has yet to surface. Though, he was almost certainly investigated because Henry was visible on the national stage. He was part of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party's challenge in Atlantic City in 1964 which was constantly monitored so the FBI could provide advance warning of the delegation's moves to President Johnson. He was also the president of the Mississippi NAACP and on the Board of Directors of King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference throughout the 1960s. Henry's FBI file includes a great deal of information concerning homosexuality, including at least five "morals arrests," but not until the 1970s. Most of this information was not

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<sup>59</sup> [redacted] to J. Edgar Hoover, August 6, 1969, Barbara Deming file, Federal Bureau of Investigation. A request for reprocessing revealed that no further information was kept on Barbara Deming.

<sup>60</sup> Allard Lowenstein file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

uncovered until 1979 when Henry was being considered for a presidential appointment in the Carter Administration.<sup>61</sup>

Like Aaron Henry, Pauli Murray's file begins when she was being considered for a federal appointment as general counsel in late 1966. Agents uncovered one arrest which occurred 25 years prior in Providence, Rhode Island. They met with the arresting officer who said, "...she remembers a female Negro in her late twenties was turned over to her department by RISP [Rhode Island State Police]. This woman had been found hitchhiking on highway at time she was picked up by RI SP and dressed in man's clothing."<sup>62</sup> The woman told the officer she "had been taking some kind of hormone treatments at Bellevue Hospital at New York City. The woman told her the treatments were to change her sex as she wanted to be a man."<sup>63</sup> While the officer acknowledged that "...the foregoing information may or may not relate to the applicant..." Murray confirmed the incident.<sup>64</sup>

Ultimately, whether Murray would be appointed general counsel hinged on four items: "her affiliation with Communist Party organizations, the circumstances of her admission and release from Bellevue Hospital, her unconsummated marriage and lack of annulment, and her two arrests and jail sentence." The arrests were for

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<sup>61</sup> Director, FBI to Washington Field Office et al., "Aaron Ed Henry, Special Inquiry," May 22, 1979, Aaron Henry file, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Because no files were released which included any information before 1970, a request for reprocessing was submitted and revealed three files: a 75-page file which covers 1963 to 1968, a 128-page file which covers 1963 to 1964, and a 29 page file from 1964. Only the third file has been released. It deals exclusively with the FBI investigation of a death threat against Aaron Henry made by KKK member Jack M. Helm. It makes no reference to sexual orientation.

<sup>62</sup> SAC, Boston (140-3891) to SAC, New York (140-16717), "Pauli Murray, AKA - Applicant, Federal Administrative and Management Examination, Civil Service Commission," January 3, 1967, p. 1-2, Pauli Murray file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>63</sup> SAC, Boston, "Pauli Murray, AKA - Applicant, Federal Administrative and Management Examination, Civil Service Commission," January 3, 1967, Murray file.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

picketing in New York City in 1935 and for violating bus segregation laws in Virginia in 1940. So, her appointment hinged on civil rights protest, Communist affiliations, and sexual orientation. Despite the fact that the Bureau had uncovered evidence they considered derogatory and could be used to discredit Murray, the FBI said it had no recommendation for or against her appointment.<sup>65</sup>

In his analysis of Lillian Smith's FBI file, Will Brantley says, "Smith's file merits attention for what it reveals about her life and for what it suggests about the ways in which J. Edgar Hoover conflated changes in the racial status quo with an acceptance of Communist ideology." Brantley says, "Hoover and the FBI were relentless in their attempts to undermine and ultimately destroy the civil rights movement." However, despite FBI investigation of Smith, Brantley concludes, "...there is no evidence to suggest that Smith's career was affected by her file."<sup>66</sup>

The FBI knew Igal Roodenko, one of the freedom riders on the 1947 Journey of Reconciliation, to be gay since 1956. However, his FBI file almost solely concerns his anti-war speeches, which the FBI documented as early as 1950, and his role as chairman of the War Resisters League in the 1970s. At a number of different points, his file notes he is "known as a homosexual," "is single and has homosexual tendencies," or lists "Peculiarities: Homosexual." Even in his role as a peace activist,

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<sup>65</sup> Mr. DeLoach to Mr. Tolson, "Pauli Murray; Civil Service Commission; Security of Government Employees," April 4, 1967, Murray file

<sup>66</sup> Will Brantley, "The Surveillance of Georgia Writer and Civil Rights Activist Lillian Smith: Another Story from the Federal Bureau of Investigation," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 85:1 (Spring, 2001), 59, 63, 80.

though, there is no evidence to suggest that homosexuality was used against him or affected his standing in the movement.<sup>67</sup>

The FBI had very little on Laplois Ashford, who was the Youth Secretary of the NAACP. It would seem that the FBI would have a keen interest in the point person in a national civil rights organization who worked with young people. However, Ashford's name appears only three times in the FBI file on 'Communist Infiltration of the NAACP' and no other records on him were kept. The FBI was not even able to locate any public source materials indicating his date or place of birth. They were able to find out that he was black, male, lived in New York City and used to live in Rochester, NY. But, that was the extent of their research.<sup>68</sup>

All of the lesbian and gay activists in the African American civil rights movement were investigated because of their civil rights activities and their supposed Communist affiliations. However, the FBI was often unable to uncover evidence of homosexuality. And, even when such evidence was obtained, the Bureau was reluctant to declare it definitive. In contrast to the general ease with which they labeled a group Communist or a Communist-front, the FBI showed uncertainty when it came to labeling someone a homosexual, "sex deviate" or "pervert." Moreover, there is no evidence that the Bureau was able to effectively use this information against the movement. In fact, records show Hoover was unwilling

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<sup>67</sup> Warren B. Jung, II, "Igal Roodenko; Security Matter - War Resisters League," February 24, 1972, p. 3, 25, Igal Roodenko file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>68</sup> SAC, New York (100-7629 Sub D) to Director, FBI (61-3176), "Communist Infiltration of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; IS - C," November 27, 1963, Communist Infiltration of the NAACP file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

to release FBI intelligence about Rustin's homosexuality to those in Congress who might put it to use against the movement.

However, it should be clear that all of these conclusions are based on the partial evidence which the FBI is willing to release or which remains in their central records system. In one FOIA request, I was told that the subject's file had been destroyed.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, the Freedom of Information Act allows "derogatory personal information" to be withheld, which may or may not be used to exclude intelligence which was collected about sexual orientation. Beyond that, Athan Theoharis has noted, Hoover kept secret office files in which he collected and maintained noncriminal information, such as monitoring homosexual activities. These files were destroyed following his death in 1972 and, as mentioned previously, the hundreds of thousands of pages of information in the FBI's Sex Deviates program were destroyed in 1977. Hoover separated the files and had Communist allegations put in the investigative section and included in central records system while allegations concerning "loose morals" were placed in the administrative section. In this way, "Noncriminal sexual information could later be used at an appropriate time, with both the timing and method of dissemination determined by the cautious FBI director."<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> In response to a FOIA request for any information contained in the Central Records System on Donald Steele, the FBI indicated that his file had been destroyed in 1994. No reason for its destruction was offered. Because Steele did not identify as a gay man until later in life, it is unlikely that this file contained anything derogatory regarding his sexual orientation. Steele suggests that his file likely focused on his trip to Nicaragua with Witness for Peace. Don Steele to author, February 11, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Athan Theoharis, ed., *From the Secret Files of J. Edgar Hoover* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991), 4; Athan Theoharis, *J. Edgar Hoover, Sex, and Crime: An Historical Antidote* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), 73, 69.

While Hoover had such evidence at his disposal, Theoharis observes, “At the same time Hoover recognized the difficulties of confirming intimations of homosexuality and the counter-productivity of a politics of homosexual rumormongering.” Hoover may have wanted to avoid homosexual allegations being lobbed back at him, which they often were. In fact, the Director ordered agents to “monitor and vigorously contain such allegations,” though, this may only have applied to allegations that he made directly or to which his name would be attached. Instead, Theoharis finds, “In the case of radical activists, no holds were barred--in part because the leaking of derogatory personal information about radical activists carried minimal political risk, given their pariah status during the cold war era.” With the FBI’s counterintelligence program (COINTELPRO), the sexual activities of radicals were purposely divulged in the form of letters sent to parents, information given to reporters, and more. According to Theoharis, “The pariah status of radical heterosexuals permitted this more aggressive politics of sex. Even so, the limits of such uses were abandoned in the case of homosexuals, regardless of their political orientation and status.”<sup>71</sup>

Evidence of the use of homosexuality against New Left groups remains extant in FBI files. By the late 1960s, the Bureau clearly indicated an interest in using homosexuality against Left movements. They declared that public exposure and ridicule could be used as a tool to halt social movements. In one instance, an agent wrote,

A leading member of the CP youth was neutralized when the Philadelphia Office publicized his homosexual activity. Weaknesses

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<sup>71</sup> Theoharis, *From the Secret Files*, 330-31; Theoharis, *Hoover, Sex, and Crime*, 24, 98, 100.

and deficiencies of individual members of the New Left should be used by us to neutralize them. Anonymous letters to the parents of individual members of the New Left might very well serve the purpose, neutralizing them through parental discipline.<sup>72</sup>

The FBI also used homosexuality against the Black Panther Party. One file noted,

Boston has developed information to the effect that [redacted] is reportedly a homosexual. Boston proposing a letter to be sent to BPP headquarters over the signature of a Boston officer of the Republic of New Africa which will ridicule the BPP for having [redacted]. This has potential for increasing disruption between the BPP and the Republic of New Africa--these organizations are already feuding, as well as exposing [redacted] to BPP headquarters as a homosexual.<sup>73</sup>

In another instance, the FBI attempted to discredit a black leader in the Chicago area by sending messages about his homosexuality to reporters and his associates. The agent wrote,

The question of homosexuality which is implied in both these communications is not considered one which normally would be of importance in the circles in which [redacted] moves, however, in view of his leadership role, and increasing emphasis upon black pride and masculinity, a question of public identification of a black leader as a homosexual might represent a considerable reflection on this image.<sup>74</sup>

According to historian David Cunningham, the FBI's attacks on Dave Dellinger represented "the clearest case of defining homosexuality as 'perverse' and therefore a valid and effective basis for discrediting a target involved in organized protest activity." Dellinger, a white man who had intimate relationships with both

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<sup>72</sup> SAC, Philadelphia (100-49929) to Director, FBI, "Counterintelligence Program; Internal Security; Disruption of the New Left," May 29, 1968, p. 3, COINTELPRO/New Left-Philadelphia file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>73</sup> Director, FBI to SAC, Boston (157-531), "Counterintelligence Program; Black Nationalist - Hate Groups; Racial Intelligence; Black Panther Party (BPP)," November 7, 1969, COINTELPRO Black Extremist file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>74</sup> SAC, Chicago (157-2209) to Director, FBI (100-448006), "Counterintelligence Program; Black Nationalist - Hate Groups," November 22, 1968, p. 2, COINTELPRO Black Extremist file.



men and women, was involved in community improvement efforts in African American neighborhoods in the late 1930s, helped secure the right to protest in Albany, Georgia, in 1963, after the movement faced repression, wrote at least one speech for Martin Luther King, Jr., and more. He became more well-known as a nonviolent theorist and anti-war leader. Around 1950, Dellinger was arrested on a “morals charge” and a few years later passionately defended Bayard Rustin when his arrest threatened his position in the movement.<sup>75</sup>

Dave Dellinger was well aware of the extreme dangers of being a gay man in America. On March 30, 1947, his younger brother, Fiske Dellinger, went out drinking with his new friend, William Albrecht. That night, Albrecht claimed Fiske made “two improper advances” and Albrecht responded by picking up a large rock, striking Fiske in the head until he died. This event was first and foremost a personal trauma for Dave. But, it carried over into his life as an activist as well. Andrew Hunt writes, “More than any other event in David’s life, the murder of his younger brother confirmed the depravity and futility of violence.”<sup>76</sup>

In the late 1960s, with the New Left COINTELPRO, the Bureau began “a major campaign” to tarnish Dave Dellinger as a gay man. They sent out a letter to New Left groups calling Dellinger a “fairy.” In February, 1969, the Bureau distributed a leaflet with “Pick the Fag Contest” written at the top and pictures of Dave Dellinger, Che Guevara, Mark Rudd and Herbert Marcuse. Though, it is not clear that this affected

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<sup>75</sup> David Cunningham, *There’s Something Happening Here: The New Left, the Klan, and FBI Counterintelligence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 119; Andrew E. Hunt, *David Dellinger: The Life and Times of a Nonviolent Revolutionary* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 39-42, 105, 129-32, 161. Cunningham places the arrest in 1949 and Hunt lists it as 1951.

<sup>76</sup> Hunt, 90-91.

Dellinger's standing among New Left activists. After reviewing his FBI file, Dellinger found they had attempted numerous times to convince reporters to publish stories about his "morals arrest" but were unsuccessful. Still, Dellinger says "the charge quietly haunted him for the next two decades."<sup>77</sup>

While counterintelligence programs had existed since 1956, the FBI never organized one against the African American civil rights movement directly. They had COINTELPROs targeting the "Communist Party, USA" (1956-71), "Socialist Workers' Party" (1961-69), "White Hate Group" (1964-71), "Black Nationalist-Hate Group" (1967-71), and the "New Left" (1968-71).<sup>78</sup> But, their targeting of black nationalists and the New Left did not begin until the late 1960s. On August 25, 1967, the FBI launched its counterintelligence program "Black Hate Groups," which included individuals like Martin Luther King, Jr.<sup>79</sup>

Instead of operating an organized counterintelligence operation against the civil rights movement, Kenneth O'Reilly argues, "A case-by-case examination of the FBI record does in fact reveal a bewildering collage, with Hoover and his men appearing to stand with the movement on one day and with the resistance the next." That conclusion is confirmed by examining the files of gay and lesbian activists in the civil rights movement. References would appear suggesting an intent to use homosexuality to smear the movement, but without any evidence of follow through or effectiveness. Investigative effort appears half-hearted and, in some cases, inept.

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<sup>77</sup> Cunningham, 119-21; Hunt, 105.

<sup>78</sup> United States Senate Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations, "COINTELPRO: The FBI's Covert Action Programs Against American Citizens," April 23, 1976.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth O'Reilly, *Black Americans: The FBI Files* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994), 48-49.

In the case of Pauli Murray, the Bureau found evidence of Communist affiliations, civil rights activities, and homosexuality, but even then expressed no preference whether she was given a federal appointment. Furthermore, attempts to put information about a person's sexual orientation to use against the movement often failed. Even when evidence about private sex lives was given to news organizations, they declined to use it.<sup>80</sup>

### **The Mississippi Sovereignty Commission**

One source of information for the FBI was the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, which funneled results of its investigations to the federal bureaucracy. Unlike the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which had a broad mission and a somewhat hostile, though varying, attitude towards the civil rights movement, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was an investigative agency created specifically to monitor and discredit the movement. However, like the FBI, the Sovereignty Commission was generally unable to uncover much evidence of homosexuality in the movement and there is little evidence that it could effectively use that questionable evidence against the movement. Historian John Howard observes, "...the Sovereignty Commission seemed to stumble across alleged communists and homosexuals--and begin [sic] to vilify homosexuality--only as a

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<sup>80</sup> Kenneth O'Reilly, *Racial Matters: The FBI's Secret File on Black America, 1960-1972* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 7-8, 148.

secondary outgrowth of its broader mission to maintain racial segregation and discredit activists for racial justice.”<sup>81</sup>

In his book *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights*, Yasuhiro Katagiri sets out to analyze the political and social background of the organization's creation, the activities it engaged in, and its impact on the civil rights movement. He argues that Mississippi serves as a classic representation of the Deep South states and that its “sovereignty commission” represented the views of most white Mississippians. The organization was a product of “...a society fears, angers, and sometimes unreasonable reactions of the white citizenry in pursuit of their dogmatic cause of white supremacy dominated the course of the state's politics.” Katagiri notes that many historians have often failed to take account of the fears and uncertainties of white southerners and attempts to remedy that with his work. This section focuses specifically on the State Sovereignty Commission in Mississippi, though it was not the only one. However, the archives of the Louisiana State Sovereignty Commission and the Louisiana State Joint Legislative Assembly on Un-American Activities were burned and only one cubic foot of the latter's files remains.<sup>82</sup>

Mississippians were extremely concerned with any subversive organization. The Sovereignty Commission, created in 1956, took that to mean any group that was listed by the US Attorney General or a Congressional Committee on Un-American Activities as a Communist or Communist-front organization. This was the same list

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<sup>81</sup> O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 179; John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 155.

<sup>82</sup> Yasuhiro Katagiri, *The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission: Civil Rights and States' Rights* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2001), xi-xii, xiv.

that the FBI utilized and it encompassed a variety of groups, often with little if any Communist affiliation. Katagiri notes that in the early 1960s, the state's white leadership expanded this term to include any organization in favor of black civil rights. Because these organizations sought to undermine Mississippi's longstanding way of life, they qualified as "subversive" and the term was used to undermine the cause of black civil rights. The Sovereignty Commission rationalized that civil rights groups, "...will not mention Communism because of its unpopularity and because of the possibility of violating certain federal laws though many of them are hard core Communists." So, even if the civil rights workers made no explicit pro-Soviet or pro-Communist statements, they could still be reasonably construed to be thinly-veiled Communists. Moreover, the commission's goals went beyond anti-Communism and the preservation of segregation. Katagiri argues that besides ensuring segregation and states' rights, the sovereignty commission acted as the state's "moral watchdog." He declares, "Any hearsay that suggested moral lapses did not go unnoticed by the state agency." Among moral concerns, their primary target was "racial miscegenation."<sup>83</sup>

However, white racist fears about race mixing were not always separate from their opposition to homosexuality. For example, Alvin Cobb, who led the Robert E. Lee Patriots, was brought before the Committee Counsel for Louisiana's Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities. Cobb claimed his group was not a Klan organization, though the state believed otherwise. In his testimony, Cobb made

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<sup>83</sup> Katagiri, 87-88, 133; "Meeting of State Officials of several Southern and Western States at Atlanta, Georgia, for the purpose of discussing Communism, racial agitators, the Black Muslim Cult, and subversion in general," investigated by A.L. Hopkins, typed by M. Curry, June 9, 1961, p. 2, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Sovereignty Commission Online.

clear the association between Communism, African American civil rights and homosexuality. He argued,

Now, they have infiltrated the colleges, etc., where the fertilizer for this Communism is being used, and the fertilizer is homosexuality. Homosexuality breeds race-mixing, and when they get so low as to do things like that, they become automatically members to the Communist Party, because if they are not loyal to their pride, their respect, and their honor, they don't have any; when they don't believe in those things, surely they don't believe in anything when they are under the influence of dope or in a homosexual passion where they are ready to sell their country out like Mr. Johnson's friend, Mr. Jenkins.<sup>84</sup>

Assuming Cobb's paranoid testimony can be analyzed as a rational statement of belief, he thought that crossing the boundary of gender in sexual relations would facilitate crossing the boundary of race. Furthermore, the moral degradation he and others associated with homosexuality would make people more susceptible to sacrifice their allegiance to their country and join the Communist Party. Although, it cannot be known the degree he actually parsed his thought on the subject. Rather, his statement comes across as a ball of fears and anxieties tangled together without any strings logically connecting one thought to the next. One can only speculate the degree to which Cobb's thinking represented that of other segregationists, though, he was in a leadership position and a representative for his Klan-front organization.

These fears were reflected in the files of the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. The evidence presented in the Sovereignty Commission files should be read skeptically. Even the investigators themselves occasionally showed awareness that their evidence may not be sound. For example, investigator Tom Scarbrough

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<sup>84</sup> "Transcript of the staff consultation held on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1965, at Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Jack N. Rogers, esq., presiding," p. 72, Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

was concerned that one informant, B.L. Bell, was an opportunist as he requested a state car, expense account and salary “...so that he could travel among his race to combat any type of negro agitation.” Scarbrough suggested, “His desire to obtain this objective could be strong enough to where he might give misinformation concerned anything he might report.”<sup>85</sup>

One of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission primary targets was Aaron Henry, state President of the NAACP. The Sovereignty Commission investigated Aaron Henry’s civil rights activity and his sexual orientation. In January, 1959, the Sovereignty Commission was monitoring Henry. They noted his prominent leadership positions in the NAACP and SCLC. The Sovereignty Commission and others believed that if Henry were pushed out of town, the NAACP would die. They also warned of sexual dangers in the area. Zack Van Landingham, a chief investigator for the Sovereignty Commission and FBI agent for 27 years wrote, “Judge Porter advised that there is an awful situation in Coahoma County around Clarksdale especially, wherein a number of white men are shacking up with Negro women. He says the police have caught them and brought them into his court. He apparently has handled the matters in his chambers to prevent any publicity.”<sup>86</sup>

The authorities were clearly out to get Henry. Noel Monaghan, Mississippi Tax Commissioner, informed Van Landingham that “...Kenneth Williams has tried every way possible to ‘get’ Aaron Henry. He had tried to get Henry in handling dope

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<sup>85</sup> Tom Scarbrough, “Grenada Lake Swimming Party, Investigation of NAACP swimming plans, Cleveland, Mississippi,” June 13, 1960, Aaron Henry file, Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Sovereignty Commission Online, accessed May 21, 2012.

<sup>86</sup> Zack J. Van Landingham to Director, State Sovereignty Commission, “NAACP, Clarksdale, Mississippi,” January 26, 1959, Aaron Henry file, MSSC; O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 179.

and liquor, but Henry has always been too smart to fall for such.”<sup>87</sup> Moreover, Attorney Cage Brewer, Jr., who was an active member of the Clarksdale Citizens’ Council, told Van Landingham, “...the Citizens’ Council are trying every way possible to deflate Aaron Henry in the eyes of the negroes of the community as they will realize he can’t do them any good.”<sup>88</sup>

The Commission apparently obtained a list of names of Aaron Henry’s associates. One of the persons identified was Archie Cowart, a white man from Jackson who worked as an agent for Bankers Life and Casualty Insurance Company. Albert Jones, Director of the Sovereignty Commission, asked Virgil S. Downing to contact Cowart and explore the nature of their relationship. Cowart said he became friendly with Henry because he would supply Cowart with names of African Americans who might be interested in buying insurance.<sup>89</sup>

In the first paragraph of his report, Downing noted Henry’s arrest for “sexual and obscene advances on a white teenager.” He asked Cowart whether Henry attempted “to make any sexual or obscene advances toward him that lead him to believe that he (Aaron Henry) was a homosexual.” Cowart said, “Yes, he had.” Downing reported, on several occasions,

Henry would always set down close to him and would put his hands on his legs so close to his privates that he would have to push his hands off of him. He further stated that Aaron Henry tried several times to get him to go upstairs over the drug store with him. He stated that he didn’t ever remember going upstairs with Henry. He

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<sup>87</sup> Zack J. Van Landingham Memo to File, “Aaron Henry,” February 23, 1960, Henry file, MSSC.

<sup>88</sup> Zack J. Van Landingham Memo to File, “NAACP, Clarksdale, Mississippi,” May 24, 1960, Henry file, MSSC.

<sup>89</sup> “Aaron Henry, colored, male, and Archie Cowart, white, male,” investigated by Virgil S. Downing, typed by M. Curry, Sovereignty Commission Files, March 26, 1962, p. 1-2, box 4, folder 8, Faulkner (Leesha) Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi.



stated that he told his wife that he believed that Aaron Henry was a homosexual and that he was afraid to go around him.<sup>90</sup>

But, there is no evidence that anything more ever came of this accusation.

The Sovereignty Commission also tried to red-bait Aaron Henry. One report cited two calls made by Carl Braden to Aaron Henry. The report listed Braden's roles as a field representative for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, which was listed as a Communist-front organization by the Committee on Un-American Activities House Reports 1311 in 1944 and 592 in 1947. It also listed Braden's convictions under the Kentucky Sedition Act and a writer for *The American Socialist* magazine.<sup>91</sup>

However, Henry was explicitly anti-Communist. When the Mississippi legislature investigated potential subversives in the civil rights movement and held hearings on November 19 and 20, 1959, Henry spoke out against Communists. He said, "The Negroes of the State of Mississippi know nothing about Communism, nor do we have any interest in learning about it...We refuse to be sold this bill of goods called, communism, for we feel that within the framework of Democracy we can secure every element of the freedom we seek..."<sup>92</sup>

Henry made other anti-Communist statements as well. At a rally in Hattiesburg for the Freedom Vote of 1963 he said, "The police of this community are like the Gestapo in Germany and Castro's police in Cuba. They break down the door

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<sup>90</sup> "Aaron Henry, colored, male, and Archie Cowart, white, male," p. 1-2.

<sup>91</sup> John Sullivan, no title, October 30, 1958, MSSC.

<sup>92</sup> Aaron Henry, "Statement approved by Board of Directors as the Official Answer of the NAACP, to charges filed by the Legislative Investigating Committee," November 25, 1959, Henry file, MSSC.

to your homes, drag you out and haul you off to jail for absolutely no reason at all.”<sup>93</sup> It seems unlikely that the Sovereignty Commission would write in anti-Communist statements given by a person they were attempting to discredit. Though Henry, aware of surveillance, may have intentionally made the statement for the informants and investigators in the audience rather than the black voters and their white supporters. It is quite possible as well that the authorities took this as a transparent attempt by Henry to cloak his presumed Communist beliefs, though, these views were not expressed in the report.

Aaron Henry was well aware that the State Sovereignty Commission was monitoring civil rights activities. A report from investigator Zack J. Van Landingham discussed his use of Professor B.L. Bell, the Elementary Supervisor of the Negro Schools in the Cleveland School District, as an informant. In January, 1960, he called Bell for a report on the Regional Council of Negro Leadership. He said he attended their meeting but that Aaron Henry accused him of being an informant for the Sovereignty Commission. Henry knew that Bell had been attending meetings of the NAACP in Meridian, Jackson and a number of other places. Henry called Bell out to make a statement in support of civil rights before the entire group and Bell refused. Bell said that he was a teacher and could not risk supporting the NAACP because he could be fired. Henry then said that there were no other teachers attending these meetings because they were afraid they would lose their jobs, yet Bell attended these meetings and was not afraid. The accusations only stopped when Bell's friend James Carter and Father LaBouse said they knew Bell and knew he would not

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<sup>93</sup> L.E. Cole, Jr. and Louie Risk, "Special Report---Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, Re: Aaron Henry for Governor Rally," October 30, 1963, p. 3, Henry file, MSSC.

inform on the NAACP. The investigator, Van Landingham, suggested that maybe Bell had ceased to be useful to the organization and Bell recommended two other African Americans who could attend meetings and report to the Sovereignty Commission instead.<sup>94</sup>

In a televised speech, Henry attacked the Sovereignty Commission saying, “By supplying the White Citizen’s Council with funds – and by co-operating with its programs – Mississippi’s Sovereignty Commission assures maintenance of the status quo. Extreme racists – seeing their views officially supported – feel justified in continuing their violent operations.” Henry then called for the legislature to abolish the State Sovereignty Commission and in its place create a State Commission on Equality.<sup>95</sup>

While there is little evidence that the Sovereignty Commission successfully used accusations of homosexuality against the Aaron Henry, in their minds, it worked. At the end of October, 1963, Tom Scarbrough again ventured to Clarksdale. He visited Chief Collins and was advised about four white males from Yale who were in Mississippi working on the mock election who had been picked up for loitering about a week prior. On the day Scarbrough arrived, another Yale student, Walter E. Wright, was picked up “on the offense of scattering literature without a permit.” In his report, Scarbrough recalls a lengthy discussion in which he employed the Socratic method to convince Wright of his misadventures. In Scarbrough’s account, Wright pliantly followed as the investigator convinced him that African Americans

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<sup>94</sup> Zack J. Van Landingham, “B. L. Bell,” January 26, 1960, Henry file, MSSC.

<sup>95</sup> Aaron Henry For Governor Headquarters, “Aaron Henry – Ed King Television Speech,” October 17, 1963, p. 3, 5, Henry file, MSSC.

were happy in Mississippi and that civil rights activists wanted blacks to occupy every position of government in order to oppress whites. Scarbrough predicts, "...in all probability the white people in Mississippi would fare the same as the white people fared in the Belgian Congo." To this, Wright responded, "...that he now felt his mission to Mississippi should have never been made. He stated when he got out of jail he was going back to Yale University and oppose the do-gooders views..."<sup>96</sup>

Yet, in Scarbrough's account, even after Wright repeatedly admitted his mistake, the investigator continued the questioning. At one point, Scarbrough wrote,

I asked Wright if he knew he was working in behalf of a Negro mock candidate for governor [Aaron Henry], who is a convicted sex pervert. He said no. I asked him if he knew that a good many of the Negro agitators in Clarksdale were recognized Negro wenches and perverts. He stated, "no." I then told him I would appreciate him advising those who inspired him to come to Mississippi just the type of people he came down and worked in behalf of as what I had told him is absolutely fact.<sup>97</sup>

Having believed Wright was fully converted, Scarbrough turned his attention to the more powerful white agitators, writing, "It is my opinion that Lowenstein is the hard core leader of this bunch and that it might be well for the congressional investigating committee on subversion to check this gentleman out."<sup>98</sup>

The same fears of Communism, black civil rights, and "sex perversion" were evident in the commission's investigations during the Freedom Summer of 1964. In preparation for Freedom Summer, Sovereignty Commission officers traveled around

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<sup>96</sup> "Coahoma County," investigated by Tom Scarbrough, typed by Elizabeth Arnold, November 7, 1963, p. 1.p. 3.

<sup>97</sup> "Coahoma County," November 7, 1963, p. 3-4.

<sup>98</sup> "Coahoma County," November 7, 1963, p. 5.

the state preparing local government and law enforcement for the influx of “outside agitators.” At a meeting held in Oxford on May 1, 1964, Tom Scarbrough, one of the three investigators that had been traveling the state, advised officials that the volunteers for the summer project were “communists, sex perverts, odd balls, and do-gooders.” While it is unclear what a former sheriff and commissioner of public safety had against “do-gooders,” he was representative of many white Mississippians in his antipathy towards Communists and sexual dissidents, two groups that were often conflated. According to Katagiri, the state’s investigation of Freedom Summer workers coincided with a renewed “subversive hunt” program to uncover Communists working in the civil rights movement.<sup>99</sup>

As early as June, 1961, state officials from several southern and western states met in Atlanta, Georgia, “to establish better communications between the various states and to familiarize those present with past and current activities of Communistic, Socialistic, Subversive and Agitative [sic] individuals and groups.”<sup>100</sup> The report of the Sovereignty Commission attempted to identify those individuals involved in the Mississippi Civil Rights movement and listed Jane Stembridge, “w/f, is very active in the Atlanta organization. Reported by G.B.I. [Georgia Bureau of Investigation] to be a sex pervert, and an associate of Negro men of this group.”<sup>101</sup> However, there is no other information on Stembridge and no evidence that this was effectively used against her. She remained in the state through the 1964 Freedom

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<sup>99</sup> Katagiri, 159-60.

<sup>100</sup> “Meeting of State Officials of several Southern and Western States at Atlanta, Georgia, for the purpose of discussing Communism, racial agitators, the Black Muslim Cult, and subversion in general,” investigated by A.L. Hopkins, typed by M. Curry, June 9, 1961, p. 6, MSSC.

<sup>101</sup> “Meeting of State Officials of several Southern and Western States at Atlanta, Georgia, for the purpose of discussing Communism, racial agitators, the Black Muslim Cult, and subversion in general,” investigated by A.L. Hopkins, typed by M. Curry, June 9, 1961, p. 6, MSSC.

Summer, but there is no evidence of “sex perversion” uncovered by the Sovereignty Commission.

While part of this is attributable to the ineffectiveness of the commission as an organization, it is also due to the fact that the vast majority of gay and lesbian activists remained closeted. For example, the Sovereignty Commission files contain a number of references to Linda Seese, a closeted lesbian activist in the civil rights movement. One document provided “Following Mississippi Summer Project Workers believed to be in Mississippi as of the end of June 1964.” The list of COFO workers for the state of Mississippi’s summer project listed Linda Seese under Ruleville as one of the volunteers. In September, 1965, Erle Johnston, Jr., director of the Sovereignty Commission, sent a message to the sheriffs of a variety of counties providing them with a list of civil rights workers arrested in Washington, D.C. for “picketing against Viet Nam policies.” The letter requested that, if any of the individuals on the list were working in their county, the sheriff send information to the Sovereignty Commission, especially if they were involved in the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. This list named nine civil rights workers, including Linda Seese, “age 23, Box 30, Indianola, Mississippi.”<sup>102</sup>

In the first week of September, 1965, Tom Scarbrough, one of the commission’s investigators, traveled to Indianola to find information on the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and Head Start programs. One of the activists Scarbrough was interested in was Linda Seese. Scarbrough wrote, “I checked on Linda Seese, who was a demonstrator protesting U.S. policy in Viet Nam

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<sup>102</sup> No author, “List of COFO Workers,” August 9, 1964, p. 2, 6, MSSC; Erle Johnston, Jr., to Sheriff, September 3, 1965, MSSC.

in Washington, D.C., and was advised by the sheriff that the information on her had been telephoned into this office and was given to Investigator Andy Hopkins and is already a matter of record.”<sup>103</sup>

Linda Seese was also listed among the hundreds of signatories to a petition to congress to abolish the House Committee on Un-American Activities because of its role in preserving segregation and its violations of the First Amendment. The document noted that,

The pervasive feeling among white Mississippians that the civil rights movement is ‘red-inspired’ enables Mississippians to dismiss civil rights protest as illegitimate, to avoid admitting the existence of or charging the intolerable conditions of the Mississippi Negro which give rise to such protest, and to rationalize violence and economic intimidation against Negroes and civil rights workers as ‘patriotic acts’. The red-smears make a volatile Mississippi even more dangerous.<sup>104</sup>

Though it is unclear whether the group was able to effectively red-bait Linda Seese.

On another occasion, Sheriff Bill Hollowell of Indianola stated that, “this subject is connected with the FDP and the Mississippi Labor Union and is a constant companion of Fannie Lou Hamer.” He provided the address of Linda’s father, M.W. Seese in Stow, Ohio. The sheriff also informed the commission that Linda Seese was arrested in Sunflower County in connection with labor union activities on March 5, 1965.<sup>105</sup> However, there is no evidence that accusations of “deviant sexuality” were ever used against her.

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<sup>103</sup> “Sunflower County,” investigated by Tom Scarbrough, typed by Elizabeth Arnold, September 15, 1965, MSSC.

<sup>104</sup> “COFO to Congress,” December, 1964, p. 1-4, MSSC.

<sup>105</sup> Erle Johnston, Jr. to Charles Griffin, September 7, 1965, p. 1, MSSC; A.L. Hopkins to Erle Johnston, Jr., September 7, 1965, p. 1, MSSC.

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission never put together extensive records on Bayard Rustin since he did not have a strong presence in the state. They did include some article clippings about his background, however. One article covered Strom Thurmond's testimony on July 13, 1964, in which he read into the record the criminal history of Rustin including 28 months in prison during WWII as a conscientious objector and a conviction in January, 1953, in Pasadena, California for "sex perversion and lewdness" which included a 60 day sentence. Thurmond also included as part of his criminal history that Rustin attended the Young Communist League meeting in New York in 1956, traveled to the Soviet Union in 1958 and participated in propaganda shows, and organized the March on Washington which "the 'Worker' called a Communist project," and was listed as an official and sponsor of the Highlander Folk School which the state of Tennessee closed "because of the indecent conduct carried on out there."<sup>106</sup>

On August 19, 1963, shortly before the March on Washington, Dick Morphey sent Erle Johnston, Jr. photocopies of Rustin's records in Pasadena, California, as well as Communist Party literature showing that Rustin attended the 16<sup>th</sup> annual national convention in 1957.<sup>107</sup> The records from the Pasadena Police Department listed a number of charges related to conscientious objection and civil rights activism. In Pasadena on January 21, 1953, it listed "Inv. PC 288a Final Chg: PC 647-5" with a disposition of "60 days Co. Jl." The following day in Los Angeles, it listed

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<sup>106</sup> "Bayard Rustin," *The Citizen*, 1965, p. 16, Rustin file, MSSC; Strom Thurmond, "Participation by Dr. Martin Luther King and Bayard Rustin in International Affairs," *Congressional Record - Senate*, September 13, 1965, Rustin file, MSSC.

<sup>107</sup> Dick Morphey to Erle Johnston, Jr., August 19, 1963, Rustin file, MSSC.



“Vag Lewd” with no disposition.<sup>108</sup> The police report sheds light on how “sex perversion” was framed. The report required the investigating officers to present the crime as an assault with the “Person Attacked two male white-Adults” and the “Object of Attack Sexual gratification.”<sup>109</sup>

The Sovereignty Commission became concerned when it was suspected that “Bayard Ruston [sic]...a very strong Leftest [sic], if not Communist” was asked to take over the leadership and planning for the Meredith March because of his experience with the March on Washington. However, during the June 9, 1966, meeting at the Lorraine Motel, Rustin stated that he probably could not take on the project because of other commitments.<sup>110</sup>

Rustin’s Sovereignty Commission file also reveals the misinformation the group received. One report from July 31, 1967 said, “At the Teresa Hotel in New York the Black Panthers held a secret conference. Admittance was by special card only. Bayard Rustin presided at this meeting. It was ascertained Rapp [sic] Brown furnished money for those desiring to attend this meeting.”<sup>111</sup> It is unclear where the Commission would have obtained this information as they did not have an investigative presence in New York. Moreover, it contains an absurd belief about “card-carrying” Black Panthers. The idea that Bayard Rustin and H. Rap Brown, who were quite distant in ideology, would be working together was equally absurd.

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<sup>108</sup> Pasadena Police Department, “Record of Rustin, Bayard – Pasa. #33914,” Rustin file, MSSC.

<sup>109</sup> M. Stornie and R. Heath, “Case No. 66350,” Pasadena Police Department, January 21, 1953, Rustin file, MSSC.

<sup>110</sup> “A meeting was held this evening at the Lorraine Motel...,” June 9, 1966, Rustin file, MSSC.

<sup>111</sup> “Quite a few SNCC workers were in Jackson...” July 31, 1967, p. 2, Rustin file, MSSC.

Finally, H. Rap Brown's name was mis-spelled and he was the Chairman of SNCC. Neither he nor Rustin were Black Panthers.

In another case, historian John Howard suggests that, "Jackson police, perhaps with the help of the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, succeeded in ridding the state of its preeminent white dissident, William Higgs." He continues, "...apprised as they were of Higgs' homoaffectionalism and homosexuality, Sovereignty Commission officials, Jackson police, and other Mississippi residents could use or misuse that knowledge in an effort to silence him. When civil rights leaders evidenced propensities toward queer sex, their enemies were never far behind, ready to capitalize on any misstep."<sup>112</sup>

Bill Higgs met William McKinley Daywalt, a 16 year-old white runaway from Pennsylvania in January, 1963. When Daywalt got involved in an accident driving Higgs' car, the Jackson police questioned him. They found out that he was living with Higgs and the two had a sexual relationship. This resulted in a trial in which Higgs was convicted in absentia for contributing to the delinquency of a minor, which carried a six-month sentence and \$500 fine. Higgs had since fled the state and would never return. He continued to be active in the civil rights movement in Washington, D.C.<sup>113</sup>

The role of the Sovereignty Commission in the Higgs case is unclear. An informant for the Commission who lived near Higgs testified that he saw Daywalt at the house often and the Commission sent an investigator to observe the trial. But,

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<sup>112</sup> Howard, 157-58.

<sup>113</sup> "Trial of Attorney William Higgs, white, male, Hinds County Court, Friday, February 15, 1963," investigated by A.L. Hopkins, typed by M. Curry, February 15, 1963, p. 1-3, Williams Higgs file, MSSC. This was not a case of statutory rape and the age of consent in Mississippi at present is 16.

other than that, there is nothing in the files to suggest that the Commission engineered this case. Although, it is possible that they manufactured the situation and it was never included in the records or was subsequently removed. There also does not appear to be evidence that the Commission knew Higgs was gay. Howard suggests that the timing of the charge makes sense because Higgs had just filed a lawsuit to get Dewey Green into Ole Miss. So, it would seem appropriate that the state would retaliate against Higgs by fabricating criminal charges. But, that begs the question, why did the state not use a “trumped up morals charge” against Higgs two years earlier when he filed a lawsuit which attacked the Sovereignty Commission directly? Howard’s suggestion that the Jackson Police coerced Daywalt into fabricating the story seems more likely as he later retracted his statement.<sup>114</sup>

The Sovereignty Commission continued after Freedom Summer, but in continually diminished form. By the end of 1965, Governor Johnson suggested a name change for the commission which would focus its efforts more on information or public relations. In 1966, the Sovereignty Commission was nearly eliminated. While preserved, its funding continually declined. However, the Commission was revived in 1968 under Governor John Bell with his appointment of former FBI Agent W. Webb Burke.<sup>115</sup> In the end, the commission was unable to uncover much information about “sex perversion” they believed was so rampant among civil rights

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<sup>114</sup> W.F. Minor, “Suit to Block Funds Is Filed,” *Times Picayune*, January 8, 1961, Higgs file; Howard, 157-59. Higgs filed a lawsuit in federal district court to prevent the State Sovereignty Commission from making its \$5000 monthly donation to the White Citizens Councils.

<sup>115</sup> “Agency History,” Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/scagencycasehistory.php](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/scagencycasehistory.php)

activists. Nor does the organization appear to have been able to effectively use the pieces they did uncover against the movement.

### **Southern Newspapers**

A key piece of the Sovereignty Commission's strategy in discrediting the civil rights movement would have been disseminating derogatory information about activists through southern newspapers. Given that the commission seems to have had the most information on homosexuality with regard to Aaron Henry, it would make sense that white-run southern newspapers would be using this information against him. In March, 1962, Mississippi NAACP leader Aaron Henry was picked up by police after being accused of making sexual advances towards an 18-year old white male hitchhiker named Sterling Lee Eilert. Henry would later claim it was all a set up, but the evidence from the local paper, the *Clarksdale Press Register*, provides little evidence that the "morals charge" had much impact on Henry.

For as scandalous as the charge against Aaron Henry could have been, *The Clarksdale Press Register* raised little clamor over the issue. Their first story on the case was picked up from the UPI in Cleveland, Mississippi. "Hitchhiker Makes Claim: State NAACP President To Be Tried in Cleveland," appeared on the front page but was only six paragraphs in length and placed lower than a tranquil story about President Kennedy's weekend vacation to the family's estate in Virginia. The paper reported that Henry, identified as the state president of the NAACP, faced a "morals

charge” after an 18-year old hitchhiker complained that Henry made “rude and obscene advances” towards him while giving him a ride on March 3, 1962.<sup>116</sup>

The young man was Sterling Lee Eilert, though not identified by name in the paper. He claimed to have gotten out of the car in Shelby where he reported the incident to police. According to Eilert, he took down the license plate number and gave it to police, who then traced it to Henry. They reported Henry’s response that he never left the Clarksdale city limits that day and had several people who would verify he never left town. Henry spent the night in jail before being released on \$1000 bond. He was also free on bond for helping initiate a boycott of white merchants in Clarksdale last December, for which he was convicted and sentenced to six months in jail. But, this issue was pending appeal to a higher court.<sup>117</sup>

A couple days later, *The Clarksdale Press Register* ran a story equal in length, though this time on page 12, which detailed Henry’s response to the story. Henry said he filed a formal complaint with the Justice Department charging that Clarksdale Police Chief Ben Collins and Coahoma County Prosecutor Thomas H. Pearson “cooked up a diabolical plot” against him and violated his civil rights.<sup>118</sup> Though, the offense and trial took place in Bolivar County, not Coahoma County, and Henry stated that he did not believe authorities there were a part of a plot against him.<sup>119</sup> However, on March 14, Henry was convicted. *The Clarksdale Press Register* picked up the six-sentence story from the UPI in Shelby and printed it on page 7. It

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<sup>116</sup> “Hitchhiker Makes Charge: State NAACP President To Be Tried In Cleveland,” *The Clarksdale Press Register*, March 5, 1962, 1.

<sup>117</sup> “Hitchhiker Makes Charge,” 1.

<sup>118</sup> “FBI Investigation Asked: NAACP President Raps ‘Plot’ By Officers,” *The Clarksdale Press Register*, March 7, 1962, p. 12.

<sup>119</sup> “High Court Rules For Aaron Henry,” *The Clarion Ledger* (Jackson), March 29, 1965.

merely said that Henry was convicted, sentenced to six months in jail and fined \$500, and filed an appeal bond.<sup>120</sup> That was the extent of the local coverage of the issue.

It seems that if the Chief Collins and Prosecutor Pearson had cooked up a “diabolical plot” to discredit Henry with a “morals charge,” the local paper was not obliging them by making a major issue of it. *The Clarksdale Press Register* provided a fairly impartial reporting of the facts of the case and gave voice to Henry’s claim that it was all a set-up. In this instance, there was little evidence that homosexuality could discredit a local and statewide civil rights leader.

Henry continued to insist that he had been set up. According to him,

I was accused of picking up a young white hitchhiker near Mound Bayou and asking him to find me a white woman. When the boy said he couldn’t do that, the conversation had allegedly moved to other forms of sex. I was supposed to have told the boy that he would have to play the role of substitute if he couldn’t find a white woman for me.<sup>121</sup>

For Henry, the “morals charge” against him marked a new development in white opposition. He said, “Standard charges were getting old, and even those who screamed them the loudest were beginning to feel foolish. So they picked a new charge—one detested equally by whites and Negroes—homosexuality.” Such accusations would prevent young men from joining the movement “where they might be accused of homosexuality.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> “NAACP President Convicted On Charge By White Youth,” *The Clarksdale Press Register*, March 14, 1962, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press, of Mississippi, 2000), 121.

<sup>122</sup> Henry with Curry, 124.

## Selma

While there is little evidence that the newspaper in Clarksdale used its platform to discredit Aaron Henry, there was an outpouring of writing about homosexuality in the civil rights movement in Selma. There is no other comparable area where claims of “sex perversion” were so widespread. Many of these reports feed off of each other or draw on the same contrived source material to build an outlandish story meant to discredit the movement.

Albert C. (Buck) Persons released an account of events titled *The True Selma Story: Sex and Civil Rights* in April, 1965, that received a great deal of attention. Persons was a journalist for *Life* magazine who was sent by Congressman William Dickinson to cover events in Selma. His account was picked up by reputable publications like *Time*, *Newsweek* and *US News and World Report*. Historian Mary Stanton writes that, as a result of Persons writing, “anti-race mixing sentiment was blazing all over Lowndes and Dallas Counties.” Local papers like the *Selma Times Journal* and the *Tuscaloosa News* printed articles denying Persons account of events and attempted to reduce the hysteria.<sup>123</sup>

In his brief account, Persons includes a chapter titled “Bayard and Ralph: Just a Couple of the Boys.” Persons identifies Rustin and Abernathy as two of “...those who use the cause, and the cloth, for basically evil purposes.” Rustin is described as

...a homosexual who solicits on city streets, whose life’s work is the subversion of the moral fibre of the youth of America, and who led Martin Luther King from obscurity to a position of such eminence in

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<sup>123</sup> Mary Stanton, *From Selma to Sorrow: The Life and Death of Viola Liuzzo* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 144-48.

the eyes of many of his followers that they actually kneel when he walks past.<sup>124</sup>

Persons' account was accompanied by a full reprint of the police report from Rustin's "sex perversion" arrest in Pasadena in January, 1953. The author disclaimed any interest in the sexual activities of civil rights activists, writing, "In this enlightened age we are neither surprised nor concerned with a person's private sex practices."<sup>125</sup>

Persons also added that Rustin was an organizer in the Communist Party for 12 years and worked in the War Resisters' League encouraging men to avoid military service, which Persons claimed was "...if not a direct attempt to overthrow the government, is at least an indirect effort which, if successful, will accomplish the same purpose." However, because Rustin was arrested for sex in a car late at night, his homosexual activities were "...offensive and call into question a person's mental balance and standards of values."<sup>126</sup>

It may, in fact, have been Rustin's arrest which inspired so many fabricated accounts of lewd behavior in the Selma-to-Montgomery March as Persons added that imitations of Rustin's behavior were "widely in evidence" in the freedom march. Persons writes of Rustin's arrest and claims of Abernathy's having sex with a married woman and underage girls, that, "It is not pretty reading but it should be

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<sup>124</sup> Albert C. Persons, *Sex and Civil Rights: The True Selma Story* (Birmingham: Esco Publishers, Inc., 1965), 13-14.

<sup>125</sup> Persons, 14.

<sup>126</sup> Persons, 14.



instructive to any who are interested in knowing in what direction the civil rights movement may be moving.”<sup>127</sup>

The following year, Selma Sheriff Jim Clark published *The Jim Clark Story*, which was, in many ways, similar to Persons work. While the title gives the appearance of an autobiography, the cover includes the inflammatory subtitle “I Saw Selma Raped” and is more narrowly focused on the civil rights struggle in 1965. The book begins with a forward by Louis W. Hollis who tells the story of a secret session of the Communist International in early 1963 in which the group plotted to overthrow the government of the United States. However, according to Clark, they were not going to set their sights on Washington. Rather, they needed to start small. They decided, “...we have to overthrow local government. The key office in local government is that of Sheriff.” Moreover, they felt they must concentrate on the South, which had a large black population that would be vulnerable to Communist influence as well as atomic installations nearby. Finally, the Communist International concluded, they needed to target Jim Clark specifically.<sup>128</sup>

Clark then lays out the intent of his book. He writes, “My purpose is rather to defend all the decent, law-abiding citizens of this nation from becoming the unwitting victims of a group of people who are morally depraved, personally degenerate, intellectually dishonest, and politically motivated by driving ambitions for purely personal gain and power.”<sup>129</sup> He felt that the public did not know any better and lacked a reliable source of information. He would be that impartial

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<sup>127</sup> Persons, 14.

<sup>128</sup> Louis W. Hollis, “Foreward,” in *The Jim Clark Story* by James G. Clark (Selma: Selma Enterprises, Inc., 1966).

<sup>129</sup> Clark, 3.

reporter. Clark also made clear from the outset that he and the people of Selma were not racists. He said the revulsion people felt about the Selma to Montgomery march was,

a revulsion not for Negroes attempting to improve themselves and their status, but rather the normal reaction of decent people against an organized invasion of their community by groups of degenerates of both races whose personal behavior was openly indecent, sexual in nature, and whether by design or otherwise, bound to provoke.<sup>130</sup>

Clark claimed that many white southerners were not opposed to black civil rights; they were opposed to sexual degeneracy, which was often meant to refer to homosexuality. He warned his readers, “You’re going to need a strong stomach to listen to all I have to tell you.”<sup>131</sup>

Clark positions his tall tale as a compendium of “irrefutable facts,” insists “the proof was all there,” and points out that his sources all took oaths of honesty, which is the “best way to separate fact from fiction.” He includes stories about how volunteers for the movement were paid with sex, people discussed and engaged in interracial sex, religious officials engaged in sex, which included having sex with underage girls, and more. Clark also made homosexuality a central part of his depiction of the movement. He includes the report of one persons who said, “I saw a white male meet a Negro male on the front porch of Rev. Lewis’ parsonage; they embraced and kissed each other mouth to mouth.”<sup>132</sup> On another occasion,

... about 200 demonstrators were singing in the street while I observed a limp-wrist white male standing in the front row with a blanket over his shoulder and a black male’s shoulder. This white man had his arm around the Negro and at one time he kissed the

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<sup>130</sup> Clark, 7.

<sup>131</sup> Clark, 7.

<sup>132</sup> Clark, 7, 30-31, 33-34, 37.

Negro in the mouth with a long lingering kiss. A few minutes later these two men walked out of the line together, arm in arm, toward the church.<sup>133</sup>

Like many others, Clark was also sure to note “Martin Luther King has associated intimately for years with Bayard Rustin, a confirmed homosexual who has been jailed several times...”<sup>134</sup> In all three instances, homosexuality in the movement was linked to the church. Men were either kissing in front of the parsonage, kissing before they made their way to the church or working closely with religious figures. An essential part of using homosexuality against the movement was connecting it to religious figures to show them as imposters or advocates of a false or perverted form of Christianity.

Clark made clear that, to him, the civil rights movement was not about racial justice. Instead, it was an attempt to impose a new moral regime in American culture, which would transform society in unimaginable and abhorrent ways. Clark concluded,

Make no mistake about it, sex and civil rights go together--in the most licentious ways possible to imagine. And it is not an incidental by-product of a movement involving youthful protestors against a society with which they find difficulty identifying...To me it spells out the deterioration of the moral fiber of at least a large part of the young people of our nation...it has also become clear to me that their participation and identification with civil rights activities is deliberate, by design, and desired by civil rights leadership.<sup>135</sup>

Similarly, “The leadership, direction and control of the civil rights movement is in the hands of the communists and communist sympathizers. The participation of

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<sup>133</sup> Clark, 38.

<sup>134</sup> Clark, 42.

<sup>135</sup> Clark, 42-43.

communists in the civil rights movement is neither accidental nor incidental..."<sup>136</sup>

Sheriff Clark used his account to bring together concerns about sex, civil rights, and Communism.

Robert M. Mikell also wrote a similar, but much lengthier, account of the events in Selma, which was published in 1965. Like Clark, Mikell's account seems to be intended as slander against the entire moral vision of the black freedom struggle. Mikell quotes representative William Dickinson, who asserted, "Another prime aim of the Communist Party, U.S.A., is to destroy our moral strength. The sex orgies that occurred [sic] in Selma, Montgomery, and on the march between the two cities, were an effective medium through which to accomplish this objective."<sup>137</sup>

There appears to be a recognition that integration gained some acceptance as white people become more comfortable with the notion of sharing public spaces with African Americans. So, Mikell's account is an attempt to show that integration is, in fact, not about sharing public space. His attempt is a desperate measure to prove that integration is much worse than what people expect in order to maintain or strengthen the opposition. By linking civil rights activists with other causes that people do not approve of, it seemed Mikell hoped to de-legitimize the cause of black civil rights. He also attempted to convince the public that the breaking of segregation laws would lead to the breaking of other laws.

Like Clark, Mikell's account includes a range of sexual activity, but places more of an emphasis on drugs and alcohol. Of particular concern to Mikell is that, according to him, white women have been "imported" from northern states to have

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<sup>136</sup> Clark, 114.

<sup>137</sup> Robert M. Mikell, *Selma* (Charlotte, NC: Citadel Press, 1965), 218.

sex with local black men. These black men will become accustomed to having sex with white women and, when the northern volunteers return home, begin seeking out local white women.<sup>138</sup>

Mikell also attempts to discredit the religious figures in the movement. He cites Chief Deputy Sherriff of Dallas County Leonard G. Crocker testifying, "On two occasions, one of these so-called white ministers was seen kissing a Negro male, and when I say kissing him, I mean kissing him right in the mouth. We have affidavits to support this." Mikell also recounts the incident in which two men kissed each other on the mouth in front of Rev. Lewis' parsonage. Later in his account, Mikell attempts to explain why people who society considers to lack morals (though he does not explicitly mention homosexuals in the passage) join the civil rights movement. According to Mikell, "They flock to the standard of civil rights because this clothes them with a morality and a purpose which they otherwise lack..."<sup>139</sup>

Mikell also attempts to position himself as an unbiased reporter. He argues that all of the sexual activity occurred but when northern reporters wrote about it, their editors deleted it before the stories went to press. On another occasion, one of the sheriff's posse was going to take pictures of all the sex going on around them, but the sheriff asked him not to, presumably out of a sense of decency. Mikell also cites Robert M. Shelton, the Imperial Wizard of the United Klans of America who said he has seen film of the "sexual instances" but "will not go into full details of any sex relations." Shelton also saw many reporters "saw these sex acts actually committed" but, for some reason, "It was virtually impossible to take pictures."

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<sup>138</sup> Mikell, 10.

<sup>139</sup> Mikell, 9, 18, 196.

Alternatively, Rep. Dickinson said that the Alabama Commission for the Preservation of the Peace hired a film crew which recorded thousands of feet of footage which prove all of his claims. Though, that footage appears to have been conveniently lost.<sup>140</sup>

Mikell also attempts to discredit martyrs of the movement. Reverend James Reeb was beaten and died in Selma, which served to highlight the brutality of white racist response to the struggle. Mikell suggests that Reeb died because the “Negro ambulance” stopped for an hour to fix a flat tire. In this way, he can absolve Reeb’s attackers for his death. In another instance, Robert Shelton of the Klan links Reeb with homosexuality. He says, “Some of his associates, according to newspaper clippings which I have from California, were arrested for sponsoring a sex pervert party under the auspices of the clergy.”<sup>141</sup> Shelton also links the federal government, which had begun to intervene to protect civil rights activists and promote civil rights legislation, with homosexuality. He says,

There are many known individuals in key positions in the government who have a questionable security background, rejected by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, who have later been appointed to federal positions. I think that sex perversion is known to be in our government and is certainly worth investigating. They tried to square it and keep it quiet, but the facts are available and have already been exposed. Many people wondered why L.B. Johnson was making his conservation move after he took over as President and why he was so interested in cutting out so many lights in the White House. After the Jenkins episode, we could see why he was doing it.<sup>142</sup>

In both Clark and Mikell’s accounts, there were no mentions of lesbianism.

Every homosexual in the movement was a man: it was two men kissing, Bayard

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<sup>140</sup> Mikell, 11, 86, 170, 208.

<sup>141</sup> Mikell, 20, 171.

<sup>142</sup> Mikell, 180.

Rustin in a leadership position, James Reeb having a “sex pervert party,” and so on. These accounts were all written by men as well. Moreover, the gay interactions that people claim to have witnessed never went beyond kissing. The heterosexual encounters included visible public intercourse. According to Mikell, there were numerous instances of “...sexual relations in the streets of Selma and Montgomery between whites and Negroes...” and, he continues, “These intercourses were seen by the law enforcement officers, news reporters, and the general public.”<sup>143</sup> Nothing similar can be imagined occurring between two men or two women. This is probably out of a sense of propriety. Clark and Mikell wanted to ensure white southerners were repulsed by the “degeneracy” of the movement, but did not write with such explicit detail that readers would resent the messenger for disgusting them. In this way, segregationist writers maintained a wall between the black movement and the white public, protecting them both from the movement and knowing the “true nature” of the movement.

Though no direct link can be made, it is interesting to note that while Selma was the subject of a vociferous reaction to the civil rights movement and its supposed association with sexual deviance, it remained uniquely homophobic, even in the region through the 1980s. Neil Miller notes in *In Search of Gay America* that

Some degree of racial progress has come to Selma, symbol of black aspirations and white intransigence. But gay liberation has hardly come at all. No gay-rights marchers have made their journey over the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Not one brave soul has ever stood up publicly and proclaimed, “I’m gay and I’m proud and I live here too.”<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Mikell, v, 7.

<sup>144</sup> Neil Miller, *In Search of Gay America: Women and Men in a Time of Change* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989), 16.

While Montgomery had gay bars in the late 1980s, Selma did not. Birmingham had Sunday evening lesbian potlucks, a women's bar and women's music production company, which were presumably open to lesbians, but Selma did not. Instead, gays in Selma remained closeted and Anita Bryant, a nationally-recognized anti-gay crusader, made Selma her home. Miller concluded, "For if times had changed for gay people in small-town America, there was little indication of it in Selma."<sup>145</sup>

### **Attempts to Use Accusations of Homosexuality Against White Segregationists**

In 1965, Murray Martin, the Grand Dragon of the Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan was brought before the Committee Counsel for Louisiana's Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities. He was asked the qualifications for being a member of his Klan and responding by saying one must be serious and unselfish, a native-born white gentile American citizen, opposed to foreign rule, believe in the tenets of Christianity, esteem American institutions among any other, defend and preserve American institutions, believe in "Klanishness" and protect and enforce it, strive for eternal maintenance of white supremacy, obey the Constitution, and be dependable. The chair asked, "Mr. Martin are there any other qualifications for membership other than the ones you have read to me?" Martin responded, "I believe not. I would like to say that we are trying our best to eliminate undesirables from our Organization. I would also like to state that we have no sex-perverts, or

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<sup>145</sup> Miller, 16-20, 22.



homosexuals, or beatniks in our Organization, and I defy anyone to find them.”<sup>146</sup> Murray’s exaggerated denial, when he was not even asked about “sex perverts” specifically, is evidence of the sensitivity of white hate groups to charges of homosexuality.

In fact, accusations of homosexuality were used against segregationists. While the Bureau desired to use homosexuality to discredit the civil rights movement, they seemed to have more effectively used it against the movement’s opponents, though this was not by choice. Of the five major counterintelligence programs run by the FBI, only the ‘White Hate Group’ COINTELPRO was created in response to outside pressure. The Bureau ran this extra-legal counterintelligence operation alongside an official investigation of segregationist groups violating Reconstruction Era statutes.<sup>147</sup>

Although racist groups were also speaking out against homosexuals, there is evidence that at least one, the American Nazi Party (ANP), seems to have been dealing more with homosexuality among its own membership. The 1965 FBI report on the American Nazi Party indicates,

Although [George Lincoln] Rockwell speaks against “queers,” there is evidence that some homosexuals have sought refuge in the ANP. Some members on the west coast, including former leader Leonard Holstein, were accused of homosexual activities. Recently, a member of the Party directed a letter to Rockwell complaining of the homosexual activities of “top men in the ANP” and threatening to resign in the absence of official action. He stated he could tolerate the

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<sup>146</sup> “Transcript of staff consultation held on April 17, 1965, at 7:22 P.M., at Columbia, Louisiana. Jack N. Rogers, esq., Committee Counsel for the Joint Legislative Committee on Un-American Activities, Presiding,” p. 21, Original Knights of the Ku Klux Klan file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>147</sup> O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 195, 200.

reputation of being a fascist but could never tolerate an association with “queers.”<sup>148</sup>

While the Nazi Party was seeking to root out gays in its organization, the FBI, in its counterintelligence program, effectively used homosexuality against white hate groups. One document reveals, “In 1965, counterintelligence activity was taken against [redacted] ANP. ReRHairtel reveals that [redacted] has resigned his position with the ANP and has reverted to his former homosexual activities.”<sup>149</sup> Unlike the civil rights leaders who supported Rustin, the ANP would not back a leader who was gay. White supremacist groups, being more homophobic, were consequently more vulnerable to accusations of homosexuality.

In another instance, the FBI had found in 1956 that Matthias Koehl, Jr. and another member of the National Socialist White People’s Party (NSWPP, formerly the American Nazi Party) were homosexual. When Koehl succeeded George Lincoln Rockwell following the commander’s murder in 1967, the FBI moved to use the information it had long known about Koehl’s sexual orientation against him. A number of FBI offices concurred that a letter should be sent out informing members of Koehl’s homosexuality. The Chicago Division also suggested that subscriptions to a number of gay publications should be taken out in Koehl’s name and be mailed to him at the NSWPP Headquarters which “would perhaps cause further disruption

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<sup>148</sup> “American Nazi Party,” June, 1965, p. 34, American Nazi Party file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>149</sup> Director, FBI (157-9-01) to SACs, Richmond (157-846); Atlanta (157-826); Baltimore (157-865); Birmingham (157-835); Los Angeles; Mobile (157-582), “Counterintelligence Program; Internal Security; Disruption of Hate Groups (Klanzi Party),” November 8, 1966, COINTELPRO White Hate Groups file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

and suspicion among the officers and workers in the office.”<sup>150</sup> While the degree of effectiveness in disrupting the party cannot be measured, in other instances the FBI was able to have party leaders removed for homosexuality and the ANP showed itself vulnerable to accusations of “harboring queers.”

### **Gays Against the Civil Rights Movement**

The Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission was able to gain local black informants and form alliances with African Americans against the civil rights movement like Henry Harrison Humes, Reverend of New Hope Baptist Church in Greenville and editor of the *Delta Leader*; Percy Green, editor and publisher of the *Jackson Advocate*, Rev. J.W. Jones, editor and publisher of *Community Citizen*’ Rev. M.L. Young of the Mutual Association of Colored People, South; and Rev. C. Fain Kyle’s Dedicated independent Society Committee Against Racial Demonstrations (DISCARD).<sup>151</sup> The Sovereignty Commission also promoted the Mississippi Negro Citizenship Association to attract the “thinking Negroes of Mississippi” and undercut the efforts of the Council of Federated Organizations.<sup>152</sup>

However, there is no evidence they were able to co-opt gays and lesbians to help them, at least until after the height of the civil rights movement in Mississippi. One white gay man, Eddie Sandifer, who had been active in efforts for black civil rights in Mississippi, did assist the Sovereignty Commission in a very limited

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<sup>150</sup> SAC, Chicago (157-382) to Director, FBI, “Counterintelligence Program; Disruption of Hate Groups; National Socialist White People’s Party (NSWPP); Alexandria Division; Racial Matters,” October 14, 1970, COINTELPRO White Hate Groups file.

<sup>151</sup> Katagiri, 18-21, 36-63, 159-161.

<sup>152</sup> “Agency History,” Sovereignty Commission Online, Mississippi Department of Archives and History, [http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital\\_archives/sovcom/scagencycasehistory.php](http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/digital_archives/sovcom/scagencycasehistory.php)

capacity in 1969. Mississippi Sovereignty Commission records show a check for \$16.00 from Director W. Webb Burke on February 7, 1969, to Sandifer.<sup>153</sup> Another document from March 31, 1970 written by Burke requested \$50.00 to give to an informant for information and expenses. Burke wrote, "This \$50.00 was expended to assist this confidential source on his expenses to Atlanta, Ga. to attend the Youth Social Alliance April 4 and 5, 1970." However, Sandifer was not able to make the trip and Burke retained the money.<sup>154</sup>

In a memorandum dated May 18, 1970, Burke noted that Eddie Sandifer, a white male employed at the Magnolia Home for Convalescents in Jackson, was also known as "Ronnie Davis." Burke made note of his expense, "\$20.00 paid to Ronnie Davis to confidential source for his attendance at the meeting of the A.C.L.U. (American Civil Liberties Union) at Millsaps College on May 9, 1970, \$10.00 of which constitutes dues for 1970 for source."<sup>155</sup> Sandifer appears to have had some disagreement with the ACLU, as he dropped his membership in the 1970s when the organization defended the KKK. When it was discovered in 1998 that Sandifer had briefly aided the Sovereignty Commission, he said, "I'm sorry it happened. I'm not trying to give an excuse for it. What I did was wrong." He added, "It's something I will regret for the rest of my life." According to the second president of the ACLU in

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<sup>153</sup> "Requisition for Issuance of Warrant No. 2861-167," February 19, 1969, MSSC.

<sup>154</sup> W. Webb Burke, no title, March 31, 1970, p. 1, MSSC.

<sup>155</sup> W. Webb Burke, "Memorandum: Ronnie Davis," May 18, 1970, p. 1, MSSC. The real Ronnie Davis was a founder of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and director of the Center for Radical Research, as an article about the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago contained in the Sovereignty Commission's files notes. "Yippies' Will Help Taunt Democrats in Chicago," *Human Events*, April 6, 1968, MSSC.

Mississippi, Charles Horwitz, there was no damage from Sandifer's reports to the Sovereignty Commission.<sup>156</sup>

Tom Kahn later tried to work with the FBI, but, like Sandifer, was not out to oppose efforts towards racial justice. In 1976, he and a man from the International Labour Programme at Georgetown University came to FBI Headquarters "to offer whatever information they had concerning the NCLC [National Caucus of Labor Committees], and at the same time, obtain certain information regarding the NCLC that would benefit them." Kahn came to the FBI because, according to him, labor officials in the Harrisburg-York area were being harassment by NCLC members, who reportedly shot at the home of one labor leader. The FBI noted that Kahn had been an admitted member of the Young Socialist League, active in the civil rights movement and an associate of Bayard Rustin "a New York City (NYC) negro leader who was reportedly under communist influence in the 60's."<sup>157</sup>

This later situation is of interest in particular because it may reveal changing attitudes towards homosexuality within the FBI. Years later, in 1983, it was suggested that the Bureau might be able to recruit Kahn, who held an executive position in the AFL-CIO, to provide information on Communist infiltration of labor unions. The file noted that "Kahn is reportedly a homosexual." However, "FBIHQ believes that Kahn is in a position to assist the FBI."<sup>158</sup> This shows that the Bureau no longer believed homosexuality to be linked to Communist subversion or make an

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<sup>156</sup> Beverly Pettigrew-Kraft, "Sandifer spied for spy agency," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson), July 4, 1998, p. 1A, 10A.

<sup>157</sup> W.R. Wannall and R.L. Shackelford, "National Caucus of Labor Committees (NCLC)," January 20, 1976, Kahn file.

<sup>158</sup> Director, FBI (100-3)(SUB 60) to FBI Washington Field (229-1), "Communist Party USA, Metropolitan, Washington, D.C.," January 11, 1983, Kahn file.

individual vulnerable to blackmail. The agency was willing to work with someone it knew to be homosexual and who had past affiliation with socialist groups if it could benefit them.

Finally, it is not the case that the civil rights movement and the FBI were intractable opponents. Kenneth O'Reilly observes that "FBI surveillance activities received implicit if limited approval not only from the Kennedy administration, but from some sections of the civil rights movement itself." A number of activists in the movement were concerned about Communist infiltration and, more importantly, cooperated in the hopes they would gain the protection of the Bureau.<sup>159</sup>

Armistead Maupin, the gay author and journalist known most widely for writing *Tales of the City* (1976), was a student at the University of North Carolina at the height of the civil rights movement in Chapel Hill and opposed the black freedom struggle. Maupin was raised in a racist and segregationist environment. He says of his father, "He was my hero, and I mimicked his conservative politics until I began to be bothered by his racism. He would rant about 'niggers' and Jews and fairies and anyone else who was different. He still does -- just doesn't include fairies, of course, when I'm around." Maupin had little contact with African Americans as he attended a segregated high school in Raleigh, North Carolina. Maupin recognized around 7<sup>th</sup> grade that he was different. He read that homosexuality was a mental illness and tried to find the courage to tell his parents "before it was too late to fix him," but never did. While the recognition of one's own difference might lead to identification with others who are different, this was not the case with Maupin. Biographer

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<sup>159</sup> O'Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 104-8.

Patrick Gale observes, “Possibly to compensate for the social unacceptability of the sexual urges he could neither ignore nor dare act upon, he was growing into a deeply reactionary young man.”<sup>160</sup>

In college, Maupin found a political mentor in Jesse Helms, then the owner of a local TV station who would take to the airwaves to speak out against civil rights radicalism, Communists and Communist sympathizers. In college, Maupin wrote an article for *The Daily Tar Heel* in which he spoke out against the civil rights movement. Maupin argued that blacks must accept much of the blame for racial problems. He pointed to cities like Washington, D.C., Detroit, Philadelphia and Chicago, which he believed had integrated their schools, restaurants, and recreational facilities, but still faced racial problems. Maupin said that the black response to integration was “a violent outburst of crime” which justifiably caused whites to move to suburbs.<sup>161</sup> Maupin also criticized civil rights organizations, writing,

The Negro illegitimacy rate remains ten times greater than the white. And this tragedy is heightened with the realization that one out of every five Negro fathers ends up deserting his family. Yet the organization that professes to seek ‘the advancement of colored people’ turns it [sic] back to these facts and pursues weightier problems (How to get a cup of coffee at Woolworths—How to get rid of Aunt Jemima).<sup>162</sup>

In early 1964, when students at UNC called for a boycott of businesses in Chapel Hill that continued to discriminate, Maupin and another student began

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<sup>160</sup> Patrick Gale, *Armistead Maupin* (Bath, UK: Absolute Press, 1999), 14, 16-17.

<sup>161</sup> Armistead Maupin, Jr., “View From The Hill,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, August 25, 1963, n. pag.

<sup>162</sup> Maupin, *The Daily Tar Heel*, August 25, 1963, n. pag.

circulating a petition opposing the boycott.<sup>163</sup> They argued that a boycott would “... amount to unjustly punishing merchants for exercising their legal rights.”<sup>164</sup> One student suggested that Jesse Helms, who often attacked UNC for being a hotbed of Communism, convinced Maupin to circulate the petition.<sup>165</sup>

Maupin’s relationship with Helms continued years later. After dropping out of law school, Maupin took a job at Helms’ WRAL-TV station, continuing to advance conservative and reactionary politics.<sup>166</sup> In late 1967, the station sent Maupin to interview the Imperial Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Maupin asked the Klan leader what he thought of the recent marriage of Margaret Elizabeth Rusk, daughter of the Secretary of State, to Guy Gibson Smith, a black man.<sup>167</sup> According to Maupin, the marriage did not surprise the Klan leader at all because, “the Secretary of State was a woolly liberal and a practicing homosexual.”<sup>168</sup> Like other white supremacists, the Klan leader linked liberal politics, interracial marriage, and homosexuality. When Maupin showed the footage to Helms,

Jesse was horrified. He himself didn't care much for Rusk, but this was nothing short of libelous-even for a liberal-and the station simply couldn't run it. Homosexuality, he told me, was the most heinous sin a man could commit. I nodded dutifully and kept my mouth shut.<sup>169</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> “Petitions Still Going ‘Round The Campus,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 21, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>164</sup> John Greenbacker, “Petition Is Circulated Opposing Lawler’s Civil Rights Statement,” *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 11, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>165</sup> Sam Himes, “Helms: No!” *The Daily Tar Heel*, February 26, 1964, n. pag.

<sup>166</sup> Gale, 25-27.

<sup>167</sup> Wallace Turner, “Rusk’s Daughter, 18, Is Wed to Negro,” *The New York Times*, September 22, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>168</sup> Armistead Maupin, “Growing Up Gay in Old Raleigh,” *The Independent* (Raleigh), June, 1988, n. pag.

<sup>169</sup> Maupin, “Growing Up Gay,” n. pag.



Like Hoover and McCarthy, Helms was reluctant to make accusations of homosexuality. Though in this case, it may have been due more to Rusk's high position and the complete absence of evidence.

Maupin recognizes his own past bigotry, reflecting, "I was doing the same thing homophobes do today, namely inventing other justifications for my bigotry." In the early 1970s, Maupin came to accept himself as a gay man, which led to a change in his politics. He observes, "...I'd passed beyond the pale when I became a full fledged fag and I realized there were a lot of people that hated me unreasonably simply because of that. And I began to realize that that must be true for black people as well."<sup>170</sup>

Walter Jenkins, the man who white racists were quick to point to as evidence of homosexuality at the highest levels of the Johnson administration, was also, to some extent, an opponent of the civil rights movement. Though, his opposition was primarily a difference of strategy. At the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in 1964, the Federal Bureau of Investigation monitored the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) with 30 special agents to keep the White House informed of all their activities in what historian John Dittmer calls "a Watergate that worked." Walter Jenkins, a top aide to President Johnson, directed the operation against the MFDP to prevent their challenge to the all-white delegation from Mississippi. Jenkins and Bill Moyers were placed on the floor of the convention and funneled information to the Bureau.<sup>171</sup> Together, they were effectively able to

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<sup>170</sup> Gale, 25, 39.

<sup>171</sup> John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 291-92.

prevent the seating of the MFDP. Deputy Director of the FBI "Deke" DeLoach wrote to Moyers,

...it was a pleasure and privilege to be able to be of assistance to the President, and all the boys that were with me felt honored in being selected for the assignment....I'm certainly glad that we were able to come through with vital tidbits from time to time which were of assistance to you and Walter. You know you have only to call on us when a similar situation arises.<sup>172</sup>

Less than two months after the convention, Jenkins would be the one the FBI was investigating. On October 7, he was arrested on "morals charges" at a Y.M.C.A. in D.C. He had previously been arrested on January 15, 1959, in the same place, though that arrest went unnoticed. When the Johnson Administration found out one week later, the reaction was panicked. Johnson ordered an immediate investigation by the FBI that night and the Bureau interviewed more than 500 people about Jenkins in the week following. After an investigation of Jenkins by the FBI, it was determined that he had not "compromised the security or interests of the United States." Though, aside from the two "morals arrests," they did claim to find that Jenkins "had had limited association with some individuals who are alleged to be, or who admittedly are, sex deviates."<sup>173</sup>

Jenkins entered George Washington University Hospital following the arrest and the public was told he suffered from hypertension and nervous exhaustion, which the FBI agreed explained his behavior. Republicans sought to make the Jenkins case one of immorality and corruption in the Johnson administration. While

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<sup>172</sup> Dittmer, 292-93.

<sup>173</sup> Robert B. Semple, Jr., "Capital Changing Its Arrest Policy," *The New York Times*, October 25, 1964; "Text of the Summary Report by F.B.I. on the Security Aspects of the Jenkins Case," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1964.

the Johnson administration was initially concerned that the issue might affect the election, they found it did not raise concern among voters. Johnson claimed to have gained two or three points a couple weeks after the Jenkins affair began. He said that because the Democrats reacted to the Jenkins affair as a “case of sickness and disease” while the Republicans tried “to capitalize on a man’s misfortune.” Consequently, the Johnson Administration received support from the public.<sup>174</sup>

*The New York Times* reported, “...every reference to ‘morality’ would be interpreted by audiences as an allusion to Mr. Jenkins.” But, they also reported that, “The civil rights movement is involved when Mr. Goldwater argues on civil disobedience that ‘men who break the law have found champions, eager investigators and nearly fanatic apologists.’” The Johnson Administration replied that, “Mr. Goldwater’s attitude toward race and civil rights is in itself a form of public immorality.” In a speech to 30,000 people in Denver, Goldwater used the adjective “curious” eight times to describe the Johnson Administration. He also said Johnson was “surrounding himself with companions,” pausing to allow the crowd to laugh. In a speech on October 27 in Cleveland, Goldwater brought together opposition to black civil rights, Communism and homosexuality in speech to 14,000 people. He called the Civil Rights Act of 1964 a violation of the rights of private citizens, told “Communist tyrants” to restore “freedom and independence to captive nations,” and criticized Johnson for not attempting “to find out if his closet advisers are security risks...” In contrast to others who were more reluctant to make an issue

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<sup>174</sup> John D. Morris, “Democrats Calm on Jenkins Case,” *The New York Times*, October 18, 1964; “Security Aspects of the Jenkins Case”; Felix Belair Jr., “Former President Surprised by Remark -- Ex-Official Recalls One Incident,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1964.

of homosexuality, Goldwater pursued the issue. Oddly enough, he did this despite the fact that Walter Jenkins was in the Air Force Reserve unit that Goldwater commanded, which made him vulnerable to criticism that he should have uncovered Jenkins' "homosexual tendencies."<sup>175</sup>

In the end, while Jenkins sought to thwart the efforts of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party to challenge the all-white delegation, he was soon removed from his position as homosexuality was used against him and the administration he served. While the Johnson Administration was acting as a roadblock to certain advances in the civil rights movement, Goldwater sought to use homosexuality against a president he saw as a promoter of black civil rights.

### **Opposition to Gays Within the Movement**

Lastly, there was also opposition to lesbians and gays within the civil rights movement. For example, according to FBI surveillance, Stanley Levison mocked James Baldwin and Bayard Rustin for being gay. One record states, "[redacted] asked what BAYARD RUSTIN's position was with BALDWIN and LEVISON replied that in his opinion, the two were better qualified to lead a homo-sexual movement than a civil rights movement."<sup>176</sup>

Another document noted,

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<sup>175</sup> Austin C. Wehrwin, "Global Events Seen Overshadowing Jenkins Case in Midwest," *The New York Times*, October 19, 1964; Charles Mohr, "Campaign Issues--V," *The New York Times*, October 29, 1964; Charles Mohr, "Goldwater to Shun Jenkins Case But Not Its Aspects of Security," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1964; John D. Pomfret, "Goldwater Sees Rights Act Flaw," *The New York Times*, October 28, 1964, p. 1, 26; "Goldwater Speaks as Officer," *The New York Times*, October 16, 1964.

<sup>176</sup> SAC, New York (157-892) to Director, FBI (157-6-34), "Racial Situation; New York Division; Racial Matters," September 23, 1963, James Baldwin file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

“...[redacted] furnished information on that date which indicated that Clarence Jones told [redacted] that he had a falling out with James Baldwin, Negro author, last night. As a result of this, Jones said he is getting out of the Ghandi [sic] Society and was getting out of the civil rights movement to devote his time to practicing law. Jones said he has been critical of Baldwin’s activities, and mentioned that Baldwin’s sexual propensities have become known.”<sup>177</sup>

At the same time, it should be remembered that the FBI sought to sow division within the civil rights movement and there is always a chance that the quotes and interviews they recorded may have been fabricated. For example, the Bureau attempted to leak derogatory information on Bayard Rustin to Whitney Young and Roy Wilkins.<sup>178</sup> However, Young and Wilkins supported Rustin (though for Wilkins it was not immediate) during the preparation for the March on Washington.

Still, James Campbell writes that civil rights leaders were often reluctant to associate with James Baldwin, in part, because he was gay. Campbell writes,

...the homosexuality and the familiarity with drug-taking, which are dramatized in *Another Country*, could be used to discredit Baldwin in the eyes not only of the general public but of the ultra-respectable Southern civil rights leaders themselves. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., always felt queasy about admitting Baldwin as a ‘spokesman,’ and there was an unkind joke going about in which he figured as ‘Martin Luther Queen.’<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> SAC, New York (100-151548) to Director, FBI (100-3-116), “CPUSA; Negro Question; Communist Influence in Racial Matters; IS-C,” October 10, 1963, James Baldwin file, Federal Bureau of Investigation

<sup>178</sup> O’Reilly, *Racial Matters*, 135.

<sup>179</sup> Campbell, 11.

King certainly embraced the dominant view of homosexuality. When a boy wrote to King in his "Advice for Living" column in *Ebony* in 1958 that he was struggling with homosexual feelings, King responded,

...it is necessary to deal with this problem by getting back to some of the experiences and circumstances that lead to the habit. In order to do this I would suggest that you see a good psychiatrist who can assist you in bringing to the forefront of conscience all of those experiences and circumstances that lead to the habit. You are already on the right road toward a solution, since you honestly recognize the problem and have a desire to solve it.<sup>180</sup>

Similarly, Jane Stembridge says that SNCC was reluctant to have Bayard Rustin be the keynote speaker at the organization's October, 1960 conference. Oddly enough, the group was willing to accept Lillian Smith in his place. Stembridge says most, if not all, were unaware of Smith's long-term relationship with Paula Snelling, which made Smith more acceptable.<sup>181</sup> However, by 1963, this attitude seems to have changed as James Baldwin, more famous and perhaps "more out" than Rustin, attended the SNCC conference that November. At the time, Rustin had recently been accepted back into the movement to coordinate the March on Washington, albeit behind the scenes with A. Philip Randolph officially in charge.

Bayard Rustin was attacked by individuals like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., who used the threat of exposing Rustin as a gay man to prevent a protest of the political conventions in 1960. Malcolm X, who Rustin debated and disagreed with regarding movement strategy and tactics, was reported by FBI agents to have said, "that

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<sup>180</sup> Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement: Keeping the Dream Straight?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 42.

<sup>181</sup> Stembridge interview.

BAYARD RUSTIN...is nothing but a homosexual.”<sup>182</sup> However, Rustin later observed that he was usually defended by black communities, despite being gay. For example, black newspapers usually just published that he was attacked for being gay as a matter of news, rather than attempting to use that fact to hurt him.<sup>183</sup>

James Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver became involved in a dispute with the publication of *Soul on Ice* in 1968. Cleaver charged that Baldwin hated black people, including himself. Connecting interracial sex and homosexuality, Cleaver believed that, like Yacub in the Nation of Islam’s narrative, self-hating blacks wanted to dilute the black race through interracial sex. However, gay self-hating blacks like Baldwin were frustrated because their interracial sex was incapable of diluting the race.

Cleaver wrote,

...it seems that many Negro homosexuals, acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man. The cross they have to bear is that, already bending over and touching their toes for the white man, the fruit of their miscegenation is not the little half-white offspring of their dreams but an increase in the unwinding of their nerves--though they redouble their efforts and intake the white man’s sperm.<sup>184</sup>

Besides an impossible desire to eliminate the black race through “miscegenation,” Cleaver also claimed that black gay men had been emasculated by whites. According to Cleaver, “the white man” took “the black homosexual” and “castrated him in the center of his burning skull, and when he submits to this change and takes the white man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on ‘whiteness’

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<sup>182</sup> New York Office, “Malcolm K. Little,” June 18, 1964, p. 24, Malcolm X file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>183</sup> “Brother to Brother: An Interview with Joseph Beam,” in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. by Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2003), 278.

<sup>184</sup> Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: A Delta Book, 1968), 127-28.

all the love in his pent up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against 'blackness' ..." <sup>185</sup> Oddly enough, Cleaver used this to explain Baldwin's "violent repudiation" of a white man, Norman Mailer, and his book *The White Negro*.

Baldwin was surprised at the way Cleaver attacked him and supported the work of Norman Mailer. He was also a bit surprised that his sexuality was still an issue more than a decade after he came out. He said to W.J. Weatherby, "All that toy soldier has done is call me gay. I thought we'd gone through all that with the Muslims and were past it." While Baldwin was "in a rage" about it, he made sure not to attack Cleaver publicly to maintain the appearance of black unity. <sup>186</sup>

Most gay and lesbian activists report that there was often no discussion about homosexuality during their time in the civil rights movement. Many agree that it was visibility that brought hostility. Almost no gays and lesbians were out in the movement and some identified as heterosexual at the time, so there could hardly be a negative reaction.

## Summary

In the pre-Stonewall era, a pathological and immoral view of homosexuality predominated. Groups like the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Mississippi Sovereignty Commission, and white racists sought to use homosexuality against the movement. However, they were only able to uncover evidence of queer sexuality in rare instances and, even then, appear to have been ineffective in marshaling anti-gay attitudes against the civil rights movement. In the case of numerous white

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<sup>185</sup> Cleaver, 128-29.

<sup>186</sup> Weatherby, 292.



supremacist accounts of the Selma-to-Montgomery march, evidence of homosexuality was quite obviously fabricated and used to spread panic. Homophobia, segregationist attitudes and anti-Communism often merged together in a discourse about morality and degeneration.

At the same time, homosexuality was used by the FBI in their counterintelligence operation against white hate groups that opposed black civil rights. There were also a few instances of gay men working against the civil rights movement, though this was limited and rare. Lastly, there was some opposition to gays and lesbians within the civil rights movement. But, the lack of gay visibility meant that the issue was rarely discussed and there was hostility in just a few instances.

## CHAPTER FIVE - GAY ACTIVISTS AND RELIGION IN THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The monk Thomas Merton, an influential American Catholic, said the civil rights movement was “certainly the greatest example of Christian faith in action in the social history of the United States.”<sup>1</sup> A number of scholars have documented the important role religion had in motivating activists in the African American civil rights movement. In one of the foremost works on the subject, *A Stone of Hope*, David L. Chappell argues that, “The black movement’s nonviolent soldiers were driven not by modern liberal faith in human reason, but by older, seemingly more durable prejudices and superstitions that were rooted in Christian and Jewish myth.” Chappell believes that intellectual conviction could not provide a sufficient energy to propel the civil rights movement. He writes, “It is hard to imagine masses of people lining up for the years of excruciating risk against southern sheriffs, fire hoses, and attack dogs without some transcendent or millennial faith to sustain them.”<sup>2</sup>

It is important to note when considering religious motivation that Chappell’s study focuses on southern black religion and almost all of the gay and lesbian activists we have evidence of in the African American civil rights movement came from outside the South. There is little material regarding gay and lesbian activists indigenous to southern black communities in the 1960s, though there almost

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2008), 2.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 3, 17, 102.

certainly were a number of them. It should also be remembered that while Chappell argues that southern black communities were the central drivers of the civil rights movement, his study does not address “the relatively inaccessible thoughts of the masses” either. Moreover, he acknowledges that the population in any particular black community that participated was likely a minority. Instead, he focuses on the strategists of direct action in the southern civil rights movement of the 1960s, even if they were not African Americans from the U.S. South.<sup>3</sup>

Chappell does make mention of the northern student activists, who make up much of the cohort of this study. He finds that they were not typically evangelical Christians and their religious beliefs tended to be of the “modernist, liberal variety.” However, even when acknowledging the influence of liberals, Chappell argues, “What makes the civil rights movement matter are the prophetic ideas it embodies--not the liberal-progressive elements it also undeniably, inescapably contains.” Likewise, in *The Beloved Community*, Charles Marsh argues that the notion of the beloved community gave the civil rights movement its “sustaining spiritual vision” and even more secular organizations like SNCC and CORE employed religious language in their early literature. It seems Chappell stretches his argument too far, though. While emphasizing the importance of grassroots black southern activists, his work does not directly discern their theological beliefs and motivations. And, while discussing the importance of strategists of direct action like Bayard Rustin

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<sup>3</sup> Chappell, 44-45, 181, 189.

and Bob Moses, who were not southern or moved by prophetic Christianity, he discounts the role of northern liberals in the movement.<sup>4</sup>

In *Religion, Rhetoric and the Civil Rights Movement*, Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon reaffirm Chappell's conclusions arguing, "Since time immemorial rhetoric and religion have conspired to cocreate reality. Nowhere was this cocreation more central than in the American civil rights movement of the mid-twentieth century." They too insist that nothing outside of religion could "make the movement move." However, they acknowledge that few women are represented in their collection of religiously-oriented civil rights speeches even though they simultaneously recognize that women were instrumental to the struggle. Like Chappell, they also recognize that a majority of African American churches did not join the movement.<sup>5</sup>

This study of gay and lesbian activists in the civil rights movement affords an opportunity to examine the role of religion in their beliefs and to offer greater acknowledgement of the importance of both northern, liberal activists and women in the civil rights movement. This is not to discount the centrality of southern black faith communities, but to strike a more accurate balance of their shared contributions. Moreover, it draws attention to yet another trajectory in the history of a "long civil rights movement" - the role of religion in the lives of activists as they moved from black civil rights to women's rights and lesbian and gay rights. For lesbian and gay activists, religion often played an important role, as it did for many others in the African American civil rights movement. In the pre-Stonewall

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<sup>4</sup> Chappell, 71, 83; Marsh, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Davis W. Houck and David E. Dixon, eds., *Rhetoric, Religion and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1965* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2006), 1, 9-11.

era, churches were largely silent on the issue of homosexuality and gays and lesbians remained involved in most religious traditions. Though, as with other facets of lesbian and gay experiences in the civil rights movement, there was great variance. Some religious activists remained within their faith traditions when issues of women's rights and lesbian and gay rights moved to the forefront. They served as forces of change within their denominations. Others who had been religious during their time in the civil rights movement left their denominations as a result of hostile responses to the question of gay rights, or, in some instances, women's liberation. Still others had little if any religious involvement at any point in their lives.

Before moving forward, it is important to identify the role religion played in conceptions of sexuality, especially homosexuality, in the pre-Stonewall era. In *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, John D'Emilio points to findings of the Kinsey studies, saying, "The information Alfred Kinsey culled from 10,000 interviews convinced him that nothing in American society had 'more influence upon present-day patterns of sexual behavior than the religious backgrounds of that culture....Ancient religious codes are still the prime source of the attitudes, the ideas, the ideals, and the rationalizations by which most individuals pattern their sexual lives."<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, though, religion often made no mention of homosexuality. In *Gay Rights and Moral Panic*, Fred Fejes points out, "Most of the major religions traditionally condemned homosexuality, but prior to the 1970s the public discussion and debate over homosexuality was notable for the lack of religious

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<sup>6</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 13.

involvement.” Instead, Fejes argues that while churches might have periodically reiterated their condemnation, opposition to homosexuality was primarily defined by law and medicine. But, as sodomy laws began to be repealed and the medical profession began to reconsider its pathological view of homosexuality in the early 1970s, “...religion remained the last authoritative voice of condemnation of homosexuality.” D’Emilio adds, “Once homosexual behavior entered the realm of science, it became subject to careful investigation. No matter how solid the consensus that homosexuality was a disease, the accumulation of empirical evidence could inspire new, dissenting theories, whereas Christian teachings rested on the immutable words of the Bible.” At the same time, though, D’Emilio seems to overlook the fact that Christian teachings varied greatly. Few Christian denominations held static beliefs about what the Bible said and many people of faith challenged prevailing interpretations of the Bible and teachings on the Christian view of homosexuality.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, there were also religious challenges to the negative view of gays and lesbians in the pre-Stonewall era. Theologian Patrick Cheng has identified a number of works in the apologetic strand of queer theology which were published in the pre-Stonewall era. In 1955, Derrick Sherwin Bailey, an Anglican priest, published *Homosexuality and the Western Christian Tradition*, which was the first work to challenge Christian opposition to homosexuality. Even more influential was the 1960 book *Christ and the Homosexual*, written by openly gay Congregationalist minister Robert W. Wood. He argued that churches should encourage the

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<sup>7</sup> Fred Fejes, *Gay Rights and Moral Panic: The Origins of America's Debate on Homosexuality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 71-72; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 18.

participation of gays and lesbians in their religious denominations and rethink their positions on homosexuality. In 1966, H. Kimball Jones' book *Toward a Christian Understanding of the Homosexual* was published by the national board of the YMCA. The following year, Anglican theologian Norman Pittenger penned the gay-affirming booklet *Time for Consent? A Christian Approach to Homosexuality*. Together, these works from a variety of Christian denominations encouraged people of faith to reconsider the received wisdom on homosexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Correspondingly, there were also a number of gay religious organizations formed in the pre-Stonewall era. In 1946, the Eucharistic Catholic Church was founded in Atlanta by a group of people who had been denied communion for identifying as homosexuals. This was the first explicitly gay religious group. One of the most important organizations pushing for a revolution in the religious understanding of homosexuality was the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, formed in 1964. In October, 1968, Troy Perry, a minister who had been expelled from the Pentecostal Church, met with a dozen people at his home in Southern California and formed the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. By 1977, the Metropolitan Community Church had more than 80 active congregations in the U.S.<sup>9</sup>

Within the civil rights movement, there is not much evidence that religious leaders spoke against homosexuality. Just as many gays and lesbians were invisible in the movement, so too were opponents of homosexuality largely silent. Certainly,

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick S. Cheng, *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology* (New York: Seabury Books, 2011), 14, 28-29.

<sup>9</sup> Cheng, 28-29; Fejes, 72.

Reverend Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. expressed a hostile attitude toward homosexuality. In 1950, he wrote an article in *Ebony* decrying homosexuality and, in particular, “parading homosexuals” in churches. Powell believed that the young were becoming more and more vulnerable to “the horrible no-man’s-land of sex.” However, he believed that if a church took up a sex education program, it could “decrease homosexuality and homosexual potentiality in its membership and its community.” Rather than cast out gays and lesbians, Powell argued that churches should draw homosexuals in to cure them. However, there appears to be no statements similar to Powell’s among church leaders in the movement.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, even if religious figures in the movement viewed homosexual behavior as immoral, there is evidence that they considered it an individual sin rather than a social evil and believed the latter was of far greater concern. When Presidential aide Walter Jenkins was arrested on “morals charges” in 1964 and it became an issue in the campaign (as discussed in the previous chapter), roughly 40 prominent Protestant, Catholic and Jewish religious leaders created an “emergency committee.” John C. Bennett, president of Union Theological Seminary, was in charge of the press conference and was joined by Abraham Heschel, a scholar at Jewish Theological Seminary and an important advocate of the civil rights movement. They opposed the use of the Jenkins case as a campaign issue. According to *The New York Times*, “They said that the case and a few other ‘episodes involving personal morality’ had been allowed to ‘obscure fateful moral issues related to public life,’ such as civil rights, poverty and the danger of nuclear

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<sup>10</sup> Michael G. Long, *Martin Luther King, Jr., Homosexuality, and the Early Gay Rights Movement* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 43-44.



war.” Wyatt Tee Walker of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference signed the document of protest as did the Catholic Interracial Council. Consequently, we have at least some evidence that civil rights activists viewed homosexuality as a relatively minor personal concern which, though negative, should not distract from the civil rights movement.<sup>11</sup>

In most instances, religious leaders in the civil rights movement did not have to confront the issue of homosexuality as gays and lesbians, many of whom were also religious, remained closeted. Pauli Murray was one of the most important lesbian and religious activists in the civil rights movement. She had been involved in protest against segregated interstate buses as early as 1940 and sit-ins in Washington D.C. in 1943 and 1944. In the 1920s, Murray learned the Social Gospel at St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in New York City. By the early 1940s, she had adopted the idea of redemptive suffering; that God would bring about the betterment of African Americans through their struggles. This served as a motivating force for her activism as she believed suffering provided one with the energy for nonviolent resistance. However, Gardiner Shattuck, Jr. notes that Episcopalians like Murray “received little support from their church when they directly challenged racial mores in the South.”<sup>12</sup>

In the mid-1970s, Murray, who already had a number of degrees, including a J.D. and J.S.D., enrolled at General Theological Seminary in New York City. Though she was 63 years old and it would be another four years before the Episcopal

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<sup>11</sup> Paul L. Montgomery, “Clergymen Decry Jenkins as Issue,” *The New York Times*, October 30, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Azaransky, 10, 27-28; Gardiner H. Shattuck, Jr., *Episcopalians and Race: Civil War to Civil Rights* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2000), 84.

Church would officially begin ordaining women, Murray pursued divinity school anyway. During that time, she engaged the work of black liberation theologians, but felt they discounted women and focused excessively on blackness. Consequently, Murray wrote her 1976 seminary thesis on the relationship between black theology and feminist theology. She called for an intersectional analysis. Instead of a single axis of identity by which to interpret the world, Murray said multiple identities and perspectives should be employed to articulate a “universal message of salvation and liberation.” This thesis, published in the *Anglican Theological Review* in 1978, anticipated black feminist and womanist theology. Murray continued to believe in redemptive suffering, though this did not gain wide acceptance among womanist theologians.<sup>13</sup>

The year prior to completing her seminary thesis, Murray was ordained in the Episcopal Church. Her ordination raised questions about the role of women in the church but also about the role of gays and lesbians as there was a ‘whisper campaign’ about Murray’s sexuality. Murray believed that the Rev. John T. Walker, an African American, was part of this. However, because he was about to become the Diocesan Bishop for the Diocese of Washington, she decided not to confront him, writing, “It is in my racially identified group interest that you be a great Bishop.” Murray remained rather quiet about the issue of sexual orientation and did not write extensively on the topic. But, she did believe that people of all sexual orientations were God’s creation and God’s work should not be questioned. A letter she wrote to friends in 1977 neatly summarized her theological outlook. She

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<sup>13</sup> Azaransky, 86-96.

declared, "...we bring our total selves to God, our sexuality, our joyousness, our foolishness, etc etc. I'm out to make Christianity a joyful thing."<sup>14</sup>

In the end, Murray never came out. There were likely a variety of factors which kept her closeted, especially the fact that she came from an older generation in which this was uncommon and the fact that she wanted to maintain her position in the Church, which would have been compromised by coming out. In his history of the Episcopal Church's engagement with racial justice issues, Gardiner H. Shattuck Jr. writes that the belief in the unity of all humanity drove the church's efforts for racial harmony. However, he adds, "...in spite of the undeniable religious truth of that ideal, it has also been misapplied and used to repress divergent voices and concerns within the church." Such was the case when the church began to confront issues like gay and lesbian equality.<sup>15</sup>

However, the Episcopal Church's stances on civil rights, women's ordination and LGBT equality often put it ahead of many other Christian denominations. Malcolm Boyd, a white Episcopal priest who had been an activist in the civil rights movement, was among those who came out within the Episcopal Church and encouraged it to take a progressive stance on gay equality. Boyd entered seminary at Berkeley in 1955 and was involved in much civil rights work in the 1960s, conducting sit-ins in New Orleans, traveling on a Freedom Ride from New Orleans to

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<sup>14</sup> Azaransky, 98-99.

<sup>15</sup> Azaransky, 104-5, 108-10; Shattuck, Jr., 3-4.

Jackson in 1961, spending the summer of 1965 working with SNCC in rural Alabama and Mississippi, and more.<sup>16</sup>

Boyd was often critical of the church for its inaction on racial justice. He criticized the way Christian churches supported segregated housing patterns, ran private schools for white students, and only employed minorities as “tokens.” This grew more pronounced with what he characterized as the “tepid” response of many white Christians to black civil rights insurgency. Boyd came to realize that he believed in Christianity as a movement rather than an institution because the institutions of Christianity often sought to stifle the movement. Boyd’s increasing involvement in civil rights activism was a direct result of his religious beliefs. He said, “As a closeted homosexual, I felt absolutely trapped, I could see no life-giving sexual alternatives. I embraced social activism, especially in civil rights, with which I associated the will of God for pressing problems of the world in which I lived.” Although, he emphasizes, “Still I felt that my participation was the will of Jesus Christ. I did not become an activist simply as a response to my sexual repression.” At the same time, Boyd’s church was not firmly behind his civil rights efforts. When he attended the General Convention in October, 1964, in St. Louis, Gardiner Shattuck, Jr. writes, “Far from affirming the progress that was being made on the civil rights front in secular circles, however, the church gathering revealed many of the divisions over race that still troubled the denomination at various levels in its

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<sup>16</sup> Frank G. Kirkpatrick, *The Episcopal Church in Crisis: How Sex, the Bible, and Authority Are Dividing the Faithful* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 2008), xx; Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders*, 433-34; Chris Freeman, “Many Lives of Malcolm Boyd,” *The Gay & Lesbian Review* 18:5 (Sept./Oct., 2011), 30.

institutional life.” For Boyd, as for many others, the religious motivation towards social justice was often individual rather than institutional.<sup>17</sup>

Subsequently, Boyd was also critical of the Christian response to gays and lesbians, writing, “It has betrayed countless people in sexuality, causing untold suffering when it broke human beings against the harsh strictures of stony legalism.” Boyd remained closeted throughout his time in seminary in the mid-1950s, though, he knew gay seminarians. He says that one of the men talked to him about the difficulty of being a gay seminarian, another married to hide his sexual orientation, and a third fell deep into alcoholism, though he later recovered. Boyd would later reflect, “The number of closeted gay men inside the church astonished me.”<sup>18</sup>

When he came out in the mid-1970s, Boyd continued to be an activist within the church. For example, in 1976, he presented the sermon at the ecumenical religious service held as part of Chicago’s Gay Pride Week and delivered the keynote at the Second Annual Integrity Convention, a group of gay Episcopalians and their allies. He also connected his views of race and sexuality, comparing the use of scripture to argue against God’s love of gay people and its use to denigrate black people as “beasts without souls.” Boyd also applied the concept of the closet to continuing racial segregation saying, “Racial separation, or any form of human apartheid, means the existence of separate closets in which people dwell, hidden from each other...” The Episcopal Church in which Boyd remained housed various

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<sup>17</sup> Malcolm Boyd, *Take Off the Masks: The Classic Spiritual Autobiography, Revised with a New Epilogue* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977, r1993), 11, 109, 113, 117, 135; Shattuck, Jr., 143.

<sup>18</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 11, 70, 106.

perspectives on questions of homosexuality, but generally adopted a tolerant attitude. The church authorized the ordination of women in 1976, though women had been irregularly ordained earlier. The first woman officially ordained by the Episcopal Church was a lesbian.<sup>19</sup>

Nina Boal, a white volunteer from Illinois who worked in Mississippi, also grew up in the Episcopal Church. While Nina was aware of anti-gay attitudes, she says she did not believe they were really grounded in religion. She does not recall homosexuality being talked about in the church at all, though she could see that the church was dominated by men as they were the only ones in positions of power. Like Malcolm Boyd, religion was also important to Nina during her time in the civil rights movement. Nina remembers attending services at Mount Eagle Baptist Church in Philadelphia, Mississippi. She recalls the church being a source of inspiration and a refuge from fear and danger in the civil rights movement. Nina continues to be among the faithful in the Episcopal Church. She says she remains in the Episcopal Church because they have repented of their sexism and homophobia. At the same time, she does not see her religious beliefs as widely accepted and acknowledges that there is still a lot of religiously-based homophobia.<sup>20</sup>

Cathy Cade was also a white volunteer who was active in church organizations. She was raised mostly in suburbs of Chicago and in Memphis, Tennessee, where she was a part of Liberal Religious Youth (LRY) through her local Unitarian Church and as a national organization. She recalls in Memphis that her Unitarian youth organization was filled with people who believed in integration and

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<sup>19</sup> Boyd, *Masks*, 137, 164, 184; Fejes, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Nina Boal, telephone interview by author, July 9, 2011.

peace and “...were a real support group for each other.” Cade was president of her local LRY, a secretary in their regional organization, and attended their national conferences. Moreover, their Unitarian Church connected with a black Baptist Church to form an exchange between their respective youth groups.<sup>21</sup>

When Cade went to Carleton College in Minnesota, she remained active in a Unitarian group and traveled to Europe with the International Religious Fellowship. While she received “bits and pieces” of information about the civil rights movement through the Unitarian Church, she says it was the movie *Operation Abolition* which she cites as her “political awakening.” Cade points out that the religious groups she was involved in were often excessively focused on discussions of ethical action to the point they could inhibit action. She says in the Unitarian Church, they “all worked really hard to figure out what was the morally right thing...But with the new movement, it was the first time you could act.” Cade felt incredibly alive and liberated even taking a small action. She says that, for her, there was “a steady progression from...Unitarian to civil rights to women’s movement, and ...they have built on each other.” For her, joining the civil rights movement also meant moving beyond the church.<sup>22</sup>

Sandra Tignor, a black woman who traveled South working with the Medical Committee for Civil Rights (later Medical Committee for Human Rights), was raised in a religious family in the D.C. area and remembers “always going to one Baptist church or another.” However, frequent church attendance in her

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Cathy Cade, interview by Ronald J. Grele, January 5, 1985, transcript p. 3, 12-13, Student Movements of the 1960s Oral History Project, Oral History Research Office, Columbia University.

<sup>22</sup> Cade interview, 3, 10, 28, 66.

adolescence did not lead her to identify with the Baptist faith. She says that religious beliefs did not play a role in her activism. In fact, she notes that her experiences in the U.S. South during the civil rights movement led her to question “how there could be a God who oversaw such inhumane treatment.” Saundra also does not believe religion played a role in shaping her sexual identity or leading her to disengage from the Baptist Church. She does not recall ever hearing anything negative about homosexuality in the Baptist churches she attended in her youth and was no longer a part of the church by the time issues of gender and sexuality moved to the forefront.<sup>23</sup>

The Southern Baptist Convention was the largest Protestant denomination in the U.S. It had been a strong supporter of the civil rights movement, but, when other denominations began reconsidering church teachings on homosexuality, there was little discussion of change in the SBC. In 1976, the organization decided that homosexuality was outside proper Christian morality. While moderates and fundamentalists within the SBC agreed that homosexuality was a sin, the fundamentalists called for greater political involvement in opposing gay rights. Many Southern Baptist churches became among the most vocal opponents of gay rights. In 1976, they led a petition drive in Atlanta against the proclamation of Gay Pride Day. They also began organizing efforts to reinstate harsh sodomy laws. Fundamentalist Southern Baptists stood out because even those denominations that

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<sup>23</sup> “Saundra Tignor,” in *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories*, ed. by Arden Eversmeyer and Margaret Purcell (Houston, TX: Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project, 2012), 289; Saundra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, p. 2.



did not believe homosexuality was moral tended to be sympathetic to legal protections for gays and lesbians. The SBC was not.<sup>24</sup>

James Baldwin's early life was infused with Baptist religion. His stepfather, David Baldwin, was a Baptist minister in New York City. Frightened of his own sexuality and believing he was depraved, Baldwin sought comfort and absolution in Christianity. He began religious training and became a youth preacher at a Pentecostal church in Harlem, which he would later write about in his semi-autobiographical first novel *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). But, he abandoned this quest around age 16.<sup>25</sup>

While raised in a religious household, James Baldwin became very outspoken in his opposition to Christianity as an organized religion. When asked if he was religious by *New York Times* reporter M.S. Handler in 1962, Baldwin said that "every artist is fundamentally religious." However, he added that he had not been to church in 20 years and had ceased to follow Christianity as an organized religion. He pointedly stated, "The church is the worst place to learn about Christianity. I have rejected it because the Christians have rejected Christianity. It is too pious, too hypocritical." While Baldwin worked with many religious figures in the civil rights movement, it does not appear to have motivated his involvement.<sup>26</sup>

Despite his sexual themes, quite a few religious groups, even in the South, promoted the work of James Baldwin, which sometimes led to a hostile response. One woman from Olive Branch, Mississippi, wrote to J. Edgar Hoover when the

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<sup>24</sup> Fejes, 73.

<sup>25</sup> David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 24-25.

<sup>26</sup> Weatherby, 228.

United Presbyterian Denomination's publication *Hi Way* recommended people read *Another Country* and other works. The woman wrote with horror,

When I bought these books and read them I was speechless. I was numb. I could not believe that any Christian Denomination would allow such writings to be advertised through their church materials. But it was true. It was before me. I don't know how far the FBI can go in church organization investigation but I see this as a matter of obscene literature and poor church organization. My faith in the Presbyterian Church has been thoroughly shaken, to say the least."<sup>27</sup>

She indicated that other members of the church exhibited the same reaction. She pleaded with Hoover, "Tell me, for the sake of Our God and Humanity how and where these writings fit into Christianity."<sup>28</sup>

Similarly, the Klan became upset when the Southern Baptist Association used its *Southern Baptist Quarterly* to urge people to buy Baldwin's books, including *Another Country*. The Klan called his books obscene and "communistic inspired."<sup>29</sup> Yet another person wrote to the FBI in anger from Fort Worth, Texas. The man had read the Fall, 1964, issue of the Baptist *Young People's Quarterly*. The journal recommended that young people read *Another Country*. The man wrote to J. Edgar Hoover that the book "...has every filthy word, compound word and phrasing that could be used to portray: Drug addition [sic], Sex perversion at its vilest. Unless or/and until one has read this Book of degradation, any attempt the writer makes to describe the contents will fall short of the degenerate nature of the Book."<sup>30</sup> He asked if there was any federal law which would prohibit the distribution of

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<sup>27</sup> [redacted] to J. Edgar Hoover, April 22, 1965, James Baldwin file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Federal Bureau of Investigation, "James Arthur Baldwin," Supplemental Correlation Summary, July 30, 1969, p. 15, Baldwin file.

<sup>30</sup> [redacted] to J. Edgar Hoover, January 22, 1965, Baldwin file.

Baldwin's writing. However, Hoover was told that *Another Country* had been read by the General Crimes Section of the Department of Justice and "it has been concluded that the book contains literary merit and may be of value to students of psychology and social behavior."<sup>31</sup> It seems that for Presbyterian and Baptist groups, the value of James Baldwin's work in confronting racial issues trumped concerns about homosexual themes. Though, this was not uniformly agreed upon by all members of their churches.

While Baldwin departed from Christianity because of the failure of Christians to live their values, Jane Stembridge was motivated by Christian beliefs despite the fact that her denomination opposed racial equality. Stembridge, a white woman, was raised in the South with a father who was a Baptist minister. Jane says her father, H. Hansel Stembridge, Jr., was a deeply spiritual man who did not fit the mold of a typical white southern Baptist minister. He moved from church to church across the South, living in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. Hansel Stembridge's tenure at each church was foreshortened by his stance on sensitive issues, like racial justice. After Jane left home, he and his wife relocated to San Francisco where he became a part of the more liberal American Baptist Convention.<sup>32</sup>

After finishing her undergraduate degree at Meredith College in Raleigh, Jane attended Union Theological Seminary. At UTS, she was influenced by the

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<sup>31</sup> Herbert J. Miller, Jr. to Director, FBI, "'Another Country', The Dial Press, Interstate Transportation of Obscene Matter," September 13, 1963, Baldwin file.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Jane Stembridge, telephone interview by author, March 3-4, 2012; Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer: Stories of Faith and Civil Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 102-3.

scholarship of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who had previously been there, and Reinhold Niebuhr, who was an emeritus professor. The seminary included field work with local communities and Jane worked with poor families on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. However, she did not feel she was as active as she should be. It was after seeing Martin Luther King, Jr. speak at Union Theological Seminary that Jane questioned whether she should be living Christian ethics rather than just studying them. While she acknowledges the importance of her studies, Jane says, “Christian ethics then meant: Go South. Do Something.”<sup>33</sup>

Jane became the first full-time staff member of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee working primarily in Georgia and Mississippi. After her time in the civil rights movement, Jane eventually finished her degree at divinity school. But, she did not have the same level of devotion. Rather, she completed her religious education because it was something her parents wanted. Jane continued her spiritual quest, but was not particularly devoted to a church or even Christianity over other religions. Unexpectedly, though, she became a Catholic for roughly thirty years until, she says, she “could no longer breathe in the church.” Jane identifies her religious beliefs today as a pastiche of Deepak Chopra, the Dalai Lama and Jesus. Jane felt less driven by Christian duty after her time in the civil rights movement and also did not become active in women’s liberation or lesbian and gay liberation efforts.<sup>34</sup>

Lillian Smith was also a white southern woman raised in a strong religious tradition, though quite differently from her friend Jane Stembridge. Smith was

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<sup>33</sup> Stembridge interview.

<sup>34</sup> Stembridge interview.

raised in a strict white southern Methodist family in Jasper, Florida, around the turn of the century. Smith was told many things about Christianity that seemed to her contradictory. She recalls learning four things about God as a child. First, she and her eight siblings were taught that God loved them, but he would also burn them in “everlasting flames of hell if we displeased Him.” Second, they learned the body was shameful and they should never degrade themselves through nakedness or sexual pleasure. Third, they were told to take pride in their white skin, which elevated them above people of other races. And finally, that segregation grew out of the previous three rules: God’s special love for them, the importance of avoiding degrading sexual pleasure, and their superior white identity. Biographer Anne C. Loveland emphasizes that “the interlocking of the lessons contributed to their power.” Smith began to spot the contradictions in the church teachings, particularly the discordance of preaching the unity of all humanity, but proclaiming that “terrifying disaster would befall the South in I ever treated a Negro as my social equal.”<sup>35</sup>

Consequently, as a young woman, Smith abandoned organized religion and by the late 1940s became an outspoken white southern critic of segregation. For Smith, the religious tradition of her youth was an impediment to civil rights activism. Feeling that she was raised in a fog of pre-modern superstition that ignored present concerns for an otherworldly future, Smith looked to science to provide answers to human problems. She also criticized the almost exclusive focus on personal sins while overlooking social evils. Smith did not believe the church

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<sup>35</sup> Anne C. Loveland, *Lillian Smith: A Southerner Confronting the South, A Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1986), 3-4, 6-7.

offered any answers to problems like poverty, segregation and lack of education. She wrote that she was raised in a religion which was “at its worst a strong support of an exploitative status quo with no spiritual content; at its best a means of achieving various ameliorations of society’s surface ills and of giving mystical comfort to those who can take it.”<sup>36</sup>

By 1954, Smith began to moderate her views somewhat. She wrote in *The Journey* that religion could offer comfort. Moreover, Smith acknowledged the limits of science and believed it could exist alongside religion with both offering people a sense of well-being. At the same time, she continued to underscore the idea that faith in God would never be enough to create a livable future on Earth and stated that the “false notions” of white southern religion should be rejected outright. While Smith became more tolerant of religion, she did not identify any with any particular faith and it likely did not play a role in her activism. Smith kept her sexual orientation hidden, so one cannot assess the degree to which her identity as a lesbian contributed to her rejection of her southern Baptist heritage.<sup>37</sup>

Aaron Henry of Clarksdale was a member of Haven United Methodist Church in Clarksdale. Like Smith, he was raised in strict Christian environment, though in a southern black church. He says, “The preachings were hellfire and damnation, and when you left you were sure you had no chance of getting to heaven.” Moreover, “All the church doings, and not-doings, and fear of my not being a good Christian left me with little desire for the fun most kids should have.” This was reinforced in his home, where Henry says, “My parents actually put a lot of strength in the traditional

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<sup>36</sup> Loveland, 108.

<sup>37</sup> Loveland, 108-9.

morals and sex taboos [...] I found that my friends had gotten the same word--an emphatic 'don't' when it came to sexual activity."<sup>38</sup>

The church was important to Henry's involvement in the civil rights. However, he found that churches were often split into factions, which could limit their effectiveness. Alternatively, Henry emphasized unity. He worked to bring churches and civil rights organizations to work together through the Council of Federated Organizations and John Dittmer calls him "the most ecumenical of Mississippi activists." Religion continued to play an important role in Henry's life after the 1960s. For example, when Henry was running for Mississippi State Legislature in 1979, he was asked by the *Jackson Advocate* what important qualities a person must possess to serve in the political body. Henry responded that the person elected must be someone "who will always seek the inspiration and guidance of God in decisions which must be made, and who will follow the teachings of Jesus Christ in making final determinations." While politicians certainly may offer statements like this to get votes, there really is not much reason to doubt Henry's sincerity. Because Henry remained closeted, we do not know what role religious beliefs might have played in how he thought about his sexual orientation.<sup>39</sup>

The strict southern Methodist traditions that Aaron Henry and Lillian Smith were raised in may play a part in explaining why both remained closeted their whole lives. Northern liberal Methodists came to believe that gay rights were a part

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<sup>38</sup> "Who Is Aaron Henry?" *Jackson Advocate* (Jan. 11-17, 1979), A10; Aaron Henry with Constance Curry, *Aaron Henry: The Fire Ever Burning* (Jackson: University Press, of Mississippi, 2000), 17, 20, 53. Emphasis in original.

<sup>39</sup> Henry with Curry, 55; John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 121; "Henry Reveals Stand on Political Issues," *Jackson Advocate* (Jun. 21-27, 1979), 3A.

of civil or human rights while southern evangelical Methodists opposed homosexuality. It should also be noted, though, that both Smith and Henry were from older generations with Smith passing away in 1966, before gay liberation came of age. Henry, however, lived until 1997 but never openly acknowledged that he was gay or bisexual and never became involved in gay rights activism.<sup>40</sup>

Yvonne Flowers, a black woman who joined the March on Washington and one of the co-founders of the black lesbian feminist group Salsa Soul Sisters, found homophobia was endemic in the movement, as Aaron Henry probably had. Flowers observed that black churches were populated with lesbians and gays, yet their presence was ignored or condemned. Unlike Henry, though, Flowers was unwilling to remain in this environment. Martin Duberman writes, "She [Yvonne] had found God, and would not contaminate His loving presence in her life with the prejudices of those who purported to speak in His name." Like many others who did not feel at home in the church, Flowers kept her faith while leaving behind organized religion. While she participated in the March on Washington, she did not become involved in the civil rights movement because black churches had such a large presence.<sup>41</sup>

Alternatively, Jan Griesinger, a white northern woman, was part of the baby boomer generation and religion was central to her participation in the civil rights, women's liberation and lesbian and gay rights movements. Jan majored in religion in college at DePauw University, a United Methodist college in Greencastle, Indiana, and was involved in the United Campus Christian Fellowship at the local Presbyterian church. After college, Jan married a Southern Baptist preacher and

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<sup>40</sup> Fejes, 73.

<sup>41</sup> Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Plume 1994), 91.



moved to Cincinnati, where she worked as the director of Christian Education at the United Church of Christ (UCC) in Ft. Thomas, across the border in Kentucky. Being involved in the Ohio Conference of the UCC provided her with a place where she could hear about important social issues. In July, 1963, the UCC established a special commission to deal with issues of racial discrimination and began to provide funding to efforts to advance black civil rights.<sup>42</sup>

After ending her marriage, Jan began attending United Theological Seminary of Dayton in early 1967 and joined the integrated and activist First Reformed Church, UCC. Jan also attended the National Conference for New Politics in Chicago, where Martin Luther King, Jr. served as the keynote speaker and a coalition was attempted between civil rights and peace organizations. After being involved in civil rights and anti-war activism, Jan joined in fighting for women's liberation. She acknowledges that religious groups did not serve as the seedbed for women's liberation and she did not know any women clergy or church leaders. However, she writes, "For me, it was the arrival of feminism that captured my imagination and made me a convert. The feminist movement was contagious and propelled me back into the church-affiliated organizations to reach other women with the good news of liberation to the captives."<sup>43</sup>

After graduating from seminary in 1970, Jan was hired to be the coordinator of the Women's Projector for the North American region of the World Student

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<sup>42</sup> Jan Griesinger, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World: Women, Student Christian Movements, and Social Justice, 1955-1975*, ed. by Sara Evans (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 191-92; James F. Findlay, Jr., *Church People in the Struggle: The National Council of Churches and the Black Freedom Movement, 1950-1970* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Griesinger, 193, 195.

Christian Federation (WCSF). She also gathered submissions for the book that would be published by the WCSF called *Women in the Struggle for Liberation* (1972), which documented the experiences of women religious around the world. It was the work of Christian women in other countries, particularly South Africa, Lebanon and Cuba, that inspired Jan. She wrote, "This new sense of the liberating power of Christianity contradicted my feeling that white American Protestantism seemed fixated in the past, having accommodated to power and privilege...I found I was not nourished or challenged there, except in the presence of justice-seeking colleagues who hovered around the fringes of church institutions." While faith was important in Jan's activism, it is important to note that it was often Christian women and Christian churches outside the U.S. that helped provide inspiration. By the late 1960s, the UCC had begun reconsidering its view of homosexuality. In 1977, when Jan came out, she continued to be active locally and nationally in the UCC, advancing the cause of LGBT equality inside and outside the church.<sup>44</sup>

Jan Griesinger's primary work for LGBT rights was through the United Church of Christ, in which she was ordained in 1970. She was the only woman in her graduating class. In Jan's experience, once homosexuality became more visible in the post-Stonewall era, the level of church opposition rose. However, Jan was in a progressive church which was open and affirming of gay identity before many others. In 1972, the UCC became the first to ordain openly gay people. Jan recognizes that if she had been in another church, she would have been thrown out in 1977. Moreover, it was through the church that she had become connected to

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<sup>44</sup> Griesinger, 197-200, 203, 206; Fejes, 72.

activists on a variety of issues ranging from black civil rights, anti-war organizing, women's liberation and, eventually, gay liberation. However, the move towards greater acceptance of gays and lesbians was not an easy one, even in the UCC. Jan recalls that at the Ohio Conference of the UCC, dealing with the resolution that the church would be open and affirming of lesbians and gays resulted in anger. Conservatives put a stop to having resolutions altogether and Jan is still seeking to bring them back as a means of educating and motivating people.<sup>45</sup>

From 1976 to 2004, she served as the director of the United Campus Ministry. Because there was no gay student organization, she helped start one which eventually took the name Open Doors. Later, she helped start Gay, Lesbian or Bisexual Employees at Ohio University. Jan also became involved in the UCC Gay Caucus (later the UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns). The first event she went to was in 1977. From 1984 to 1997, Jan served as National Coordinator of the Coalition. In 1990, Jan co-founded Christian Lesbians Out (CLOUT), a multi-denominational group of lesbian clergy, and served as national coordinator from 1998 to 2006. Outside of the church, Jan works as the co-director of Old Lesbians Organizing for Change, a national group of lesbians seeking to challenge ageism.<sup>46</sup>

Jan says in all her work, the influence of the civil rights movement remains. She says that the movement for black civil rights provided a template that allowed later struggles to learn the language of oppression and activism, understand how systems work, and act against it using protest, formal politics and more. Jan

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<sup>45</sup> Griesinger interview; Dallas (Dee) A. Brauning, *Antoinette Brown Women: Finding Voice*, March, 2008, <http://www.ucc.org/women/pdfs/microsoft-word-finding-voice-2008-03-griesinger.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> Griesinger interview; Brauning.

continues to believe in the importance of challenging racism in the LGBT groups of which she is a part. She emphasizes that even all white groups must use their white privilege to challenge racism. Griesinger was also a founding resident of the Susan B. Anthony Memorial UnRest Home Womyn's Land Trust near Athens, Ohio.<sup>47</sup>

Charlotte Bunch was raised in a white Methodist family. Her parents initially planned to be missionaries and move to China, but were stopped by World War II. Instead, they remained involved in their local church and were at one point named New Mexico's Methodist Family of the Year. When she attended Duke University in the early 1960s, Bunch became involved in the Young Women's Christian Association, which she says was important as a "women-only environment which encouraged our leadership and forged strong bonds of friendship." Their advisor at the Y encouraged them to discuss how they could support African American students with the coming of integration at Duke in 1963. Bunch emphasizes the importance of the Christian social justice movement. She writes, "The Methodist Student Movement at Duke was a place of intellectual and political ferment, from the theological excitement generated by the Lay Scholars Program that Art Brandenburg had initiated to the social activism that was spawned by the black civil rights movement in North Carolina." Bunch participated pray-ins and other civil rights demonstrations in North Carolina. She also worked in a project helping children of color in Philadelphia sponsored by the Methodist Deaconess Home, which she says was an education in poverty and racism in the North. Bunch rose to leadership positions becoming the co-president of the YWCA at Duke, president of

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<sup>47</sup> Griesinger interview; Brauninger.

the state Methodist Student Movement and vice president of the National Student Christian Federation.<sup>48</sup>

After graduating, Bunch and her fiancé moved to Washington, D.C. to do social justice work. She says, “We wanted to create an intentional Christian community working in the black ghetto and saw community organizing as a way to mobilize the poor to take power over their lives and change society.” But, after a year, they realized their job was to educate white communities about racism. In the late 1960s, Bunch became president and focused on building the University Christian Movement (UCM), which she says was “our utopia.” Eventually, she observes, “I got drawn more and more into the secular new left, but I still felt safer entering there from the supportive space of the progressive Christian community.” Following that, Bunch was elected to the executive committee of the World Student Christian Federation around 1968 and traveled the world learning about a variety of issues. A year later, she worked with the staff of *motive* magazine, a Methodist publication, on one of the first women’s liberation anthologies, which she says furthered the connection between the church and the women’s movement. After coming out in 1971, she also worked with *motive* to produce their final two issues, which examined the lesbian and gay movement.<sup>49</sup>

However, it was coming out that also caused her to leave the church. While the church and Christian movement had been instrumental in preparing her as an activist, she no longer felt supported. Bunch concluded,

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<sup>48</sup> Bunch, in *Journeys That Opened Up the World*, 123-26, 129,

<sup>49</sup> Bunch, 131-33, 135-36.

The more feminist I became, however, the more impatient I was with the phallogentricity of Christianity and with the slowness of the institution to see how it oppressed women. When I came out as a lesbian in the context of the feminist movement, I was simply not willing to be affiliated with an institution that labeled me a sinner or denied me the right to enter its highest callings.<sup>50</sup>

As with Charlotte Bunch, religion was important to Rose Gladney's thinking about race and civil rights. Rose attended a local Presbyterian church and was involved in a young people's group. The Presbyterian Church in her home town of Homer, Louisiana, was all-white and Rose recalls that questioning segregation was simple not done. However, when her group attended the national youth conference, both black and white Presbyterians were present. In high school, Rose recalls one instance when she was standing in line at the national conference and a black girl from Arkansas asked her what she thought of integration. Rose did not know how to respond because she had been taught that integrationists were Communists. At the same time, she believed as a Christian that she should accept everyone and personally liked this girl. So, Rose said, "I don't know..."<sup>51</sup>

After high school, Rose attended Southwestern, a Presbyterian-affiliated college in Memphis. She recalls there being a program to connect the white and black Presbyterian churches in Memphis by having college students from each church go to the other and teach Sunday school. However, Rose acknowledges that at this stage in her life, she thought, "I couldn't possibly do that." When she did get involved in the movement a couple years later, churches were instrumental to organizing. Rose's sister, though younger, had been involved in the movement in

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<sup>50</sup> Bunch, 139.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Margaret Rose Gladney, telephone interview by author, June 28-29, 2011.

Memphis earlier. She and Rose's friend, Larry, a black gay man, both connected Rose to Centenary Methodist Church, where James Lawson was the pastor. Lawson had been instrumental to organizing the SCLC chapter in Memphis, where Rose became a secretary for a time. It was there that she learned about organizing and non-violent direct action.<sup>52</sup>

However, Rose says she distanced herself from organized religion as she entered feminist and lesbian groups. Two of her sisters, both married to Presbyterian ministers, remained within the church working for gender and sexual equality. Within the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition, which Rose helped to form, a number of women felt it important to reform the church within, though Rose was not one of them. Even when the University Presbyterian Church decided to become an affirming More Light church, Rose did not join. More recently, Rose joined a Presbyterian church in Florida and tried to change the church from within, but she says she "basically found no real support for doing so." Rose believes that the church remains important to her today in the sense that she recognizes its power to promote political change. However, she concludes, "I find no need to be a member of reconcile my life with any professed church doctrines."<sup>53</sup>

Don Steele also came from the white southern Presbyterian tradition. He was raised in a strict immigrant Calvinist family in Nashville, Tennessee. Don says the church was the place where a lot of people were hearing about segregation issues. While his local church did not oppose segregation, his parents and the larger Presbyterian church did. In May, 1963, the United Presbyterian Church, an

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<sup>52</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>53</sup> Rose Gladney to author, February 26, 2013.

influential Protestant denomination, established a special commission on civil rights and began to provide sizeable financial support to efforts for racial justice.<sup>54</sup>

Like Rose, Don Steele was also raised in the Presbyterian church and attended Southwestern. While in college, Don went on the Westminster Fellowship Retreat with the school choir and they inadvertently integrated a state park in northern Mississippi. He entered in 1964, the first year the school enrolled African American students and, in his senior year, assisted in the Memphis garbage workers' strike. Don went around to a number of white churches in Memphis with a small group to educate people about the garbage workers' strike. He recalls being thrown out of churches, even ones where he had previously been accepted, because he was advocating for the garbage workers. While Don's religious faith helped animate his activism, he encountered a great deal of resistance from churches.<sup>55</sup>

Don went on to attend Union Presbyterian Seminary, a very politically involved seminary in Richmond, Virginia, that focused on organizing in a predominantly African American neighborhood. In 1973, Don moved with his family to West Virginia where he was the pastor of three different parishes over the years. At all of them, he worked with people who were coming to terms with being gay or lesbian in the church. In 1994, Don was living in Berkeley, California, and working on his doctorate at Graduate Theological Union. Don had long since come to terms with the idea that "gay is good" but this was the first time in his life when he finally felt comfortable coming out. At the same time, in the mid-1990s, Don was more involved in gay activism, especially working with a group of Franciscans who

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Don Steele, telephone interview by author, July 6, 2011; Findlay, Jr., 3.

<sup>55</sup> Steele interview.



helped abused teens who were also coming to terms with being gay. He also volunteered in a hospital working with AIDS patients.<sup>56</sup>

However, Don did not come out in the church. Don was raised in a family where integrity was very important and the disconnect between his personal life and his life in the church left him depressed and seeking help from a therapist. He faced a conflict because the Presbyterian Church, which ordained him, did not ordain gay men. In the early 1970s, the United Presbyterian Church created a number of task forces which decided that the church should not bar homosexuals as members and considered the issue of gay ordination. Though the church prohibited gay ordination, because Don was ordained five years before the Presbyterian Church had its first debate about gay ordination or explicitly banned the ordination of partnered gays, Don remained a pastor.<sup>57</sup>

Don recalls that religion had often been used to keep gays silenced. By prohibiting gay ordination, the church attempted to make homosexuality a non-issue. Within the Presbyterian Church, though, some congregations decided to become More Light churches, which declared their acceptance of LGBT people. In 2012, the church lifted its ban on ordaining partnered gay people to allow each church to decide for itself what it would do. Don said of this decision, "I've known people who have left the church because there was no room for them to serve in the way that they felt God was calling them. This opens the doors for many..."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Steele interview.

<sup>57</sup> Steele interview; Fejes, 72; Ann Rodgers, "Church members celebrate acceptance of gays," *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, March 30, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Rodgers.

Linda Seese, a white civil rights volunteer who participated in Freedom Summer, attended the College of Wooster, a Presbyterian school. While there, she dated a white minister from South Africa who was an opponent of racial apartheid. She says that, because of him, "I think I got more of a sense earlier on about racial injustice by reading about and hearing about apartheid." Linda says religious beliefs definitely played a role in her decision to go to Mississippi. She had been raised in a religious household that emphasized caring for those who had less and that lesson remained with her. The compassion learned from Christianity was important to her activism. However, the particular church in Stow, Ohio, that Linda was raised in was resistant to the civil rights movement, a position Linda's family opposed. She recalls her mother writing a letter to the editor of a newspaper in Indianola, Mississippi, where Linda was working, calling on the local churches to support the efforts of civil rights workers.<sup>59</sup>

Later, the woman that Linda came out with had a Master's in Divinity from Union Theological Seminary and worked for the Y. Linda says her partner and her friends from seminary had been part of a group of women that were trying to make change within Protestant churches. But, her partner had given up those efforts by the time she met Linda. Likewise, Linda became disillusioned with Christian churches, particularly the one she was raised in, for their failure to respond to a number of social problems. She says, "And then...seeing a total lack of response from the church to the women's movement, let alone the gay movement - I was out

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<sup>59</sup> Seese interview.

of there.” While living on women’s lands, Linda practiced nature-based pagan spirituality and today identifies as a Buddhist.<sup>60</sup>

Among gays and lesbians in the African American civil rights movement, many became involved by participating in Quaker efforts. In his study of the American Friends Service Committee, Allan W. Austin notes that not much has been written about Quaker racial justice activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instead, most scholars have focused on anti-slavery efforts by the Quaker faithful. In Austin’s work, he argues that, for Quakers “...religion mattered deeply and motivated them to reinvigorate their traditional support of and work for racial justice in the United States.” Moreover, Austin underscores the link between anti-war activism and civil rights efforts. He finds that the AFSC’s work in peace activism led them to view problems of war and violence as systemic and institutional, rather than the result of flawed individuals. They subsequently applied this to their analysis of racial injustice. However, Austin’s study ends in 1950 and there remains little work on the role of Quakers in efforts for racial justice after 1950. While many gay and lesbian activists for black civil rights worked closely with the Quakers, they did not identify as Quakers. This was typical of Quaker efforts, which Austin says, increasingly relied on non-Quaker staff in their interracial activism. Even by 1947, only 32 percent of the AFSC staff were Quakers.<sup>61</sup>

Bayard Rustin came out of the Quaker tradition. His grandmother, Julia Rustin, was one of the few African American Quakers in eastern Pennsylvania and,

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<sup>60</sup> Seese interview.

<sup>61</sup> Allan W. Austin, *Quaker Brotherhood: Interracial Activism and the American Friends Service Committee, 1917-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 4-7, 9.

according to Jervis Anderson, was “the chief moral and religious influence upon Bayard’s upbringing.” Rustin attended Wilberforce, a university affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, and following that, he worked with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a Quaker peace and civil rights organization.<sup>62</sup> Though he was raised a Quaker and worked through Quaker organizations, religion was not particularly important to Rustin. David L. Chappell notes that Rustin was the least religious of the movement strategists. In fact, Rustin was often critical of southern black churches for their ties to white authorities. However, Chappell believes that Rustin recognized the power of southern black churches and worked with King to draw on their power.<sup>63</sup>

At the same time, Chappell affirms the importance of sexual orientation in Rustin’s participation in the movement. He finds, “As a not-too-well closeted homosexual before the 1970s, Rustin had insight from another perspective into the pariah status that was part of the sacrifice of the prophets.” Though Rustin was not one of the more religiously-driven people in the movement, his experience as a gay man gave him the understanding that a prophet “must be prepared to be looked upon as queer.”<sup>64</sup>

As a gay man, Rustin experienced a different response from his Quaker family and the Quaker organization he worked for. Rustin believes that his family knew, for example, when he was involved with a male friend from college. While they did not explicitly talk about it and his family did not explicitly say it was a good

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<sup>62</sup> Jervis Anderson, *Bayard Rustin: Troubles I’ve Seen, A Biography* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 9.

<sup>63</sup> Chappell, 55, 97.

<sup>64</sup> Chappell, 56. Rustin’s original quote appears in Rustin to Platt, September 3, 1948, Rustin Papers, microfilm, reel 20.

thing, Rustin says, “they obviously approved it.” Alternatively, he reflects, “It was amongst the Fellowship....that I found some of the worst attitudes to gays.” Rustin continues, “Many of the people in the Fellowship of Reconciliation were absolutely intolerant in their attitudes. When I lost my job there, some of these nonviolent Christians despite their love and affection for humanity were not really able to express very much affection to me.”<sup>65</sup>

However, Anderson says that Rustin rejected any religious condemnation of his sexuality. He writes, “A part of him said, ‘I’m also a child of God. I also have a soul and a personality made in the image of God.’” Even at the end of his life, Rustin still spoke in religious terms. When asked if prejudice would be overcome in his lifetime, Rustin responded, the “prophets taught that God does not require us to achieve any of the good tasks that humanity must pursue. What God requires of us is that we not stop trying.” While Rustin seems to have retained a theistic belief, his rejection by Quaker organizations for being gay pushed him away from the church.<sup>66</sup>

Dave McReynolds was born in 1929 and raised in a conservative white Baptist family in California. As a young man, he accepted the gospels as truth, the doctrine of personal salvation and the belief that Jesus Christ was his savior. McReynolds attended UCLA where he became involved with the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) and first met Bayard Rustin. McReynolds was very much influenced by Bob Demmer, a Quaker radical who encouraged him to join FOR. Demmer was a charismatic leader and a singer who used African American

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<sup>65</sup> “Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement: An Interview with Open Hands,” 1987 in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. by Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2003), 283-84.

<sup>66</sup> Anderson, 169; “An Interview with Open Hands,” 289.

spirituals in his presentations. While McReynolds was welcomed into FOR, a predominantly Christian and Quaker group, and the War Resisters' League, a more secular organization created by FOR members, he did feel somewhat uncomfortable with their religious tone.<sup>67</sup>

As McReynolds grew older, he rejected Christianity, though he still believed Jesus was a significant figure and incorporated the teachings of Jesus into his view of social justice. Even before he became an activist in various struggles, McReynolds was moving away from Christianity. He had a sort of spiritual awakening after reading Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* and began to call himself "an atheist with faith." McReynolds thought that Christians exhibited a fear of sex and a lack of sensual delight. At the same time, he felt caged by these attitudes himself and did not believe he would ever escape the guilt of doing things his culture raised him to believe were wrong. Martin Duberman writes that McReynolds certainly did not think that "God believes people should be weeded out and dropped into hell or sent up toward heaven on the basis of which orifice they use for the sexual act."<sup>68</sup>

Mandy Carter, a black woman who, like Rustin and McReynolds, became involved in civil rights and anti-war activism through the Quakers, attended Mt. Pleasant High School in Schenectady, New York. In high school, Mandy's social studies teacher invited a man from the American Friends Service Committee to speak to the class. The man talked about the involvement of Quakers in the civil rights movement in the South, something Mandy and others living in upstate New

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with David McReynolds, telephone interview by author, July 20, 2011; Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: New Press, 2011), 27, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 28, 51, 155, 157.

York felt very removed from. He also spoke about Quaker concepts. Most memorable for Mandy was the concept of the “power of one”; the idea that a single person has the capacity to make change if they so desire. This man’s discussion of the concepts of equality and justice for all also resonated with Mandy. He then invited the students to a one-week retreat in the Poconos. Mandy was eager to attend the camp. At the Quaker farm, she and the other students learned more about Quaker values, particularly nonviolence, and the role of Quakers in the civil rights movement, anti-war efforts, and other causes.<sup>69</sup>

While the Quaker organizations were important to bringing Mandy into the movement, religion never really motivated her activism. She did feel drawn to the Quakers and attended Friends meetings, but Mandy was never an “official Quaker.” Growing up in a group home in Schenectady, the kids would often be taken to a local Protestant church, but Mandy was never moved by her experiences there. She was also drawn to the Unitarian Church for its support of progressive causes. While Mandy emphasizes the importance of faith-based groups in advancing social justice, she never identified herself as a religious person.<sup>70</sup>

The greatest number of gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement identified themselves as secular Jews. Clive Webb argues that various Jewish sects all “shared a common sense of historical suffering that sensitized them to the plight of other peoples plagued by racial and religious bigotry.” At the same time, there were regional divisions among Jews with regard to civil rights. Webb points out that historians have underestimated southern Jewish support of racial segregation out of

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<sup>69</sup> Interview with Mandy Carter, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2012.

<sup>70</sup> Carter interview.

genuine ideological opposition to integration. More frequently, though, southern Jews remained silent on the issue to avoid violent repercussions. There was also a gender divide among southern Jews as many more women supported civil rights efforts. And, Webb argues, it remains true that southern Jews were more supportive of desegregation than other southern white communities. Northern Jews tended to be more supportive of black civil rights, especially those of younger generations. It is from that cohort that many of the gay and lesbian activists in the civil rights movement came.<sup>71</sup>

Debra L. Schultz argues, with regard to northern Jewish women specifically,

Jewish women had many motives for going south, but their primary impetus was clearly to be part of a democratic movement to combat racial injustice. Like many young people of their generation, they sought to hold the United States to its democratic ideals. Yet, they made their decision to join the movement from a more specific historical location: as women in mid-twentieth-century American Jewish life.<sup>72</sup>

In contrast to the arguments that have been made about southern black Christians being driven by higher religious ideals, a number of northern white Jews, many of whom were secular, were motivated by a desire to secure racial justice and make America uphold its liberal democratic ideals. Schultz argues that, even for women who did not possess a strong Jewish identity or religious faith, “In a range of ways, these women were exposed to a liberal Jewish moral framework of social justice that made involvement in the civil rights movement almost irresistible.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), xvi, 166-67, 218-19.

<sup>72</sup> Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Schultz, 4.



Faith Holsaert grew up in a secular Jewish household in New York City and was raised with an understanding of Judaism as an ethical and humanist system. In her estimation, Judaism in general was more liberal in the immediate post-World War II era when it was more connected to radical European roots. At least, that was the Judaism she was raised in. Faith was taught to have pride in Jewish involvement in progressive causes. There was not much of God or spirituality in this theology. As a child, Faith attended the Little Red School House in New York City. For one half of the school year, students learned black history and, for the other half, Jewish history. They were taught that the two were linked. During her time at the High School of Music and Art, Faith became involved in the National Conference of Christians and Jews and, through that organization, worked with the Harlem Brotherhood doing housing surveys in the city.<sup>74</sup>

While organizing in Georgia, Faith was inspired by the prophetic Christian witnesses, who expressed something different from the secular Jewish belief system she was raised in. Instead, Faith saw a spirituality there that was bigger than the individual, less about reason, and more communal than any of her prior religious experiences. At the same time, in writing about Faith Holsaert and other Jewish women in the civil rights movement, Debra L. Schultz says that these women often employed the survival strategy of hiding their identity when the situation called for it. This was necessary, as Clive Webb observes, because “The active involvement of northern Jews in the direct action campaigns of the 1960s would reaffirm the suspicion that the civil rights movement was a Zionist-Communist conspiracy.” One

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Faith Holsaert, telephone interview by author, July 13, 2011; Schultz, 152-154.

might also add that masking gay or lesbian identity, for those who recognized themselves as such, was done in similar fashion. The closet could protect individuals from retaliation and protect the movement from criticism. Gay and lesbian Jews were doubly closeted.<sup>75</sup>

Much like Faith Holsaert, Nancy Stoller was raised in a family of atheist and agnostic Jews, who were originally from New York City, in northern Virginia. Nancy attended the Orthodox synagogue as a child primarily because it was the only one in the area. Her parents wanted her to know what it meant to be Jewish. Learning about her Jewish heritage and history influenced her broader sense of justice and belief in self-assertion and struggle. At the same time, she was more conscious of her white privilege and did not believe that the discrimination against Jews was comparable to African Americans. Nancy says the fact that she is Jewish has had a number of important effects on her life. But, it is primarily because of discrimination against Jews rather than the particularities of religious belief and practice. She notes, for example, that Jews in her town could not be members of the country club. At her high school, there were sororities, but Jews could not join those either.<sup>76</sup>

While Nancy never really identified as a religious Jew, she found the Jewish religion to be very sexist, which she believes sparked her later interest in feminism. She also says her reaction to sexism among Jews may have triggered her rejection of gender roles which, in turn, stimulated her desire to be a lesbian. Nancy believes

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<sup>75</sup> Holsaert interview; Schultz, 120; Webb, 68.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Nancy Stoller, telephone interview by author, September 15, 2011; Interview with Nancy Stoller, interview by David Cline, April 16, 2010, transcript p. 2, Southern Oral History Program Collection, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

this was one part of her larger push to reject many conventional notions and practices. In her study, Debra Schultz found many other Jewish women like Nancy for whom feminist identity was strongest. Some attempted to become a part of Jewish spiritual communities but were repeatedly disappointed in the sexism they found in existing institutions. Others gave up their attempts to connect with Jewish institutions entirely.<sup>77</sup>

Sharon Raphael was also a non-religious or cultural Jew who was involved in civil rights activism. She says, rather than Judaism, it was Leftist and Socialist ideology, especially what she learned from her union-organizing aunt, that provided her with the political consciousness to become an activist in a variety of causes. While religious beliefs played no role in her civil rights activism, she would later become involved in lesbian and gay religious groups.<sup>78</sup>

In the early 1970s, Sharon joined the Jewish offshoot of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC), the largest gay-identified American church. Reverend Troy Perry, the founder of the MCC, opened up his church to gays and lesbians who were not Christian. Eventually, Jewish congregants in the MCC worked with Los Angeles Rabbis Norman Eichberg and Erwin Herman to open a Metropolitan Community Temple (MCT), with the support of Perry. Sharon's partner Mina Meyer recalls that many Jews did not feel comfortable in straight synagogues. But, the new temple brought out gay Jews who had not been to Jewish services since their teen years. In January, 1973, the group adopted a new name, Beth Chayim Chadashim, or House of New Life. The following year, they achieved recognition from the Union of

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<sup>77</sup> Stoller interview with author; Schultz, 201-2.

<sup>78</sup> Sharon Raphael to author, March 7, 2012.

American Hebrew Congregations. This marked the first time a gay congregation gained acceptance from the governing authorities of an established religion. Within Beth Chayim Chadashim, Mina Meyer became the first treasurer and Sharon Raphael became the first social action chair. Critical of its sexist language, Beth Chayim Chadashim became the first religious body with a de-androcentrized liturgy. The temple also had lesbian women serve as rabbis.<sup>79</sup>

Eddie Sandifer, a white gay man who was active in the civil rights movement in Mississippi, was also active in the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) and attempted to set up a house of worship in Jackson in the early 1980s. His efforts were met with a harsh response from evangelical Christians. In particular, Reverend Mike Wells, the leader of the Mississippi Moral Majority from 1982 to 1982, said that Sandifer would be destined for hell if he did not repent for his homosexuality.<sup>80</sup>

Arthur Finn was also raised a secular Jew in New York. In fact, he recalls his family putting up a Christmas tree during the holidays. While religious beliefs did not motivate his civil rights activism, the group that he joined to do civil rights work in Mississippi was Mennonite. Though Arthur was secular, he does not believe that was the result of religious proscriptions against homosexuality. He did not feel that religious belief was keeping him in the closet at all. It was more a sense of respectability and fear of social disapproval should he come out.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 262-64.

<sup>80</sup> Ken Lawrence and Dick Harger, "Persistence Is the Key," *Southern Exposure* (Mar.-Jun., 1985), 121.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Arthur Finn, telephone interview by author, July 7, 2011.

Igal Roodenko, born in 1917, was older than many other Jewish activists in the civil rights movement. His family was also more religious. Roodenko says it was an accident that he was even born in the United States rather than Israel. His parents were Zionists and moved to Palestine before World War I. At that time, the territory was under the control of Turkey. When the Great War broke out, Turkey attempted to draft his father. Consequently, his parents left for the United States and Igal was born in New York City. During World War II, Roodenko became a conscientious objector (CO) and was placed in a camp where he met many Quakers. However, he had an uneasy relationship with the American Friends Service Committee, which ran the CO camps. Roodenko believed that the Quakers served the government by preventing more radical action. While Roodenko later joined the Journey of Reconciliation, sponsored by the Fellowship of Reconciliation, religion does not seem to have played much part in his decision. In one interview, he stated, "I think one can take social action...without the moral righteousness." In fact, he spoke against the Judeo-Christian theology which he believed emphasized "that great big thing off in the future" rather than focusing on change, which was often incremental, in the here and now. Perhaps his passport application provided the most succinct summary of his worldview. He crossed out "so help me God" and wrote, "consistent with the Gandhian principles of nonviolence."<sup>82</sup>

Joan Nestle was also raised in a Jewish family. Like many others, she was not particularly religious. But, Jewish heritage was an important part of her identity. In

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<sup>82</sup> Interview with Igal Roodenko, interview by Charlotte Adams et al., April 11, 1974, transcript p. 36, 46-48, 65-66, 69-70, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; "Igal Roodenko," June 1, 1967, p. 2, Igal Roodenko file, Federal Bureau of Investigation.

her memoir *A Restricted Country*, she recalls instances of being discriminated against because she was Jewish. For example, on a family vacation to a ranch in Tucson, her family was told that only Gentiles were welcome. After telling the owner they were Jewish, he said they could stay as long as they did not tell anyone they were Jewish, entered and exited through the back door, and ate their meals alone. They refused. While events like these were memorable, Nestle does not write of religious identity playing any role in her activism.<sup>83</sup>

Allard Lowenstein was an important white activist in the civil rights movement who was also a Jew. According to Richard Cummings, Lowenstein was raised in “a traditional, conservative Jewish family in which sexual matters were not discussed openly.” His father, Gabriel Lowenstein, was an important Zionist who founded the United Palestine Appeal, which later became the United Jewish Appeal. As a young man, Lowenstein became involved in a Sephardic temple and thought of becoming a rabbi, though this may have been primarily to gain the approval of his stepmother. His commitment to Judaism seemed to waver throughout his life and Lowenstein seems to have abandoned religion for long periods of time. But, when he had children, he began taking them to temple and raised them Jewish. Cummings writes that, according to Lowenstein’s cousin, he was never “seriously religious, though he maintained throughout his life that he believed in God and called himself a theist.” There does not appear to be much evidence that Jewish beliefs or theism played much of a role in Lowenstein’s activism and because Lowenstein was

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<sup>83</sup> Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1987), 31.

closeted most of his life, there also is not much about his thoughts on religion and homosexuality.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast to many others, Elizabeth Slade Hirschfeld was a white northern religious Jew who remained connected to the faith. Hirschfeld was the only Jew in her school in Michigan. In fact, she was known as “the Jewish girl.” However, when she attended Cornell, she met many other Jews and developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of Judaism. During her time in the southern civil rights movement, she occasionally saw parallels to Jewish oppression. For example, when riding in a wooden wagon to Parchman Prison after being arrested on a Freedom Ride, Hirschfeld thought of images she had seen of the Holocaust. Hirschfeld says that Judaism, as well as feminist spirituality, is a major part of her life and she pushed for various Jewish groups to support LGBT equality. She encouraged her synagogue to include feminist and lesbian and gay issues among its concerns. Hirschfeld also worked to get her chapter of the American Jewish Congress to send a resolution supportive of lesbian and gay relationships to the national organization.<sup>85</sup>

Hirschfeld’s continued religious participation in Jewish religious life both contributed to and result from certain sects of Judaism becoming more accepting of LGBT persons. Like the parallels drawn between Jewish and African American experiences, in *Rainbow Jews*, Jonathan Friedman argues that, “There is little doubt that Jews and gay people are linked by history and that their experience of oppression has served to unite them as fellow ‘others.’” However, there are key

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<sup>84</sup> Richard Cummings, *The Pied Piper: Allard K. Lowenstein and the Liberal Dream* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985), 15, 402.

<sup>85</sup> Schultz, 154, 178, 184, 201.

distinctions among the views of Orthodox, Reform, Hasidic, cultural, and many other groups of Jews. It is primarily two liberal sects of Judaism in the U.S., Reform and Reconstructionism, that have advanced LGBT equality. Friedman argues that it is because of the longer history of participation in social justice efforts by these sects, including their support of the black civil rights movement, as well as the importance of re-evaluation and principles of compassion and healing in these two sects that they advanced gay rights. As early as 1965, the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods, a Reform Jewish group, passed a resolution which called for the repeal of sodomy laws and an end to the harassment of homosexuals. While Reform and Reconstructionist Jews were not uniformly and consistently supportive LGBT equality, they were often more progressive than many other religious groups.<sup>86</sup>

It is, in part, the progressive stance of liberal Judaism on questions of feminism and LGBT equality that led women like civil rights activist Mary Jo Osgood, who was raised a secular Jew, to choose a religious Jewish identity later in life. During her time as an activist for black civil rights, Mary Jo does not ascribe her participation in the movement to spirituality. Mary Jo was raised in the suburbs Denver and attended a Catholic high school, but does not believe her religious upbringing or education motivated her towards social justice. She does believe, however, that her cultural identity as a gay Jew helped propel her to join the movement though. It made her aware of being “the other” and allowed her to identify with other disenfranchised classes. But, while she may have identified with African Americans, she does not claim that her experiences were the same. She

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<sup>86</sup> Jonathan C. Friedman, *Rainbow Jews: Jewish and Gay Identity in the Performing Arts* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 3, 5, 18-19, 25.



writes, "My emotional souvenir is the very real knowledge that no white really knows what life was like for African Americans living in the South of the 60's. The privilege of my white skin and middle-class background allowed me eventually to return to the safety of my life."<sup>87</sup>

Later in life, Mary Jo chose a religious Jewish identity. Mary Jo notes that she feels much more comfortable as a lesbian in the Jewish community than she does as a Jew in the gay community. Living in Galveston, Texas, she says she has seen a great deal of anti-black and anti-brown racism among gay communities in the South, as well as anti-Semitism. Alternatively, she says she has not experienced much homophobia among Jewish communities in the South. Mary Jo also believes being a Jew is also a much stronger part of her identity because, she says, she chose to be Jewish but did not choose to be gay.<sup>88</sup>

While Mary Jo attended a Catholic school, that does not appear to have influenced her activism, though Catholics did play an important role in the civil rights movement. Catholics were somewhat distinct from Protestants in their view of racial issues. In *Almighty God Created the Races*, Fay Botham argues that distinct viewpoints evolved because of Protestant and Catholic differences over questions of authority, the role of the Bible and who could interpret it. Because Protestants believed the Bible was the sole authority on theological questions and that individuals could interpret the Bible differently, Protestant beliefs about religion and race became localized. Botham argues, "As the nation inched into the civil rights

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<sup>87</sup> Interview with Mary Jo Osgood, telephone interview by author, July 10, 2011; Mary Jo Osgood, "Memories of a Civil Rights Volunteer," document in author's possession.

<sup>88</sup> Osgood interview.

movement, the southern white Protestant theology of separate races became an explicit theology of segregation, and the marriage altar was the place where God's mandate had to be most vigorously enforced." Alternatively, the more hierarchical Catholic Church made interracialism the orthodox belief by 1960s. However, Botham, John T. McGreevy, and others have noted that there was still a sharp distinction between the church's teaching and the behavior of parishioners.<sup>89</sup>

Achebe Betty Powell, a black woman, was influenced by a number of religious traditions, with Catholicism probably being the most important. Her grandfather, who she cites as a "a major part" of her life, was an African Methodist Episcopal (AME) preacher. His father had been a slave preacher. Living in Mannheim, Germany, in her early teen years though, Powell decided to covert to Catholicism after some family had come to stay with them and she became interested in practicing their Catholic faith.<sup>90</sup>

When she returned to Florida for her senior year of high school, she became involved in civil rights activities, working with the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ), as Faith Holsaert had. The NCCJ was where Powell says she underwent her first political learning experience and began to understand prejudice. She began participating in the group's program called Youths Speak Against Prejudice. Powell says faith was important to her, adding, "actually my biggest coping strategy was an altered state of consciousness." She continued

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<sup>89</sup> Fay Botham, *Almighty God Created the Races: Christianity, Interracial Marriage, and American Law* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 6-9, 109, 111-12, 126; John T. McGreevy, *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth Century Urban North* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 180-83.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Achebe Betty Powell, interview by Kelly Anderson, July 6-7, 2004, transcript p. 14, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

attending the AME church with her father and also attended Catholic mass on her own.<sup>91</sup>

Powell decided that she must go to a Catholic women's college, while many of her peers were going to Howard or Hampton. She enrolled at the College of St. Catherine in St. Paul, Minnesota. The College of St. Catherine became known for its feminist teaching and producing radical women. While there, Powell became involved with the Catholic Interracial Council. However, she eventually felt that the church was never as ecumenical as she wanted to be. When she came out at age 30, both Powell and her partner Ginny Apuzzo were no longer practicing Catholics.<sup>92</sup>

The Catholic teaching on homosexuality was complicated. Fred Fejes writes,

In America's largest denomination, the Roman Catholic Church, homosexuality was viewed not through the prism of biblical condemnations but through centuries-old Catholic teachings on natural law. Homosexuality was regarded as an innate disorder that hindered a person from engaging in the procreative sex act. While the practice of homosexuality was a sin against natural law, being a homosexual was not. Starting in the early 1970s lesbian and gay Catholics began organizing chapters of the group Dignity to work for Church acceptance of openly lesbian and gay members and a change in the teaching.<sup>93</sup>

It was the attitude of the local bishop that often determined whether groups like Dignity were accepted. The Vatican also responded to the issue. In 1975, the Pope issued the Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics and the following year, the pastoral letter "To Live in Christ." Both documents affirmed the church's moral opposition to homosexuality, but also said that homosexuals were valued members of the church. One could be a celibate gay or lesbian and remain in

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<sup>91</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 22, 28.

<sup>92</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 15, 19, 43, 50.

<sup>93</sup> Fejes, 74.

communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>94</sup> However, many people like Powell and Apuzzo rejected this teaching.

When Powell attended the National Women's Conference in Houston in 1977, where thousands of women had gathered, she and Barbara Smith tried to connect with black church women. When talking to them about lesbian rights, Powell says, reactions varied. Some were "totally into it" while others "literally would turn their backs and walk away from us." Though religion and activism had gone hand-in-hand for Powell, to some extent her fervent religiosity was supplanted by activism. She observes, "I loved the notion of being a drum major for justice. And that, to me...seems like it has a religious fervor to it, a spiritual fervor to it."<sup>95</sup>

While Catholic religious beliefs animated Powell's work for a time, they did not really motivate Jewelle Gomez in her advocacy for social justice. She was raised Catholic in Boston. Jewelle looks back and remembers it being difficult as a black Catholic there. She attended mass only because her family wanted to go. However, Jewelle felt the church was racist. She had learned from her Native American great-grandmother that the church had a hand in destroying Native Americans, so she did not look to Catholic figures for guidance. Things changed somewhat, though, when her church received a black priest from the Caribbean who increased the number of African Americans participating in the Catholic Church and attending their school. However, Jewelle continued to have a negative opinion of organized religion and

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<sup>94</sup> Fejes, 74.

<sup>95</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 57, 62.

never questioned the relationship between Catholicism and lesbianism as she did not identify with the church.<sup>96</sup>

Rodney Powell, a black gay man who was involved in the Nashville movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s, was also raised Catholic. He grew up in Philadelphia and attended St. Joseph's University as an undergraduate. As a student at St. Joseph's, he began to question his beliefs and become very critical of Catholicism to the point that, he says, he risked his scholarship. In explaining his divergence from the church's teachings, Powell says, "part of the reason for that was that I am a gay American and although I was not out of the closet at that point, I certainly had some insight about my feelings and the Church's homophobic dogma was so condemning and alienating."<sup>97</sup>

During his time in the Nashville movement, Powell worked closely with Christian civil rights activists, especially Rev. Kelly Miller Smith, C.T. Vivian and James Lawson. Powell believes that "the movement would not have been effective without the sustained support from those churches." At the same time, David Halberstam writes in *The Children* that Powell "suspected, the black community, because of its own vulnerability to the larger white society and the cruelty inflicted on it over the years because of skin color, might be even harder than white society on anyone who was different from the norm."<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Interview with Jewelle Gomez, telephone interview by author, July 12, 2011.

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Rodney Powell, interview by K. G. Bennett, March, 29, 2005, Nashville Public Library.

<sup>98</sup> Rodney Powell interview; David Halberstam, *The Children* (New York: Random House, 1998), 385-6.

Subsequently, Powell drew on the tactics of the civil rights movement to oppose religiously-based homophobia. He says that his experience in the civil rights movement,

...very much influenced my view of conservative Christianity and how the Biblical texts have been abused and interpreted and codified into laws that initially oppressed black Americans in slavery and segregated schools, racism, and their support of bans on interracial marriage. And most importantly, it has provided me the focus that I use in trying to combat Christian homophobia towards homosexual Americans. And I still use the lessons learned and that commitment to love and nonviolence...<sup>99</sup>

Rodney Powell has become a prominent figure in Soulforce, a group “committed to relentless nonviolent resistance to bring freedom to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people from religious & political oppression.” His work with Soulforce has also included once again working with fellow activists from the civil rights movement, like James Lawson. He is also a current board member of Faith in America, a group whose mission “is to educate the public about the harm caused when misguided religious teaching is used to place a religious and moral stamp of disapproval and inequality on the lives of gay and lesbian Americans, with emphasis on its horrific impact on youth and families.”<sup>100</sup>

The Catholic Church that Achebe Betty Powell, Jewelle Gomez and Rodney Powell came out of attempted to embrace issues of racial justice, but it did not take the same progressive stance when it came to questions of gender and sexuality. John T. McGreevy finds that, “In retrospect, the Second Vatican Council and the 1960s were the opening acts in a remarkably turbulent, unfinished drama. A

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<sup>99</sup> Rodney Powell interview.

<sup>100</sup> Rodney Powell interview; Soulforce Website. “About.” <http://www.soulforce.org/about/>; Faith in America Website. “About FIA.” <http://www.faithinamerica.org/about-fia/>

generation after the opening of the council, unprecedented disagreement with Church teaching in all areas connected to gender and sexuality, a steep drop in vocations to the religious life, and marked declines in mass attendance suggested an institution less capable of making claims on Catholic lives.” At the same time, the Church’s efforts on racial justice, primarily in northern urban areas, led the number of African American Catholics to continue to expand.<sup>101</sup>

There were also a number of gay and lesbian activists in the civil rights movement for whom religion played no role in their lives. Barbara Deming was not really raised in any particular religious tradition. Her activism in the civil rights movement and anti-war movements as well as women’s liberation and lesbian and gay liberation does not appear to have been motivated by any religious belief. Her activism in women’s liberation came in part through reading the works of women who were critical of organized religion. Among the most influential radical feminist works that Deming cited was *The Church and the Second Sex* and *Beyond God the Father* by Mary Daly.<sup>102</sup>

While James T. Sears titled his chapter on the prominent role of three gay men in the Chapel Hill civil rights movement “The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost,” none of them seem to have been particularly driven by prophetic Christianity. In describing his religious beliefs, one of the leaders, Quinton Baker, a black gay man, says that he occasionally went to the Community Church, but “I was much more of an agnostic than anything else about the whole thing. But given Christianity as I understood it, within the doctrines and the teachings of Jesus Christ

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<sup>101</sup> McGreevy, 260, 262.

<sup>102</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 159.

at the time, it made more sense in the framework that I was acting than it did in the framework that the people who were in the church were acting. So that if I were going to be a Christian, I was going to be the kind that was in the streets.” Baker identifies a religious outlook similar to Igal Roodenko. He concludes, “I was a pacifist at that time from about 1960 on. It was very much my philosophy. In fact, if you had asked me my religious belief, I would have probably told you at that time that I was a satyagrahi or a follower of Zion.”<sup>103</sup>

While the suggestion that homophobia was endemic in almost every American religious traditions for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not new, it has rarely been placed in conversation with scholarship on the role of faith in the African American civil rights movement. A discussion of the role of lesbians and gays in the black civil rights movement affords an opportunity to consider the intersection of many faith traditions that began to promote African American equality while continuing to deny LGBT equality. In looking at this issue, it is once again apparent that gay and lesbian experiences in the civil rights movement were quite diverse and many of these individuals had complicated connections to various religious traditions over time.

The presumption that gays and lesbians would not be religiously motivated to participate in the civil rights movement does not hold true. While essentially every religious denomination opposed homosexuality, the fact that it was not a major issue at the time meant that little was ever said of it and lesbians and gays

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<sup>103</sup> James T. Sears, *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997); Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by Larry Goodyn, June 2, 1974, transcript p. 8, The North Carolina Civil Rights Movement, 1973-1978, 1992, Duke University Oral History Program Collection, 1937-1978, 1992.



remained within many churches and synagogues. Moreover, a number of gays and lesbians did not identify as such in the 1960s and it was only when greater consciousness of homosexuality led them to a realization of their sexual identities as gays and lesbians that many religious institutions also became more vocally homophobic.

For a number of civil rights activists, religion played an important role in their efforts for racial justice and they remained involved in religious organizations thereafter. Religion was certainly important in Aaron Henry's civil rights work, though the "hellfire and damnation" version of southern Methodism that he was raised in probably helped to keep him closeted for his entire life. Pauli Murray was also religiously motivated and later ordained in the Episcopal Church. Like Henry, she remained closeted as well, though she contested religious teachings on gender and sexuality. Malcolm Boyd and Nina Boal also remained involved in the Episcopal Church throughout their lives as the order moved from supporting civil rights efforts to greater acceptance of lesbians and gays. Similarly, Jan Griesinger remained involved in the United Church of Christ as it too traveled a more progressive path on issues of racial justice and LGBT equality. Elizabeth Slade Hirschfeld continued to be a part of a liberal Jewish tradition which promoted racial and gay equality. Don Steele continues to be a Presbyterian minister, though that denomination remains divided on questions of gay ordination and LGBT equality and Yvonne Flowers remained religious outside of black churches, which she found very homophobic.

A number of other civil rights activists whose denominations were not responsive to calls for sexual orientation equality left their churches. While religious faith motivated Charlotte Bunch's civil rights efforts, after identifying as a feminist and lesbian, she could no longer see herself as a part of a Methodist Church which deemed her a sinner and prevented her from answering its highest callings. Achebe Betty Powell was involved in Catholic activism for civil rights, but by the time she came out as a lesbian, she left the church. Meanwhile, Jane Stenbridge was raised a southern Baptist and felt her civil rights activism was necessary for her to live out her Christian ethics. While she became a Catholic for many years, she too concluded as Powell had that the church was "too suffocating." Linda Seese and Rose Gladney were both raised in the Presbyterian Church, but for Rose the church became less important as she gravitated toward feminism and lesbian activism and Linda explicitly left because of its negative response to the women's movement and gay liberation. For many of the gay and lesbian activists in the black civil rights movement, the rise of women's liberation and lesbian and gay liberation was also the end of their association with organized religion.

Many more gay and lesbian activists were never religiously motivated in their civil rights activism. Most of these activists were secular Jews whose cultural identity was important to their involvement but who were not religiously motivated. These activists included Allard Lowenstein, Faith Holsaert, Igal Roodenko, Nancy Stoller, Joan Nestle, Arthur Finn, Sharon Raphael and Mary Jo Osgood. Though Osgood later became involved with a gay-affirming religious Jewish sect. A number of others worked with religious organizations, including

Bayard Rustin, David McReynolds and Mandy Carter who worked with Quaker groups and Arthur Finn who traveled to Mississippi with a Mennonite group. But, none of them were particularly religious themselves.

There was also a sizeable group who were not religious at all. It is important to recognize that for white southern women like Lillian Smith, whose Methodist church preached segregation, abandoning the church was a necessary precursor to civil rights activism. Moreover, Smith abandoned religious belief almost entirely because she believed it encouraged people to be “otherworldly” and ignore important social problems in the present, like racial inequality. While Cathy Cade became interested in civil rights through the Unitarian Church, for her, the beginning of civil rights activism meant departing from the church. She felt that the church was too focused on discussing issues of morality rather than taking action to create a more moral society. For Sandra Tignor, her time in the civil rights movement led her to question religion even more as her experiences in the U.S. South pushed her to doubt a God who could allow such terrible inequality. While James Baldwin was raised in Baptist and Pentecostal churches, the hypocrisy he saw pushed him away from religion as an adolescent and it did not play a role in his activism. For Lorraine Hansberry, Barbara Deming and Jewelle Gomez, religion did not animate their efforts for black civil rights either.

Many lesbian and gay civil rights activists cite no religious motivation and were not a part of organized religion even before issues of gender and sexuality became prominent. For those that were religiously motivated in the civil rights movement, roughly half of them abandoned religion when their churches

confronted issues of gay and lesbian equality. The ones who remained were either closeted or involved with denominations that were more progressive on issues of LGBT equality. Examining the role of gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement presents a somewhat different picture of the struggle in which religion played a less important role. Finally, in looking at this “long civil rights movement” one can observe the diminishing importance of religion over time as churches that were responsive on questions of racial justice lost activist followers as they failed to issue a prophetic call for gay and lesbian equality.

## CHAPTER SIX - A DIFFERENT PROTEST: CIVIL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN THE MOVEMENT FOR GAY LIBERATION

In 1986, the 35-member New York City Council considered a gay rights bill. The legislation proposed that the city prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, employment and public accommodations. Similar legislation had been defeated annually for 15 consecutive years. This bill came at a time when attacks on LGBT individuals were rising. The New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project documented 351 incidents of attacks on gays and lesbians from January to December of 1986, ranging from numerous verbal threats to 17 homicides. This was more than double the number of incidents from the previous year. Many attributed the rising violence to the increased visibility of gay and lesbian protest and the spread of AIDS and the attendant rise in fear of AIDS, a disease many blamed on gays and lesbians. It was also the year that the Supreme Court upheld Georgia's anti-sodomy law on a 5-4 decision in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, ruling that the "crime" of "homosexual conduct" did not escape the purview of the law even between consenting adults in their own home.<sup>1</sup>

Seeing the increasing violence against gays and lesbians and recognizing the opportunity for the city to finally pass legislation to help prevent it, Bayard Rustin spoke in favor of the ordinance. Drawing on decades of activist experience, he

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<sup>1</sup> "Koch Offers City Council Homosexual-Rights Bill," *The New York Times*, January 23, 1986; William R. Greer, "Violence Against Homosexuals Rising, Groups Seeking Wider Protection Say," *The New York Times*, November 23, 1986; John T. McQuiston, "City Finds Rise in Complaints of Bias Against Homosexuals," *The New York Times*, March 8, 1986; Larry Rohter, "Friend and Foe See Homosexual Defeat," *The New York Times*, July 1, 1986; *Bowers v. Hardwick*, 478 U.S. 186 (1986).

declared, "I categorically can state and history reveals that when laws are amended to provide 'legal loopholes' that deny equal protection for any group of citizens, an immediate threat is created for everyone, including those who may think they are forever immune to the consequences of such discrimination." Despite strong religious opposition and efforts by council members to water down the bill, in late March, 1986, the City Council finally approved its first gay rights legislation and Mayor Ed Koch exercised his veto power for only the fifth time in nine years to prevent a subsequent attempt to weaken it.<sup>2</sup>

Like Rustin, many gays and lesbians in the civil rights movement went on to be active in gay liberation. As with their involvement in the black freedom struggle, they played a variety of roles. After being involved in efforts to bring down Jim Crow in the South, some activists remained there to advance lesbian and gay rights in an often hostile region. A number of black lesbian and gay civil rights activists also went on to form groups specifically addressing black gay and lesbian issues after feeling alienated from black, gay and women's movements. A number of others acted as prophetic voices in their religious denominations pushing them to recognize LGBT equality, pursued AIDS activism, offered their skills in social work, contributed to lesbian and gay culture, and more.

While the Stonewall Rebellion is used to set the temporal bounds of this study, its position in the history of LGBT history should be interrogated. While it is

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<sup>2</sup> Bayard Rustin, "Statement on Proposed Amendments to Law Banning Discrimination on the Basis of Sexual Orientation," in *Time on Two Crosses: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin*, ed. by Devon W. Carbado and Donald Weise (Berkeley: Cleis Press, 2003), 296; Suzanne Daley, "Council Panel Moves to Weaken New Law on Homosexual Rights," *The New York Times*, April 18, 1986; Mary Connelly and Alan Finder, "Koch Vetoes Curb on Gay Rights Bill," *The New York Times*, June 8, 1986; Larry Rohter, "Homosexual-Rights Bill Will Pass, Backer Say," *The New York Times*, January 13, 1986.

generally true that it is more difficult to uncover gay and lesbian history before 1969 with the call for everyone to come out, the role of Stonewall in bringing about a change in consciousness should not be overstated. In the lives of many gay and lesbian activists in the African American civil rights movement, Stonewall did not create a sea change.

Many scholars have argued for the pre-eminent position of New York City and Stonewall in LGBT history. In *Gay Power*, David Eisenbach explains his choice of New York City as the central setting because “the movement in the media capital of the world was able to generate media events and images that had a nationwide reach.”<sup>3</sup> In *Stonewall*, David Carter generally accepts the prominence of the rebellion in Greenwich Village but offers some important qualification. He acknowledges that the militant attitude arose slightly earlier on the West Coast among activists like Carl Wittman, author of *A Gay Manifesto*, and Leo Laurence.<sup>4</sup>

Carter also recognizes, to some extent, the role of other struggles, writing, “that the Stonewall Riots occurred during a period of great social change and unrest--the civil rights and the antiwar movements in particular--has to be added to the list of factors that caused the riots.”<sup>5</sup> Though, it was not merely surrounding events, but the fact that many of those who pushed for gay rights were engaged in direct action protest long before Stonewall in these movements. Instead of gays and lesbians adopting the tactics of direct action from other movements, gay and lesbian activists

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<sup>3</sup> David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), vii.

<sup>4</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 259.

<sup>5</sup> Carter, 259.

who had been engaged in direct action throughout the decade added another goal: gay liberation.

Moreover, a number of gays and lesbians who were involved in the civil rights movement came out before Stonewall. For example, Eddie Sandifer came out in the 1940s in Mississippi, Rodney Powell came out in 1965, and Sandra Tignor came out around 1967 and does not believe the Stonewall Rebellion had any direct effect on her. Similarly, Linda Seese came out shortly before Stonewall, though she says hearing about Stonewall and knowing that there were many other gays and lesbians helped her come out to more people.

Others were not familiar with Stonewall at the time. For example, Armistead Maupin reflects, "Nobody heard about Stonewall, let's face it. That was a PR campaign after the fact."<sup>6</sup> Mary Jo Osgood was living in Denver at the time of the Stonewall Rebellion and does not recall ever hearing about it. Similarly, in Ohio, Sharon Raphael and Jan Griesinger were not aware of events at the Stonewall Inn. But, Raphael had two activists from the Gay Liberation Front speak to a class she was teaching in the early 1970s. Aside from offering their honesty and openness about their sexual orientation, they educated Sharon and others about Stonewall.<sup>7</sup> Though Jewelle Gomez, a journalist, recalls knowing about Stonewall and thinking it was great, she says she rarely came across it in the newspapers. Instead, Jewelle reflects, "I knew more about Alcatraz than I did about Stonewall."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Patrick Gale, *Armistead Maupin* (Bath, UK: Absolute Press, 1999), 31.

<sup>7</sup> Sharon Raphael to author, March 12, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Gomez interview.



Alternatively, Amber Hollibaugh recalls hearing and reading about Stonewall and was amazed by the outpouring of literature on lesbian and gay experience in its aftermath.<sup>9</sup> Faith Holsaert went to elementary school not far from Stonewall and says she was very conscious of what the event meant for lesbians and gays. Moreover, her mother, who was also a lesbian, was still living in the area. So, while Stonewall was an important event, particularly for those with connections to New York City, the reach of the rebellion should not be overstated.

It should also be recognized that some gays and lesbians were involved in civil rights activities and went on to become involved in the homophile movement of the 1950s and 1960s, before Stonewall. The homophile movement, which was primarily represented by the Mattachine Society (founded 1950), ONE (1953), and the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB, 1955), has been characterized as overwhelmingly white, conformist, reformist, and committed to the politics of respectability. However, Marcia Gallo has shown in *Different Daughters* that the Daughters of Bilitis did not always fit that mold. In 1963, the DOB elected Cleo (Glenn) Bonner, an African American lesbian, to be their national president. Bonner was the first black lesbian to lead a national gay and lesbian rights group. Further, the DOB had some black lesbians in leadership roles at the local level. However, Gallo acknowledges that segregation inhibited the organization from making good on its stated principles of equality.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Amber Hollibaugh, interview by Kelly Anderson, December 15-16, 2003, and January 20, 2004, p. 111, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>10</sup> Gallo, xxii.

Within the DOB, Ernestine Eppenger<sup>11</sup>, a black lesbian, was one of the most important activists working to bring direct action from the civil rights movement into the homophile movement, fighting both racism and homophobia. Eppenger had been involved in the civil rights movement through the NAACP at Indiana University.<sup>12</sup> In 1963, she moved to New York and joined both the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Daughters of Bilitis. Eppenger appeared on the cover of the DOB's magazine *The Ladder*, perhaps to counter the presumption of gay and lesbian whiteness. In short order, she also became Vice President of DOB-New York. Her plan was "to reach out to women who saw the gay struggle as linked to other civil rights issues and hope that during her time as vice president of the local chapter she would help build a more social action-oriented group."<sup>13</sup> As early as 1966, Eppenger and women like her were making direct connections between the rights of various groups and drawing on their experiences with direct action in the civil rights movement in order to advance lesbian and gay rights.

However, Eppenger also encountered resistance to this new approach. She became frustrated with disagreements in the DOB over strategy and tactics and felt there was too much time devoted to personal problems, rather than political and

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<sup>11</sup> Ernestine Delois Eppenger is the real name of "Ernestine Eckstein" of the Daughters of Bilitis. While other scholars like John D'Emilio and Marcia Gallo have used her DOB pseudonym because she could not be located, Social Security Death Index records and California Death Index records indicate she passed away in 1992 in Contra Costa, California.

<sup>12</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 150, 172-3. Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006), 117. *The Arbutus Yearbook* (Indiana University), 1963, lists her as a member of the NAACP.

<sup>13</sup> Gallo, 121-22.

social concerns. In 1968, she left the organization and moved to Northern California where she joined the Oakland-based Black Women Organized for Action.<sup>14</sup>

While the DOB was more integrated than other homophile organizations, it also drew on the direct action tactics of the civil rights movement. By the middle of 1965, the Daughters abandoned their policy against picketing and began demonstrating at national sites. Marcia Gallo writes,

The 1965 demonstrations in Washington were significant because they marked the first time that a group of gay people openly took to the sidewalks of the nation's capital to demand their rights. Homophile activists had been influenced by the examples of countless civil rights protests, marches, pickets, and demonstrations that steadily increased in the first half of the 1960s. At that time within DOB, however, as Del Shearer's scorching letter to DOB's national governing board reveals, comparisons between the black civil rights struggle and the emerging gay rights movement were constantly asserted and highly contested.<sup>15</sup>

The adoption of direct action tactics led members like Del Shearer, founder of the Chicago chapter, to leave the group saying, "The homosexual is not the Negro." Shearer argued that there was "an endless mass of literature" which had made many whites sympathetic to black calls for equality. Since this did not exist for lesbians and gays, Shearer argued the homophile movement should remain focused on educating the public and called picketing "ridiculous if not utter insanity."<sup>16</sup>

The Mattachine Society of New York also began to adopt direct action in the mid-1960s. This was primarily driven by Randy Wicker and Craig Rodwell.<sup>17</sup>

Wicker had been involved in protests for black civil rights, sitting in at lunch

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<sup>14</sup> Gallo, 149.

<sup>15</sup> Gallo, 117.

<sup>16</sup> Gallo, 118.

<sup>17</sup> Gallo, 111; Neil Miller, *Out of the Past: Gay and Lesbian History from 1869 to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 349. Randolfe (or Randy) Wicker's birth name was Charles Gervin Hayden, Jr.

counters while attending the University of Texas.<sup>18</sup> According to John Howard, gay political organizing began in Mississippi when Wicker and Eddie Sandifer, who was also involved in civil rights efforts, began Wicker Research Studies in 1959.<sup>19</sup> In 1964, the efforts of Wicker and others to push Mattachine to direct action were successful. That year, there were gay protests at the U.S. Army Induction Center, the White House, the United Nations, the Civil Service Commission, the Pentagon, and the State Department. There were also protests in Philadelphia and San Francisco.<sup>20</sup>

David Eisenbach also says of Wicker that, "His interest in the civil rights struggle, which was generating headlines and news reports daily during his college years in the 1950s, convinced him that the media could be a powerful tool in the fight for gay rights." Wicker formed the Homosexual League of America, which was essentially Wicker himself, and began a media campaign. He wanted to make gays and lesbians more visible by dispelling stereotypes. Wicker argued that those gays who did not fit the common stereotypes felt they could easily stay closeted and did so. Consequently, Wicker pushed for news coverage of and media appearances by gays who otherwise seemed to be just like everyone else to eliminate the presumption of straightness by those who appeared "normal."<sup>21</sup> Not only did gay

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<sup>18</sup> Randy Wicker, "A life lived on the front line of the gay rights battle," *The Dallas Voice*, October 26, 2007, <https://www.dallasvoice.com/a-life-lived-on-the-front-line-of-the-gay-rights-battle-1023260.html>; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 232-34. Eddie Sandifer also apparently used the pseudonym Randy Wicker as a request for his Sovereignty Commission files includes the alternate name Randolph Wicker, III as well as Eeay Sand and Alien Neila. Edgar A. Sandifer Papers, box 19, folder 7, Personal: Life History, ONE Archives.

<sup>20</sup> Gallo, 111-14.

<sup>21</sup> David Eisenbach, *Gay Power: An American Revolution* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 33-34.

activists who participated in the black civil rights movement push gay rights activists toward direct action, they did so years before Stonewall.

### **Gay Liberation and the Black Panther Party**

The Stonewall Rebellion spurred the creation of the Gay Liberation Front, a group dedicated not only to gay liberation but the liberation of all people. The group adopted broad goals and engaged with other organizations, the most important of which was the Black Panther Party. The post-Stonewall era saw not only increased calls for gays and lesbians to come out, but also an open political alliance between gay liberation and the black freedom struggle, which stood in contrast to the largely closeted efforts of lesbians and gays in the earlier black civil rights movement.

One of the Gay Liberation Front-New York's central concerns was its relationship to the Black Panther Party. GLF activist John O'Brien, who had previously been involved in efforts for black civil rights, proposed handing over \$500 in revenues from GLF dances held at Alternate U to the Black Panther 21 defense fund. O'Brien says the Panthers immediately received support from gay people, in part, because of their similarities: they both opposed the police and favored radical action. However, opposition arose from those who opposed the Panthers' anti-gay rhetoric. Alternatively, Jim Fouratt, a white gay activist, defended the Panthers' rhetoric saying that "faggot" was their metaphor for "any castrated male made impotent by society." The final vote favored giving the money to the Panthers. This decision led to a split in the GLF just months after Stonewall as Jim

Owles and Marty Robinson left to form the Gay Activists Alliance, a group devoted solely to gay liberation.<sup>22</sup>

Even before Huey Newton's letter "To the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters About the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements" in August, 1970, gay liberation activists supported the Panthers and the Panthers reciprocated. In the Bay Area, which was a center of both gay liberation and black power activism, gay activists reported having a strong relationship with the Panthers. The Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF) was formed in April, 1969, shortly before Stonewall.<sup>23</sup> The CHF reported being accepted by the Panthers almost from its inception. They attended the Panthers' National Revolutionary Conference for a United Front Against Fascism in the summer of '69 and passed out leaflets about the "Homosexual Revolution." Panther officials told them, "Our Board of Control hasn't endorsed this, but we're for anyone who wants freedom, so go ahead."<sup>24</sup>

Part of the reason gay liberation activists saw the Panthers as their allies is that they both believed their "most immediate oppressors are the pigs."<sup>25</sup> One CHF leaflet declared,

Vice pigs in Los Angeles beat a homosexual to death a few months ago. In Berkeley, vice pigs shot and murdered another homosexual in his own car. In Oakland, a 'straight' professor the pigs thought was 'queer' was beaten, and later died, by the pigs...

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with John O'Brien, interview by author, February 28, 2013; Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 46-47, 50; Eisenbach, 140; Carter, 232.

<sup>23</sup> Committee for Homosexual Freedom, "69 - Gay Liberation - 70," ca. December, 1969, Laurence, Leo, J.D. folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

<sup>24</sup> Leo Laurence, "Gays Get Panther OK," *Berkeley Tribe*, July 25, 1969, Laurence folder.

<sup>25</sup> Chicago Gay Liberation, Legal and Political Action Committee, Working Paper - Plenary Session, Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, August 30, 1970, Black Panthers folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

The Homosexual Revolution is part of the whole street revolution fighting fascism in the US. By locking arms with our brothers and sisters in the movement, we can ALL win our freedom. POWER TO THE PEOPLE!!<sup>26</sup>

At the beginning of 1970, CHF activist Leo Laurence observed, "...not once did I find hostility to the Gay Liberation movement from a Panther, even during discussions with Brothers David and June Hilliard, and Masai Hewitt, Minister of Education."<sup>27</sup> Shortly thereafter, fellow activist Don Burton predicted in the *Berkeley Barb* that the Panthers would soon avowedly support gay liberation. He wrote, "The Panthers haven't supported us actively yet, but they HAVE sat down and rapped with us. They're getting their heads straight on it. And I think that, once again, the Panthers will be the vanguard. I've a feeling they'll be the first to 'Do It' with Gay Lib."<sup>28</sup> This was in contrast to other movements, like women's liberation, of which Burton wrote, "All I've seen and heard from them is hostility...for everybody."<sup>29</sup>

Roughly a month before Huey Newton's statement, the *Berkeley Tribe* interviewed two black gay liberationists, Tony Blake and John Mosher. One of the first questions they were asked was whether they believed the Gay Liberation Front was more important to them than the Black Panther Party. Blake said, "For me yes, but on the whole no. I am a Black, Gay radical, anarchist. All movements are important." When pressed about Eldridge Cleaver's statements on homosexuality in *Soul on Ice*, Blake explained,

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<sup>26</sup> Laurence, "Gays Get Panther OK."

<sup>27</sup> Leo E. Laurence, "Roland Raps Leo Listens," *The Tribe* (Berkeley), January 2, 1970, Laurence folder.

<sup>28</sup> Don Burton, "Gay Head Hits Liberal Shits," *Berkeley Barb*, March 20, 1970, Laurence folder.

<sup>29</sup> Burton.

“Soul On Ice” was written in anger from prison by a man who was rebelling against society, the prison system and all it represented. Forced homosexuality and the conditions that force men to this are a major part of the prison system he was fighting against.<sup>30</sup>

Like Jim Fouratt, Blake offered an apologia for Panther homophobia.

But perhaps more important were Blake’s somewhat prescient statements about the intersections between the two movements. Blake believed in the importance of “working with complete freedom in the revolution.” He noted that gays and lesbians often wasted too much time hiding their identities in other political struggles and worried about being exposed. He added that he knew a gay Panther and said, “They are going to have to face this issue of being a Black Gay revolutionary.”<sup>31</sup>

On August 14, 1970, Huey Newton went on KPFA radio and said that gay liberation, whose relationship to the Panthers had been uncertain, was welcome in the struggle. Newton declared flatly, “...we see that homosexuals are human beings, and they are oppressed because of the bourgeois [sic] mentality and bourgeois [sic] treachery that exists in this country (and) tries to legislate sexual activity.”<sup>32</sup>

The following day, he gave a speech on gay liberation calling for an alliance. Newton declared,

Whatever your personal opinions and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexuals and women as oppressed groups), we should try to unite with them in a revolutionary fashion. I say “whatever your insecurities are” because as we very well know, sometimes our first instinct is to want to hit a homosexual in the mouth, and want a woman to be quiet [...] We must

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<sup>30</sup> “Two-Time Winners,” *Berkeley Tribe*, June 19, 1970, n. pag., African American gay men, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

<sup>31</sup> “Two-Time Winners.”

<sup>32</sup> “Huey Raps on Gay Lib,” *Berkeley Barb*, August 14, 1970, Newton, Huey P., 1942-1989 folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.



gain security in ourselves and therefore have respect and feelings for all oppressed people.<sup>33</sup>

Newton went on to suggest that homosexuals might be the most oppressed, and therefore, most revolutionary people in society. That, along with the necessity for the Panthers to have as many allies as possible, made unity with gay liberation imperative.<sup>34</sup> Roughly a week later, his words were published as a letter in *The Black Panther*. Amy Abugo Ongiri points out the importance of this statement and the way its been obscured by Panther imagery. She writes, “The fact that the Black Panther Party was the first, and for many years the only, national African American organization to speak out in favor of gay rights or to make open alliances with a homosexual rights group, and that the organization had many women in positions of power are hidden by the macho mythos that surrounds the party.”<sup>35</sup>

Newton’s statement on gay liberation grew directly from his connections with gays and lesbians. Bob Kohler, a white gay man, got his activist start working with the Congress of Racial Equality until 1966, which gave him training in nonviolence. But, with the rise of black nationalism, he and other white organizers left the movement.<sup>36</sup> Kohler was present at the Stonewall Rebellion and a major figure in the Gay Liberation Front thereafter. He was one of the activists who encouraged Huey Newton to make a statement of mutual support for gay

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<sup>33</sup> Tony Morrison, ed., *To Die for the People: The Writings of Huey P. Newton* (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing, Inc., 1995), 152.

<sup>34</sup> Morrison, 153-54.

<sup>35</sup> Amy Abugo Ongiri, *Spectacular Blackness: The Cultural Politics of the Black Power Movement and the Search for a Black Aesthetic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), 21.

<sup>36</sup> “From Stonewall to Diallo: Benjamin Shepard Interviews Bob Kohler,” in *From ACT UP to the WTO: Urban Protest and Community Building in the Era of Globalization*, ed. by Benjamin Shepard and Ronald Hayduk (New York: Verso, 2002), 127-28; Jewelle Gomez, “Out of the Past,” in *The Question of Equality: Lesbian and Gay Politics in America Since Stonewall*, ed. by David Deitcher (New York: Scribner, 1995), 23-24.

liberation.<sup>37</sup> In the Bay Area, gay activist Stew Albert wrote a statement on gay liberation in the fall of 1969 and distributed it to Panthers. Fellow gay liberationist Leo Laurence wrote in the *Berkeley Barb* that it received a positive response. He noted the transition as, “Ridicule has changed to tolerance, and now tolerance is changing to support.”<sup>38</sup>

Perhaps more influential, though, was the writer Jean Genet. He arrived in America from France to interview members of the Black Panther Party. Openly gay, Genet opposed the use of homophobic language by the Panthers and compared it to the use of racist terminology. Newton took Genet’s criticism seriously.<sup>39</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh attributes Newton’s reconsideration of sexist and anti-gay attitudes to Genet specifically.<sup>40</sup> Genet was also important to advancing the Panther cause, which he identified with because of his experience with imprisonment and similar political views. The Panthers contacted him to campaign in support for both the Panther 21 in New York and the Panther 13 in New Haven. In *Framing the Black Panthers*, Jane Rhodes says Genet “brought a new level of attention to these events, particularly among intellectuals at American universities.”<sup>41</sup>

However, the extent to which Newton’s position was adopted by the party members remains unclear. Tracye Matthews finds that the effect of Newton’s

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<sup>37</sup> Bob Kohler, in *The Question of Equality*, 72.

<sup>38</sup> Leo E. Laurence, “Gays Rising,” *Berkeley Barb*, September 5, 1969, Laurence folder.

<sup>39</sup> Jeffrey O.G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 102.

<sup>40</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, “The Black Panthers and the ‘Undeveloped Country’ of the Left,” in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered*, ed. by Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 87.

<sup>41</sup> Jane Rhodes, *Framing the Black Panthers: The Spectacular Rise of a Black Power Icon* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 286-7.

speech “varied both in terms of acceptance and implementation at the local level.”<sup>42</sup>

Jane Rhodes says that while the statement worked to bring in groups like the Gay Liberation front, it “also alienated parts of the Panthers’ rank and file.” However, Newton remained committed to supporting gay liberation.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly, the Gay Liberation Front made important efforts to support the Panthers. GLF activists staged a picket in front of the House of Detention for Women in New York City where members of the Panther 21, including Afeni Shakur, were being held.<sup>44</sup> These actions in support of the black freedom struggle helped convert Panthers to support gay liberation. Shakur spoke to the gay men’s workshop at the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention in September, 1970. One gay man wrote that Shakur said of the picket at the Women’s House of Detention,

Seeing a Gay Liberation banner in the crowd made her think for the first time about gay people and Gay Liberation. She then began relating to the gay sisters in jail beginning to understand their oppression, their anger and the strength in them and in all gay people. She talked about how Huey Newton’s statement would be used in the Panther Party, not as a party line, but as a basis for criticism and self-criticism to overcome anti-homosexual hang-ups among party members, and in the black community. She also helped us to formulate what we wanted to say in our list of demands.<sup>45</sup>

The invitation for lesbians and gays to participate in the Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention was an important sign that Newton and others were serious about incorporating gay liberation into their vision of a new society.

Michael Tabor of the Panther 21 spoke at the September convention in Philadelphia

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<sup>42</sup> Tracye Matthews, “No One Ever Asks, What a Man’s Place in the Revolution Is’: Gender and the Politics of The Black Panther Party 1966-1971,” in *The BPP Reconsidered*, 282.

<sup>43</sup> Rhodes, 298.

<sup>44</sup> Carter, 215.

<sup>45</sup> “Gays Discover Revolutionary Love,” report to the male homosexual workshop, Chicago Gay Liberation members, Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, September 5-7, 1970, Panthers folder.

saying the original Constitution excluded many people, including sexual minorities, and must be re-written.<sup>46</sup>

However, the convention went very differently for white gay men and white lesbians. Following the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, a group of white lesbians from New York broke ties with the Panthers. The group "left with the clear realization that if women continue to struggle for their liberation within contexts defined by sexist mentalities, they will never be free." The group had numerous grievances following the convention. They found their workshop cancelled and their speaker denied access. When they held another meeting for women, the Panther woman who spoke was surrounded by male guards, which they believed were intended to intimidate them. Meanwhile, the Panther woman who spoke to the gay men had no guards. The group wrote that Michael Tabor's comments on women and homosexuals, while positive, were also superficial. They found Miriam Makeba exhibiting outright hostility to their efforts, saying she "had spent the day in attempts to harass and subvert the workshop" and made derogatory comments about lesbians. They concluded,

The hysterical and paranoid reaction of the Panthers has helped us to realize the potency of our position as women whose primary concern is our own revolution...Speaking from our guts, from the depth of our oppression, we say that the Black Panthers are sexist; that the Black Panther Party, supposedly our brothers in revolution, oppress us in a doubly painful thing. But we will take no one's shit.<sup>47</sup>

Alternatively, the statement of the male homosexual workshop recognized Newton's message to gay liberation as a "vanguard revolutionary action" and

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<sup>46</sup> Donald Freed, "Huey Newton - the people must burn the pig constitution," *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 11, 1970, p. 3, Panthers folder.

<sup>47</sup> "Gay Sisters Speak," *Berkeley Tribe*, November 6, 1970, p. 8-9, Panthers folder.

declared, “We recognize the Black Panther Party as being the vanguard of the people’s revolution in Amerikkka.”<sup>48</sup> The gay men saw the acceptance by the Panthers as a major change. The Chicago Gay Liberation group wrote that the Panthers were “the first national organization to give us such warm, public support, as well as official recognition. For years, many of us have worked in radical organizations always hiding our identities, always working in the struggles of others.”<sup>49</sup> At the conference, the gay men added, “They treated us with respect and consideration; not acting judgmentally toward what was unfamiliar or even strange to them.” However, the gay men also recognized that the women were treated differently. They observed that one male Panther insulted a lesbian, though the Panthers subsequently removed him. They also noted that spokesperson for women’s liberation acknowledged she did not treat the lesbian women as sisters and she would attempt to remedy the situation.<sup>50</sup>

At the same time, white lesbians were not the only gay group who had difficulties working with the Panthers. Third World Gay Revolution, which was formerly the Black Caucus of the Gay Liberation Front in Chicago, also encountered difficulties.<sup>51</sup> Between September 9 and November 11, after the first convention meeting in Philadelphia and before the second in Washington, D.C., the group revised its 13 Point Platform, adding three points. Two called for the abolition of

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<sup>48</sup> “Statement of the Male Homosexual Workshop,” Panthers folder.

<sup>49</sup> Chicago Gay Liberation, Legal and Political Action Committee, Working Paper - Plenary Session, Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, August 30, 1970, Panthers folder.

<sup>50</sup> Gays Discover Revolutionary Love, report to the male homosexual workshop, Chicago Gay Liberation members, Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention, September 5-7, 1970, Panthers folder.

<sup>51</sup> Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 83. There was also a group called Third World Gay People, which was based in Berkeley.

capital punishment and the penal system. The third and now longest point was likely a critique of the Panthers, though it did not mention them by name. The group wrote, in part,

We believe that so-called comrades who call themselves 'revolutionaries' have failed to deal with their sexist attitudes. Instead, they cling to male-supremacy and therefore to the conditioned role of oppressors. Men still fight for the privileged position of man-on-the-top. Women quickly fall in line behind-their-men. By their counter-revolutionary struggle to maintain and to force heterosexuality and the nuclear family they perpetuate decadent remnants of capitalism. To gain their anti-homosexual stance, they have used the weapons of the oppressor thereby becoming the agent of the oppressor.<sup>52</sup>

While Huey Newton and other Panthers were certainly ahead of American society in general in their acceptance of gay liberation, the alliance was not fully accepted by either group and tensions persisted.

Some Panthers continued to oppose gay liberation, most notably Eldridge Cleaver, whose *Soul on Ice* was discussed in chapter four. Cleaver would continue to oppose homosexuality and gay rights activism throughout his life despite numerous ideological conversions. His harsh language became more tempered over the years and he acknowledged in 1986, if not earlier, that his older sister was a lesbian and he was trying to understand homosexuality.<sup>53</sup>

While we know little of lesbian and gay Black Panthers, there certainly were some and they faced difficulties in the organization. In the Jamaica Queens branch of the Party, there was an openly gay Panther, according to Omar Barbour. Barbour

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<sup>52</sup> Third World Gay Revolution 16 Point Platform and Program, November 11, 1970, Panthers folder.

<sup>53</sup> Reginald Major, "Cleaver's Christian Crusade," *The Straight Creek Journal* (Denver), July 14, 1977, Panthers folder; George Mendenhall, "'Some Truth' That Gays Sick, Cleaver Tells GOP," *Bay Area Reporter*, May 22, 1986, Panthers folder. To some extent, these later statements may have been necessary to maintain the support of his white conservative Christian benefactor Arthur DeMoss, who was helping Cleaver in his legal defense and providing him with expensive accommodations.

says this man was supported by the existing members because of his radical commitment. However, when a new member of the group confronted him about his homosexuality, the two battled in a fistfight with the gay Panther winning decisively. The gay man remained in the organization with the other learning that sexual orientation did not define one's masculinity. In the Los Angeles branch, though, one Panther left the group for fear they would find out he was gay, according to Roland Young.<sup>54</sup>

Moreover, the relationship between the Gay Liberation Front and the Black Panther Party in Los Angeles seems to have been quite different from the mutual support between the Committee for Homosexual Freedom and the Black Panther Party in the Bay Area. Del Whan, a white woman who had supported the black civil rights movement, heard Morris Kight's call for gays and lesbians to come out at the University of Southern California in 1970. She subsequently joined the Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles, whose first chair, Greg Byrd, was an African American gay man.<sup>55</sup>

The GLF considered itself part of a broader revolution. The group made a statement in support of the Black Panthers, saying they too believed in freedom for all and considered Newton's position on gay liberation "a vanguard revolutionary statement." While she does not remember much of the discussions about whether they should work with the Panthers, Del Whan does recall the group going to meet

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<sup>54</sup> Ogbar, 103; Leo E. Laurence, "Roland Raps Leo Listens," *The Tribe* (Berkeley), January 2, 1970, Laurence folder.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Del Whan, telephone interview by author, February 19, 2013; Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 172.

with at the Panthers and their headquarters. She felt there was a great deal of hostility to their presence. Del suspects that the overtures to the Panthers and their meeting may have been devised by Morris Kight primarily as a means of getting attention for the Gay Liberation Front.<sup>56</sup>

Many other gay liberation groups also declared an alliance with the Black Panther Party. The members of FREE: Gay Liberation of Minnesota issued a statement recognizing the Panthers as the vanguard in the movement for the freedom of all. Though, they hedged, saying they did not necessarily agree with every action by the Panthers. Similarly, the Gay Liberation Front of Baltimore declared their support for the Panthers.<sup>57</sup>

For Bettina Aptheker, her connection to Black Power was more individual and personal. Aptheker had been involved in civil rights sit-ins and pickets in the Bay Area and joined the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination.<sup>58</sup> She was also central to the Free Speech Movement at Berkeley, which grew out of organizing efforts on campus to advance black civil rights.<sup>59</sup> In the early 1970s, Aptheker became heavily involved in the defense of Angela Davis, who she first became friends with as a teen. Aptheker writes,

I was politically committed to her defense, of course, but it was my love for her that sustained me. This love was mutual. The intimacy and trust Angela and I developed were sources of great healing for

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<sup>56</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 172; "Gay Lib supports Panthers," *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 6, 1970, p. 2, Panthers folder; Whan interview.

<sup>57</sup> "Panthers get FREE nod," *Advocate*, November 25, 1970, Panthers folder; Ron Storme, "Supports Panthers," *Advocate*, November 25, 1970.

<sup>58</sup> Bettina Aptheker, *Intimate Politics: How I Grew Up Red, Fought for Free Speech and Became a Feminist Rebel* (Emeryville, CA: Seal Press, 2006), 112-13.

<sup>59</sup> Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 167.



me, especially in my continued bouts of depression and paranoia. I was fighting for Angela's life, but she helped me to save my own.<sup>60</sup>

Through this, she met James Baldwin, who was also worked on Davis' defense.

Meeting Baldwin was important to Aptheker because he "was evidence to me that a gay person like myself (I dared to breathe the thought) could be productive, respected, and well loved."<sup>61</sup> By the end of the decade, Aptheker "began to live true to [her] lesbian identity."<sup>62</sup>

It should also be noted that the gay liberation groups that were building alliances with the Black Panther Party drew attention from the FBI, which is important to understanding the opposition forces discussed in chapter four. FBI documents reveal an interest in the Gay Liberation Front almost solely as they related to other groups like the Black Panther Party, Socialist Workers Party, Venceremos Brigade, and dozens of others. Since the Black Panthers were headquartered in Oakland, the San Francisco office files contain a great deal about the relationship between the Gay Liberation Front and the Black Panther Party. However, the pages released are so heavily redacted as to be virtually unreadable. Throughout 1970, the office produced numerous documents about the GLF and BPP. All that remains to read in these documents are that they dealt with the Gay Liberation Front and RM (racial matters), according to subject headings, and often

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<sup>60</sup> Aptheker, 248.

<sup>61</sup> Aptheker, 251.

<sup>62</sup> Aptheker, 341.

one line of text remains which identifies the Black Panther Party as a “violence-prone black militant organization.”<sup>63</sup>

What can be gleaned from this evidence is that the primary reason for the FBI investigation of the Gay Liberation Front was their connection to the Black Panther Party and, to a lesser extent, the New Left. This denotes a change in attitudes towards homosexuality. First, since those involved in the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) were openly gay, no one, including the FBI, could use that information against them. While the FBI might use this information to disrupt other New Left or black power organizations that had members who were gay or lesbian, this was ineffective against gay liberation groups.

Second, the FBI does not seem to have believed that the Gay Liberation Front or Gay Activists Alliance in themselves could be a threat. They no longer viewed “sex deviates” as a danger to society. Homosexuality was rarely, if ever, mentioned in relation to Communism. Groups that were solely dedicated to changing laws and attitudes about lesbians and gays drew little attention. Rather, it was New Left and black power radicalism, especially the Bureau’s belief in their propensity for violence, that concerned the FBI the most. Since a group like the Gay Activists Alliance was not interested in issues outside sexual orientation equality, the FBI exhibited little interest in them.<sup>64</sup> This also held true of Gay Liberation Front

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<sup>63</sup> Gay Liberation Front, FBI San Francisco 100-65673, 1970-1975, box 4, folder 10, Dan Siminoski Collection on Federal Bureau of Investigation Surveillance of Gays and Lesbians, ONE Archives.

<sup>64</sup> SA [redacted] to SAC, New York (100-170388), “GAY ACTIVISTS ALLIANCE (GAA); IS - RA,” March 5, 1973, Gay Activists Alliance, FBI New York 100-170388, Revised Documents, 1971-1974, box 2, folder 8, Siminoski Collection.

groups, like the ones at the University of Michigan and the University of Missouri, that were only interested in advancing gay rights and did not forge connections with Leftist groups.<sup>65</sup>

On the other hand, the FBI tried to use Newton's statement in favor of gay liberation to divide the Panthers. Winston A. Grady-Willis believes, "Part of the effectiveness of COINTELPRO was its ability to make the most of larger societal contradictions that also existed within the liberation movement. An example of this was the FBI's ability to use the homophobia of many persons in and outside of the Party to its own advantage." The Bureau tried to sever the relationship between the Panthers and Mau Maus by sending a letter suggesting that two male Panther leaders were lovers. They also approved a plan to forge letters from Panther supporters protesting Newton's gay liberation speech. Grady-Willis concludes, "The FBI's effort to capitalize on rampant homophobia spoke to the need to confront honestly sexism and homophobia within the Black Panther Party, not to mention the larger society."<sup>66</sup>

In the late 1960s, many lesbians and gays began working openly on efforts for gay liberation rather than remaining closeted in social movements. The Panthers were one of the first groups outside of the gay liberation movement to declare their support for the cause. However, the relationship remained a

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<sup>65</sup> SAC, Detroit (100-37274) to Director, FBI (100-459225), "GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT; UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN; IS - MISC," October 28, 1970, Gay Liberation Front, FBI Headquarters 100-459225, 1970-1972, box 2, folder 12, Siminoski Collection; SAC, Kansas City (100-14536) to Director, FBI, "GAY LIBERATION FRONT; UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI; IS-MISCELLANEOUS," July 30, 1971, Gay Liberation Front, FBI Headquarters 100-464462, 1971, box 2, folder 15, Siminoski Collection.

<sup>66</sup> Winston A. Grady-Willis, "The Black Panther Party: State Repression and Political Prisoners," in *The BPP Reconsidered*, 374.

complicated one. It seems white gay men expressed more unequivocal support of the BPP, particularly after Huey Newton's statement in August of 1970, while white lesbians had a more difficult relationship with the Panthers. LGBT people of color, like Third World Gay Liberation, also continued to experience hostility from the Panthers in late 1970 and called on them to live true to Newton's message.

Relationships between gay liberation groups and the Panthers also varied at the local level, offering further proof for the argument that acceptance of Newton's message varied. While the two groups had a strong relationship in the Bay Area, there appears to have been greater tension between the Panthers and gay liberationists in Los Angeles. Still, though the connection between the Black Panthers and gay liberation was not uniformly strong and supportive, the Panthers remained ahead of many other groups in their acceptance of and support for the freedom of gays and lesbians.

### **Lesbian and Gay Civil Rights Activists in Gay Liberation**

A number of African Americans who had been involved in prior efforts to advance black civil rights became involved in gay and lesbian liberation. They were often important in the creation of or gravitated towards organizations devoted specifically to black gay and lesbian issues. Barbara Smith, a black lesbian, got her start as an activist in the civil rights movement in Cleveland, Ohio, working with CORE to end school segregation and later working with the Civil Actions Group at Mount Holyoke College. Smith became an out black lesbian in the 1970s, not long

after Stonewall, and became a part of the Boston chapter of the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO).<sup>67</sup>

In the summer of 1975, a group broke off from the NBFO and became the Combahee River Collective, a black feminist and mostly lesbian organization named after Harriet Tubman's effort to free 750 slaves in Port Royal, South Carolina, in 1863. Smith says almost all of the members had previously been involved in the black freedom struggle. Historian Marcia Gallo argues that the Combahee River Collective "played a crucial role in bringing issues of race, class, sexuality, and gender to the forefront of American consciousness."<sup>68</sup> The group is noted for coining the term "identity politics." Barbara Smith makes clear the Collective's use of the term, saying,

What we meant by identity politics is that we had a right as people who were simultaneously black and female to determine a political agenda for our own freedom and liberation and also, by extension, the freedom and liberation of all the members of our community. We were never separatists. We never saw ourselves as being in opposition to anything except for oppression.<sup>69</sup>

The group viewed various forms of oppression as inter-related and made efforts to support those who did not identify as black feminists or lesbians. For example, they helped raise money for the defense of Willie Saunders, a black man who had been accused of raping a white woman. Smith was also a central figure in *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press* from 1980 to 1995. She observes that what made their feminist independent press for women of color unique is that, "we

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with Barbara Smith, interview by Loretta J. Ross, May 7-8, 2003, transcript p. 29, 40-46, 48-50, *Voices of Feminism Oral History Project*, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>68</sup> Smith interview, 56, 67; Gallo, 199.

<sup>69</sup> Smith interview, 53.

weren't just a publisher, we were a political vehicle. And we supported our movements, various movements."<sup>70</sup>

One particularly difficult experience for Barbara Smith was the hostility she encountered from African Americans. In turn, she emphasizes the importance of developing specifically African American-identified lesbian and gay groups. She says, "Because we are rendered invisible in both black and gay contexts, it is that much easier for the black community to oppose gay rights and to express homophobia without recognizing that these attacks and the lack of legal protections affects its own members."<sup>71</sup> She recalls one instance at a conference at Howard in the late 1970s when Frances Cress-Welsing got up to speak after Smith's presentation. Cress-Welsing said Smith was mentally diseased and that homosexuality would result in the extinction of the black race.<sup>72</sup> Smith says,

The hardest thing to me about being a lesbian is being rejected by my black brothers and sisters. That's the hardest thing. I mean without any doubt. Because white people were never down with me as a group, you know. So I never expected anything from white people as a group, as far as acceptance, caring, love, support. I expect absolutely those things from other black people and people of color but particularly from African Americans, because that's the group that I come from. So the hardest thing to me is to feel like I don't belong, that I don't deserve to be respected, that I'm ostracized.<sup>73</sup>

Like Smith, Mandy Carter also worked to increase the visibility and acceptance of black gays and lesbians. Mandy had previously been involved in the Poor People's Campaign and was a long-time anti-war activist. She became really

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<sup>70</sup> Smith interview, 54, 74, 80.

<sup>71</sup> Barbara Smith, "Blacks and Gays: Healing the Great Divide," in *Dangerous Liaisons: Blacks, Gays and the Struggle for Equality*, ed. by Eric Brandt (New York: The New Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>72</sup> Smith interview, 62-63.

<sup>73</sup> Smith interview, 30.

involved in lesbian activism around 1979 in San Francisco primarily organizing through the bars (Maude's specifically but also the city-wide Tavern Guild). She says this was a turning point in her life when she really began to be an out lesbian social justice organizer. She continued doing so for roughly three years. In 1982, a position opened up at the War Resisters' League in Durham, North Carolina. Mandy had long worked with the WRL, especially in opposing the Vietnam War, and applied and got the job.<sup>74</sup>

When she arrived in Durham, she found out that the lesbians met at the Durham YWCA. She saw that, as compared to the gay and lesbian movement in San Francisco where gay men seemed to have the most prominent roles, "lesbians ran Durham." Mandy says that many of the lesbian graduates of Duke University decided to stay in Durham, which contributed to the building of a progressive lesbian community. The other factor she points to is that Ladyslipper Music was located in Durham and had a prominent role in the women's and lesbian music scene.<sup>75</sup>

Moving to the South, Mandy had to deal with a lot of anti-southern bias in the lesbian and gay movement, as well as the women's and anti-war movements. In 1993, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) decided to hold their annual conference, *Creating Change*, in Durham, North Carolina. The NGLTF found there was resistance to holding the conference in the state where Jesse Helms was a sitting Senator. So, Mandy, Mab Segrest and others decided to hold a workshop devoted to explaining what it is like to be a lesbian, woman, or person of color

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mandy Carter, telephone interview by author, March 6, 2012.

<sup>75</sup> Carter interview.

organizing in the South. Out of this grew the organization Southerners on New Ground (SONG), a group that would connect race, class, gender, culture, sexual orientation and gender identity. Mandy notes that their intersectional vision remains today as the organization continues on to its third decade. In 2003, SONG and NGLTF were invited by Coretta Scott King and Martin Luther King, III to be the official LGBT co-conveners of the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the March on Washington.<sup>76</sup>

Mandy was involved in a number of other LGBT organizations as well. In the mid-1990s, Mandy went to work for the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, D.C., focusing specifically on issues important to lesbians of color.<sup>77</sup> Mandy was also involved in the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum, a group organized in 1988 by Ruth Waters and Phill Wilson in Los Angeles.<sup>78</sup> The group was instrumental in organizing black lesbian and gay leaders. One piece of their organizational literature stated, "Throughout the history of the gay movement, involved Black leaders have been few indeed. But the effects of the AIDS crisis have been particularly devastating to us, and it has caused a number of Black Gays and Lesbians to come forward to take power within our communities."<sup>79</sup>

After the group folded, Mandy and others decided to form another group to take its place. She says the formation of a successor group was especially important because of events in Massachusetts, where same-sex marriage had recently been legalized. The opposition group held a rally which featured a black minister who

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<sup>76</sup> Carter interview.

<sup>77</sup> Ta'shia Asanti, "Black Herstory," *Lesbian News*, February, 1995, p. 82, African American Lesbians folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Carter interview; Craig A. Rimmerman et al., *The Politics of Gay Rights* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 65-67.

<sup>79</sup> "Why a Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Conference," National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.



said, “If the Klan would ride against the gays, we would ride with them.” Mandy found this comment “absolutely stunning” and felt it necessitated an organized response. In December, 2003, she and others held a conference at the National Press Club in which they announced the formation of the National Black Justice Coalition (NBJC). Mandy said the memory of the struggle against bans on interracial marriage was particularly relevant to those working in this new organization. In Mandy’s view, there is no issue that LGBT people have encountered that black people based on race or women based on gender had not already confronted.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Sandra Tignor says, in the civil rights movement, “I had started to learn (and experience) grassroots activism and organizing and applied all that I knew to all of my activism.” She believes that through observing the structure of groups like SNCC and CORE, “I began to see how organizations and leaders functioned. When I became a lesbian activist, I subliminally called upon all of that experience and knowledge.” Just as Sandra had put her medical training to use in the civil rights movement, so too did she put those skills to work with the Minority AIDS Project as a case manager in the 1980s in Los Angeles. Sandra worked with people who were facing an unimaginable burden dealing with both an emerging epidemic disease and ostracism from their families and communities because of their HIV status and sexual orientation.<sup>81</sup>

She also began working with the Uptown Gay Alliance (UGA), though the organization lacked much involvement from women. So, Sandra sent out a

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<sup>80</sup> Carter interview.

<sup>81</sup> Sandra Tignor to author, June 4, 2012, p. 3; Sandra Tignor to author, July 10, 2012, p. 2; “Sandra Tignor” in *Without Apology: Old Lesbian Life Stories*, ed. by Arden Eversmeyer and Margaret Purcell (Houston: Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project), 292.

message to lesbians in her community and gathered about 30 women at her home. The group debated whether to continue under the UGA umbrella. Consequently, Ivy Bottini convinced the UGA to add “lesbian” to their organizational name. For the next year, men and women held separate events, but continued to work together on mutual issues as the Uptown Gay and Lesbian Alliance (UGLA).<sup>82</sup>

Eventually, Sandra, like Mandy, joined the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum. However, she encountered the same problem she faced in the UGA: the group did not include many lesbians or devote much time to lesbian issues. Roughly fifteen women, including Sandra, left to form United Lesbians of African Heritage (ULOAH) in 1989.<sup>83</sup> One writer notes, “In 1989 there were virtually no organizations for same-gender-loving womyn of African descent. Our lesbian voice was a quiet one, but a determined one. But it was this state of frustration and near invisibility that encouraged and inspired D. Lisa Powell, Sandra Tignor and Yolanda Whittington to create United Lesbians of African Heritage.”<sup>84</sup> Sandra became co-chair of the organization and remembers it as “the phase of her activism for which she felt the most passionate.” The group organized an annual conference for 18 years which drew women from around the U.S. as well as Canada, the Caribbean, England and South Africa. Sandra says, “We covered not only homophobia, but racism, sexism, and for the older women, we discussed ageism.” Today, she continues to work with another group, Old Lesbians Organizing for

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<sup>82</sup> “Sandra Tignor” in Eversmeyer and Purcell, 292-3.

<sup>83</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 295-96.

<sup>84</sup> Lenore Myisha Rivers, “Sistah! Sistah!” *SBC* (July, 1997), p. 16, African American Lesbians folder.

Change (OLOC) and gives workshops at their National Gatherings “regarding racism, classism, and other isms.”<sup>85</sup>

After coming out in 1971, Jewelle Gomez, who had been active in the civil rights movement in Boston, became involved with a number of lesbian and gay organizations in New York City. Jewelle’s primary activism was with the Lesbian Lit Collective on producing *Conditions* magazine, conducting fundraisers, and organizing peaceful demonstrations. She also became involved with the Lesbian Herstory Archives, as she lived just a few blocks away from Joan Nestle and Deb Edel’s apartment where they were stored. Jewelle worked with them on programming and they marched together during Pride. She was also on the board of the Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice, which provides financial and technical support to social justice groups.<sup>86</sup>

When the AIDS crisis hit, Jewelle felt propelled into an outpouring of activism. The newspaper coverage of HIV/AIDS and its demonizing of gay men was particularly troubling for Jewelle, given her background in journalism. Her boss Gregory Kolovakos, the director of the literature program at the New York State Council on the Arts, her friend, Vito Russo, and others decided to start an organization to deal with media bias against gays and lesbians.<sup>87</sup> Kolovakos and Russo convinced Jewelle to become involved, despite her reluctance given her heavy workload. The group was mostly white men, but, for this reason, Jewelle found it

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<sup>85</sup> “Saundra Tignor” in Eversmeyer and Purcell, 294-96.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Jewelle Gomez, telephone interview by author, July 12, 2011; Astraea Foundation, “Mission,” <http://www.astraeafoundation.org/who-we-are/about>

<sup>87</sup> “Gregory Kolovakos; Translator, 38,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 1990, <http://www.nytimes.com/1990/04/17/obituaries/gregory-kolovakos-translator-38.html>

especially important that she be involved so women of color would be represented. Jewelle found herself working hard organizing and serving as the first treasurer of the group. The organization became known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) in 1985 and served as a media watchdog, filling the vacuum left by the decline of the Gay Activists Alliance. Jewelle also participated in the subgroup called Swift and Terrible Retribution, which she says served as a model for the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) in its use of quick direct action against injustice.<sup>88</sup>

Jewelle says what she learned from the civil rights movement was, in many ways, a learning by omission. She was invisible as a lesbian in the movement and believes that most groups in the civil rights movement and the gay rights movement were too narrowly focused. This omission taught her and others the importance of including all people in the movement and allowing them to be their full selves. More needed to be done to bridge the gaps between communities. She says,

...as a feminist, I feel like once I had that as a political philosophy that I could articulate. I had no problem seeing the connection between being a lesbian and being a person of color and that the two movements were connected because, as a feminist, I understand that the things that are oppressing one group are the same things that are oppressing another group. It just takes different forms.<sup>89</sup>

Jewelle feels lucky to have come of age when so much activism was going on. It created an aura of value around social change and made it acceptable to insist on social justice. Jewelle also feels that her time in the civil rights movement taught her the importance of the news media. While initially they were instrumental in

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<sup>88</sup> Gomez interview; Jewelle Gomez, "Out of the Past," in *The Question of Equality: Lesbian and Gay Politics Since Stonewall*, ed. by David Deitcher (New York: Scribner, 1995), 57-59; Eisenbach, 300-1.

<sup>89</sup> Gomez interview.

covering the struggle, many reporters and journalists retreated later on and refused to answer the tough questions about American society and politics.<sup>90</sup>

Achebe Betty Powell, a black woman who had been involved in the civil rights movement in both Florida and Minnesota, also went on to work for lesbian and gay liberation. She became a member of the National Gay Task Force where she was co-chair of the board and played a key role in the women's caucus. Powell also became involved in groups specifically for black lesbians. She became "part of the core" of the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays.<sup>91</sup> The group was formed in 1978 by A. Billy S. Jones and others black gays and lesbians in the D.C. and Baltimore area. Powell and Barbara Smith both served on its board of directors. The group held the first Third World Lesbian/Gay Conference in 1979 and membership eventually rose to 3000.<sup>92</sup> Powell was also involved in Lesbian Feminists Liberation, which she calls "a very critical piece." Powell believes her organizing at this time brought all of her activist experiences together because she sees "the gay civil rights movement...and women's liberation and the black civil rights struggle as one."<sup>93</sup>

At its inception, Powell was involved in Salsa Soul Sisters (later African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change, AALUSC). She says in the mid-1970s, a PBS station asked her and others to be involved in a 3-hour special on the lesbian and gay community in New York City. It was a live program with call-in questions

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<sup>90</sup> Gomez interview.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Achebe Betty Powell, interview by Kelly Anderson, July 6-7, 2004, transcript p. 53, 55, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project, Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College.

<sup>92</sup> "History of the National Coalition of Black Gays," p. 7-9, National Black Gay and Lesbian Conference folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 52, 68.

and a number of women asked, “Where are the organizations for black lesbians?” Powell and a black woman from the Metropolitan Community Church, an LGBT-identified religious denomination, in New York City decided to hold a meeting to respond to this concern. The result was the formation of Salsa Soul Sisters.<sup>94</sup>

Jewelle Gomez was also a member of the group, which she describes as primarily a social organization which also did some activism.<sup>95</sup> Candice Boyce, a black woman who had also been involved in the struggle for African American civil rights, joined Salsa Soul Sisters as well. Boyce was initially working within the Gay Activists Alliance, but says, “GAA was not what I needed at the time because they didn’t understand the depths of what we were experiencing...They did good work, but they just didn’t know how to be inclusive.” So, she became a part of Salsa Soul Sisters. Boyce was an alcoholic at the time and the women in Salsa Soul Sisters accepted her, convinced her she was intelligent and helped her on the path to recovery.<sup>96</sup> However, because most members of the group wanted to focus on creating a social space for lesbians of color, rather than political action, women like Powell ended up disengaging. When it became African Ancestral Lesbians United for Societal Change, with the goal of promoting social change built into the name, Powell found herself again working with them in the early 2000s.<sup>97</sup>

Like Jewelle Gomez, for eight years, Powell also served as a board member of the Astraea Foundation, which she and other lesbians founded. The group focused

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<sup>94</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 68-70.

<sup>95</sup> Gomez interview.

<sup>96</sup> David Deitcher, ed., *The Question of Equality: Lesbian and Gay Politics in America Since Stonewall* (New York: Scribner, 1995), 77-79.

<sup>97</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 68-70.

on increasing funding for women's projects and girls' development. Powell says of her work with the Astraea Foundation that, because of their experiences in black churches during the civil rights movement, she and other members were aware of the possibilities of community financial support to advance social change.<sup>98</sup>

After working for about a year at Kitchen Table Women of Color Press, which Barbara Smith ran, Powell went to work for the Equity Institute, the organization civil rights activist Joan Lester founded. After training people on issues related to racism, sexism and other issues, Powell went on to create her own organization, Betty Powell Associates, doing similar work. Along with her friend, Joan Olson, Powell eventually developed the Racial Justice Institute, which conducted training and workshops, but began to focus more on long-term initiatives. Powell concludes, "...it's not enough. It's just not enough. And I'm just bound and determined to have even more impact and in particular around the issue of race and race inclusion."<sup>99</sup> As was the case with a number of other lesbian and gay activists in the African American civil rights movement, advancing the cause of gay liberation did not mean abandoning the fight for racial justice.

Skye Ward, a black lesbian, was also focused on issues of racial justice. She says, "I was not involved in Stonewall by choice. My energies were focused toward the struggle that was at the forefront of my life, the civil rights and black liberation movement." Later, though, Ward did direct her attention to lesbian and gay rights as a founding member of the National Center for Lesbian Rights. She also co-founded the Umoja Strategy Group, "an alliance of African Americans working to

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<sup>98</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 70-71, 73.

<sup>99</sup> Achebe Powell interview, 75, 79-81.

challenge the infiltration of the religious right into the black community.”<sup>100</sup> The group was created around 1993 when Rev. Eugene Lumpkin, a black pastor serving on the San Francisco Human Rights Commission, stated his belief in the literal interpretation of the Bible and appeared to justify violence against lesbians and gays.<sup>101</sup> While Ward saw the black freedom struggle as her primary concern, she also recognized that threats to gays and lesbians necessitated a response.

Many black lesbians and gays who had previously been involved in the African American civil rights movement went on to be involved in black-identified gay liberation activism. Many cite their experiences of being overlooked or ignored in lesbian and gay groups just as they had been invisible as lesbians and gays in civil rights groups as their motivation. At the same time, they emphasize the consciousness and skills they drew from prior experiences. Black lesbian and gay organizations allowed them to focus on issues which directly affected them while maintaining connections to both black and gay organizations as well as other causes. As Jewelle Gomez pointed out, it was also important that they continued to be involved in groups where they might be the minority so that the voices of African Americans and lesbians continued to be represented in those organizations.

A number of lesbians and gays who had been involved in the southern civil rights movement also worked to advance gay liberation in the South. As mentioned previously, Mandy Carter was instrumental in southern lesbian and gay organizing in North Carolina with the formation of Southerners on New Ground. Eddie Sandifer

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<sup>100</sup> Asanti, 82.

<sup>101</sup> David W. Dunlap, “Leaders of Gay Blacks Emphasize Local Issues,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/02/20/us/leaders-of-gay-blacks-emphasize-local-issues.html>



was an important activist in southern gay rights as well. A civil rights activist in Jackson, Mississippi, Sandifer continued to live there. In 1973, the Mississippi Gay/Lesbian Alliance (MGLA) was formed in Starkville by lesbian faculty and students at the University of Mississippi. However, the following year its headquarters was moved to Jackson and Sandifer was named its director, a position he held for decades.<sup>102</sup> The MGLA engaged in a variety of activities making its voice heard in Jackson municipal politics, calling for the repeal of sodomy laws, tracking police harassment, running a hotline, promoting sex education, and organizing mass demonstrations including an anti-Klan march in Tupelo, Mississippi, and peace vigils once a week in the capital.<sup>103</sup> At the same time, Sandifer continued to believe that all forms of oppression were interrelated. He remained active in fighting racism through the Southern Conference Education Fund (SCEF). He was also the first white person to join the United League of Mississippi in their confrontations with the KKK.<sup>104</sup>

Some of Sandifer's most important work was as an AIDS activist. Sandifer became director of the Persons with AIDS/HIV Project in Mississippi. The statewide organization provided relief to those who had contracted the virus by offering housing, medicine and other forms of support. Sandifer also served as a consultant for the Southern AIDS Commission, a nonprofit organization that does education and outreach to prevent the spread of HIV and assist those living with AIDS. The

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<sup>102</sup> Howard, *Men Like That*, 234-36; Ken Lawrence and Dick Harger, "Persistence Is the Key," *Southern Exposure* (Mar.-Jun., 1985), 121; Leesha Cooper, "Sandifer is a human rights activist, but foes just see him as being gay," *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson), March 3, 1991, p. A1

<sup>103</sup> Lawrence and Harger, 121; Howard, 234-36.

<sup>104</sup> "Rebel With a Cause," p. 4, in Eddie Sandifer subject file, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

Sandifer House, a boarding home for people living with AIDS, was named after Eddie Sandifer in 1987. It became a cause for anxiety among many residents who, health officials said in 1991, feared the home because they did not understand that sexual contact was the primary mode of transmission. The house was closed the following year.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, Sandifer faced criticism for his work advancing gay rights. Richard Barrett, a segregationist attorney in Jackson, spoke out against Sandifer, calling him “a tragic aberration of nature, just like a mulatto.” He continued, “I’m not surprised that Eddie would be fellow traveling with red-tainted and black-tainted groups. On his side you find red and black, whereas on our side you find red, white, and blue.” In more dangerous incidents, Sandifer was assaulted, his home was set on fire, and an anonymous caller threatened to blow up his office building.<sup>106</sup>

Rose Gladney, who had been involved in school desegregation efforts in Memphis, also continued movement efforts in the South. She eventually became a professor at the University of Alabama where she worked on lesbian organizing. Rose and her partner Marcia Winter were involved in a small women’s reading group and most of the women in the group were lesbians. After attending the Southern Women’s Music and Comedy Festival in Georgia, some of the women from the reading group decided to organize a company that would sponsor women-produced women artists. The group became the Tuscaloosa Lesbian Coalition

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<sup>105</sup> Cooper, A1; Beverly Pettigrew-Kraft, “Sandifer spied for spy agency,” *The Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson), July 4, 1998, p. 10A.

<sup>106</sup> Lawrence and Harger, 121.

(TLC), of which Rose and her partner were co-founders in August, 1986.<sup>107</sup>

According to Minnie Bruce Pratt, TLC brought together lesbians from the University and Tuscaloosa community, “some with connections to the struggles of the 1960s,” and was “one of the first groups working publicly in Alabama on lesbian and gay issues.”<sup>108</sup>

That openness concerned many women who feared the repercussions of being an openly lesbian organization, including violence, loss of jobs, and rejection by family members.<sup>109</sup> The group began as a production company, sponsoring women’s plays, photograph exhibits, and other artistic works. It subsequently evolved into a politically active organization. They participated in the first gay pride march in Alabama, held in Birmingham in 1989. For many years in the 1990s, Rose and Marcia were also the faculty advisors the LGBT student group at the University of Alabama, now known as Spectrum, formed in 1983.<sup>110</sup>

Rose finds that her experiences with the civil rights movement in Memphis led directly to her personal and professional involvement in issues of racism, sexism and homophobia. Grassroots organizing around these issues led to further education and the belief that ordinary people could make a difference. Rose recalls the instruction by Ella Baker that, “Things that one did not think would change could be changed.” Her previous activism also taught her to anticipate resistance. Rose remembered Lillian Smith’s observation that encountering opposition is a sign that

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<sup>107</sup> Interview with Margaret Rose Gladney, telephone interview by author, June 28-29, 2011.

<sup>108</sup> Minnie Bruce Pratt, “Civil rights forces in Alabama join lesbian/gay fight for justice,” *Workers World*, March 14, 2002, <http://www.workers.org/ww/2002/alabama0314.php>

<sup>109</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>110</sup> Gladney interview; “About Spectrum,” <http://spectrum.ua.edu/about.html>

change is happening. Finally, her experiences in the civil rights movement conferred an appreciation of the value of nonviolence and the importance of developing a core group of committed people.<sup>111</sup>

Living in Charles Town, West Virginia in the 1980s, Faith Holsaert, who had been raised a secular Jew, became involved with the group Integrity at St. John's Episcopal Church. While Faith says she was only marginally a part of the church, Integrity brought in people from outside the church to support equality for gays and lesbians. Residing in a rural area, Faith primarily connected to the larger lesbian movement through cultural products that were transportable: music from *Ladyslipper* in Durham, books like *Lesbian/Woman* by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, and magazines like *Up From Under*. By the late 1980s, the lesbian women of Charles Town started holding social gatherings, though, Faith says, they remained "pretty hush-hush." In 1990, she moved to Washington, D.C., where she started going to a lesbian discussion group at Whitman-Walker Clinic. She says this was her "first experience of being in a big, open and also multi-racial community."<sup>112</sup>

The arena of formal politics was important to advancing lesbian and gay rights as well. Freedom Summer volunteer Barney Frank is perhaps the most notable in this regard. Frank became a major political figure and worked to advance gay rights. He ran for state representative in Massachusetts in 1972 and, during the campaign, issued a letter declaring his support for civil rights for homosexuals. After winning election as a Democrat in a Republican-controlled district, the first bill Frank introduced in January, 1973, proposed banning discrimination based on

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<sup>111</sup> Gladney interview.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Faith Holsaert, telephone interview by author, July 13, 2011.

sexual orientation in employment, housing, insurance and public accommodations. This bill, the first piece of gay rights legislation in Massachusetts history, was derided by some legislators as the “Frank fag bill” and subsequently defeated.<sup>113</sup>

Barney Frank was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1980. However, he was not publicly out for fear it might jeopardize his seat. Eventually, a number of events, in particular the death of Stuart McKinney in May, 1987, compelled Frank to come out publicly. McKinney was a closeted bisexual Republican serving as a representative from Connecticut who succumbed to AIDS-related complications. Frank did not want similar speculation about his sexuality in the event he were to die and also did not want people to think he was ashamed to be gay. So, that month he became the first member of the U.S. Congress to voluntarily and publicly come out as a gay man, which was an important step towards greater acceptance of gays in politics.<sup>114</sup> Frank continued to work for acceptance of gays in the military, the repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and other civil rights legislation.

Barney Frank was very much a student of Allard Lowenstein, saying that outside of his family, no one made more of an impact on his life than Lowenstein. Though, Frank did not know that Lowenstein was gay.<sup>115</sup> Historian William Chafe says Lowenstein had always advocated an end to discrimination based on sexual preference. However, Lowenstein was married and did not really begin to consider coming out until he met Bruce Voeller of the National Gay Rights Task Force in 1974.

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<sup>113</sup> Stuart E. Weisberg, *Barney Frank: The Story of America's Only Left-Handed, Gay, Jewish Congressman* (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2009), 102-3, 111-13.

<sup>114</sup> Weisberg, 340-42, 444.

<sup>115</sup> Weisberg, 153-54.

By the late 1970s, Lowenstein became more associated with gay rights efforts. He actively campaigned against the Briggs Amendment in California in 1978, which was a proposed ban on allowing gay teachers in California schools. That same year, he worked to get delegates to add a gay rights plank to the Democratic platform at the mid-term Democratic Convention in Memphis. His final political work before his murder was in the Ted Kennedy campaign in 1980. Lowenstein played a key role in shaping Kennedy's position on gay rights.<sup>116</sup>

Like Lowenstein, it took some time before Bayard Rustin joined efforts for gay liberation. While Rustin had been outed a decade before, he remained reluctant to identify himself as gay and pursue efforts for gay rights after Stonewall. John D'Emilio makes clear that Rustin did not feel a connection to the emerging gay rights organizations and did not align himself with gay liberation until later in life. Rustin wrote to Joseph Beam, who compiled the first anthology of writing by black gay men, "...I fundamentally consider sexual orientation to be a private matter. As such, it has not been a factor which has greatly influenced my role as an activist." But, D'Emilio points out, "Though Rustin might have wished for a world in which sexuality remained sequestered in the private realm, he could not avoid the workings of gay oppression."<sup>117</sup>

By 1986, Bayard Rustin was finally speaking out on gay rights and connecting it to the struggle for black civil rights. Rustin said, "...our struggle [is] the central struggle of our time, the central struggle for democracy and the central struggle for

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<sup>116</sup> William H. Chafe, *Never Stop Running: Allard Lowenstein and the Struggle to Save American Liberalism* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), 409-10, 447-448.

<sup>117</sup> D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet*, 490-1.

human rights. If gay people do not understand that, they do not understand the opportunity before them, nor do they understand the terrifying burdens they carry on their shoulders.”<sup>118</sup> In “The New ‘Niggers’ Are Gays,” Rustin observed, “Today, blacks are no longer the litmus paper or the barometer of social change. Blacks are in every segment of society and there are laws that help to protect them from racial discrimination. The new ‘niggers’ are gays...gay people are the new barometer for social change.”<sup>119</sup>

Rustin called on gays and lesbians to overcome fear, self-hate and self-denial and then begin the work of political change. He argued,

Our job is not to get those people who dislike us to love us. Nor was our aim in the civil rights movement to get prejudiced white people to love us. Our aim was to try to create the kind of America, legislatively, morally, and psychologically, such that even though some whites continued to hate us, they could not openly manifest that hate.<sup>120</sup>

Rustin believed that gay people had a tremendous burden because their struggle was at the center of democratic progress. As part of a larger movement for democracy, he said that it was essential that lesbians and gays find allies to work with. Moreover, they must be aware of their own prejudices. If they did not reject racism and antisemitism, among other biases, they could not truly advance human rights. Finally, calling upon his background as a labor organizer, Rustin reminded gays and lesbians to remain attentive to economic issues. Pointing to the intersections of multiple causes, he remarked, “You will not feed people *a la* the

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<sup>118</sup> Bayard Rustin, “From Montgomery to Stonewall,” speech to a gay student group at the University of Pennsylvania, April, 9, 1986, in *Time on Two Crosses*, 273.

<sup>119</sup> Bayard Rustin, “The New ‘Niggers’ Are Gays,” speech to the Philadelphia chapter of Black and White Men Together, March 1, 1986, in *Time on Two Crosses*, 275.

<sup>120</sup> Rustin, “From Montgomery to Stonewall,” 273.

philosophy of the Reagan administration. Imagine a society that takes lunches from school children. Do you really think it's possible for gays to get civil rights in that kind of society?"<sup>121</sup>

However, Rustin continued to believe that he was right in focusing on efforts to advance black civil rights and remaining aloof of homophile and gay activism prior to the mid-1980s. Reflecting on the civil rights movement and whether it should have been connected to the gay movement, Rustin said, "I believe there are certain types of movements which cannot be married..." His reasons were a bit murky, though. Rustin said "each movement has to stand on its own feet" and "if people do not organize in the name of their interest, the world will not take them as being serious."<sup>122</sup> In the same speech, though, Rustin said, black gay activists,

...should try to build coalitions of people for the elimination of all injustice. Because if we want to do away with the injustice to gays it will not be done because we get rid of the injustice to gays. It will be done because we are forwarding the effort for the elimination of injustice to all. And we will win the rights for gays, or blacks, or Hispanics, or women within the context of whether we are fighting for all.<sup>123</sup>

He reiterated that notion in another interview, declaring, "every indifference to prejudice is suicide because, if I don't fight all bigotry, bigotry itself will be strengthened and, sooner or later, it will turn on me."<sup>124</sup> In the end, Bayard Rustin saw the importance of inter-connected social movements, though he did not want to appear to second-guess his previous stance.

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<sup>121</sup> Rustin, "The New 'Niggers' Are Gays," 276.

<sup>122</sup> "Brother to Brother: An Interview with Joseph Beam," 1986, in *Time on Two Crosses*, 278.

<sup>123</sup> "Brother to Brother," 279.

<sup>124</sup> "Black and Gay in the Civil Rights Movement: An Interview with Open Hands," 1987, in *Time on Two Crosses*, 288.



Freedom Summer volunteer Cathy Cade became involved in the lesbian movement much earlier. Living in San Francisco, Gay Women's Liberation would hold Friday meetings at the large house where Cade lived with a number of other feminists in the early 1970s. She also attended a conference that included a workshop on sexuality and admired the lesbians who led it who "seemed so free and independent and together." In spring, 1971, she became involved with a woman named Ruth, who was also coming to identify as a lesbian. Cade says that the minute the two slept together, they both became politically involved in the lesbian movement in San Francisco.<sup>125</sup>

Cade observes that, with respect to lesbian organizing, she often floats from group to group. One of the most important things she does is photography. She says, "I also became a photographer in '72. Actually, as I was coming out. They're not unconnected. Coming out as a Lesbian really gave me the feeling of confidence to be able [to] do what I'd been wanting to do which was photography."<sup>126</sup> Much of her photography has been of lesbian mothers. She says she was "inspired and taught by the photographers of the Southern Freedom Movement."<sup>127</sup> In part, choosing photography was a way she could do something political for the lesbian movement that did not require repeated meetings which she says, given her years of

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with Cathy Cade, interview by Ronald J. Grele, January 5, 1985, transcript p. 64-66, Student Movements of the 1960s Oral History Project, Columbia University.

<sup>126</sup> Cade interview, 72.

<sup>127</sup> Cathy Cade, "My First Demonstration - Atlanta, 1962," Veterans of the Civil Rights Movement Website, 2010, [http://www.crmvet.org/nars/stor/s\\_cade.htm](http://www.crmvet.org/nars/stor/s_cade.htm)

experience in other movements, had burned her out.<sup>128</sup> In 1987, Cade published *A Lesbian Photo Album: The Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists*.<sup>129</sup>

When asked if she would have done anything differently in her past as an activist, Cade's first response is that she wishes she had more friendships with black women. It is important to note that even for lesbian activists for black civil rights, there is still a feeling of racial divide. Cade notes that in San Francisco she was not close to civil rights issues. However, by 1985, she and others had been able to make more connections between black and white lesbians, and women generally. While Cade understands and appreciates the need for autonomous movements, she believes, "my experiences and who I am, I really believe in integration, old fashioned a word as that is." Cade emphasizes the importance of bridging gaps across race, gender and sexual orientation. She says, "that happened a lot in the civil rights movement, and that was like my first experience of it, of people who were so different from each other..."<sup>130</sup>

Like Cade, Pat Norman, a black lesbian, was also involved in activism as a lesbian mother, though her work was more political than cultural. Norman had been "very involved in the civil rights movement and the women's movement" and confronted both homophobia and racism living in Dallas. This was problematic not only among straight whites, but within lesbian and gay communities as well. Despite the segregation of gay bars, Norman went anyway because there was no other place to meet lesbians in Dallas. Like Cade, she eventually relocated from the

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<sup>128</sup> Cade interview, 73.

<sup>129</sup> Cathy Cade, *A Lesbian Photo Album: The Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists* (Oakland: Waterwomen Books, 1987).

<sup>130</sup> Cade interview, 40-41, 74.

South to San Francisco. In 1971, she lost custody of her children because she identified as lesbian. She organized the Lesbian Mother's Union and successfully regained custody a year later.<sup>131</sup>

Within her first year at UC-Santa Cruz in the early 1970s, Nancy Stoller, a white woman active in SNCC in Arkansas, was quite out. She got involved with the Santa Cruz Women's Prison Project, a multiracial movement which worked with female prisoners in California. They brought in courses, music and more from the outside. Nancy was particularly concerned about lesbian women in prison, or those who were lesbians-by-circumstance, and worked to incorporate lesbian programming into their project. For a time, the three women in charge of the project were lesbians and there were many lesbians among the group's membership. Nancy also worked with the Santa Cruz Women's Health Center, in which many of the leaders were also lesbians. During the time she was fighting her denial of tenure, which Nancy believes was the result of her activism, she moved to San Francisco. There, she brought her previous two projects together, working on the health of women in prison. Nancy focused primarily on developing educational materials about lesbian health and AIDS. After being tenured, Nancy returned to Santa Cruz and continued to teach about lesbian and gay life. She was also a part of the Lesbian and Gay Task Force at UC-Santa Cruz, which worked to gain equal access to benefits.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Ta'shia Asanti, "Black Herstory," *Lesbian News*, February, 1995, p. 82, in African American Lesbians folder.

<sup>132</sup> Interview with Nancy Stoller, telephone interview by author, September 15, 2011.

In 1998, Nancy published *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores and Junkies Respond to AIDS*. Her work was particularly attentive to the intersection of multiple struggles. She writes, "Specifically, I have attempted to look at the ways that racism, sexism, and class have both limited and energized the responses of community organizations to the epidemic."<sup>133</sup> In focusing on bias within community organizations, she sets out not to discredit the organizations, but to draw attention to the bias and encourage the kind of self-criticism that might correct it. She notes that her own participation in direct action groups, including six years in SNCC, made her curious about AIDS advocacy groups. Moreover, she writes, "I hope that my past experiences with the cultural and structural obstinacy of racism have also sharpened the perspective of this book."<sup>134</sup>

Nancy's experiences in the civil rights movement influenced her in other ways as well. She says she was exposed to a freedom about sexuality within the black freedom struggle, even if it did not pertain to homosexuality specifically. The civil rights movement helped break down rules about who one should be close to; for example, who one could have sex with or marry. She says that people who accepted that "breakdown and transgression" were more likely to accept transgressions in other areas, like gender and sexual orientation. Nancy also believes that being in the civil rights movement had a profound effect on her lesbian activism, declaring, "It helped to make me strong and proud." Moreover, the idea of having a right to one's own body was a key belief Nancy held and, she says, grew out

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<sup>133</sup> Nancy E. Stoller, *Lessons from the Damned: Queers, Whores and Junkies Respond to AIDS* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 1.

<sup>134</sup> Stoller, 5.

of the civil rights movement. She believed in the principles that all we have are our own bodies and that people have a right to make their own decisions about their bodies.<sup>135</sup> Finally, Nancy says her political education occurred during her time in SNCC. The civil rights organization taught her the importance of holding ethical and moral beliefs above laws and acting to break down the barriers created by unjust laws and practices. For Nancy Stoller, her experiences in the civil rights movement were formative and deeply influenced her later activism.<sup>136</sup>

Living in San Francisco in 1970, Amber Hollibaugh became a part of the activist gay community. Though she was not a leader at that point, she would later become one. Hollibaugh engaged in activities like helping to start the Lesbian and Gay History Project in San Francisco. While she has remained an activist throughout her life, she says it was the AIDS crisis that “thrust me back into a level of organizing I haven’t been involved in since the early civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s and 1970s.”<sup>137</sup>

Hollibaugh was instrumental to the creation of the Lesbian AIDS Project at the Gay Men’s Health Crisis and had previously worked in the AIDS Discrimination Unit of the Human Rights Commission. She says, “this was really a place where in every way the skills that I had about sexuality, around gender, around class and race, in every way demanded it.” Working on HIV/AIDS issues was difficult, especially early in the crisis. It was particularly difficult working with lesbians, who

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<sup>135</sup> Stoller interview by author.

<sup>136</sup> Interview with Nancy Stoller, interview by David Cline, April 16, 2010, transcript p. 38, Out in the Redwoods Oral History Project, University of California-Santa Cruz.

<sup>137</sup> Amber L. Hollibaugh, *My Dangerous Desires: A Queer Girl Dreaming Her Way Home* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 123, 209; Interview with Amber Hollibaugh, interview by Kelly Anderson, December 15-16, 2003; January 20, 2004, transcript p. 140, Voices of Feminism Oral History Project.

were often ignored in the epidemic. Hollibaugh says that the angriest she has ever been at the women's movement was its refusal to deal with the HIV/AIDS crisis among women and adds her disappointment that many black activists were not dealing with the issue either.<sup>138</sup>

At the same time, she cites the importance of the civil rights movement in her later activism. Hollibaugh writes,

Those who survived that experience remained politicized, and I was hooked. In the society I'd come from I'd been taught that nothing mattered, nothing was worth fighting for, but through that struggle I'd come to know people who believed in something and who were prepared to act on that belief, the right of people to be equal—which was an extraordinary thought in a racist society. The struggle gave me so much, and, even though I didn't know where to go, I couldn't give up political involvement.<sup>139</sup>

One important difference from her time in the civil rights and anti-war movements, though, is that Hollibaugh believes that the movements of the 1960s and 70s generated a privileged storytelling. Alternatively, the AIDS movement helped give voice to those who had previously gone unheard, especially working-class women of color. Consequently, Hollibaugh created a documentary film called *The Heart of the Matter*, which was built around the stories of those people who had previously been left out.<sup>140</sup>

Kiyoshi Kuromiya also became an important AIDS activist. Kuromiya was a Japanese-American who was born in an internment camp in 1943. He became an activist for civil rights in Philadelphia while a student at the University of Pennsylvania, joining sit-ins with CORE in Maryland and voting rights marches in

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<sup>138</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 152-55.

<sup>139</sup> Hollibaugh, 105.

<sup>140</sup> Hollibaugh interview, 159.

Montgomery, Alabama, where he was beaten by police. At the same time, he was involved in early efforts for gay rights, joining one of the first demonstrations held at Independence Hall in 1965. Kuromiya was also a founder of the Gay Liberation Front in Philadelphia, a branch predominantly composed of people of color. He served as a delegate from the GLF to the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention, organized by the Black Panthers in 1970.<sup>141</sup>

With the spread of HIV/AIDS and the failure of government and medical institutions as well as many existing activist organizations to respond to the degree an epidemic requires, Kuromiya and others drove the efforts of the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). Kuromiya was a committed member of ACT UP Philadelphia and the organization's People of Color Caucus.<sup>142</sup> Created in New York in 1987, ACT UP became one of the most important AIDS activist organizations and worked to address a crisis that disproportionately affected gays and people of color. The group employed non-violent direct action, street theater, agit-prop, and other tactics to dramatize the crisis. As a result of the activism of ACT UP and other groups, the government increased funding for AIDS research, the Food and Drug Administration streamlined its bureaucratic approval system, scientific researchers

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<sup>141</sup> Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 316; Stein, *Rethinking*, 83; Simon Hall, *American Patriotism, American Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 37; Patrick S. Cheng, *From Sin to Amazing Grace: Discovering the Queer Christ* (New York: Church Publishing, Inc., 2012), 97-98.

<sup>142</sup> Jeff Maskovsky and Julie Davids, "Kuromiya, Kiyoshi," in *The Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History in America*, ed. by Marc Stein (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 122-23.

began to include people with HIV/AIDS in their decision-making process, pharmaceutical companies lowered the price of AIDS drugs, and more.<sup>143</sup>

Kuromiya also helped found the multiracial, cross-class organization We the People Living with AIDS/HIV, which “became one of the most significant avenues for political participation among low-income sexual minorities of color.” Moreover, he believed the distribution of information was critical. Kuromiya edited the ACT UP book *Standard of Care*, which was the first book on standard of care for people with HIV/AIDS written by people with HIV/AIDS. Finally, he founded the Critical Path Project, a source of comprehensive information on HIV/AIDS treatment distributed across a variety of communication platforms.<sup>144</sup> Kuromiya died in 2000 from complications from AIDS at the age of 57.<sup>145</sup>

After falling back into drinking and drugs in the late 1960s, Nina Boal got out of the movement. She says she was not a dedicated activist again until she found sobriety in 1982. Nina says, “I remember doing a lot of drinking and feeling sorry for myself because everyone hates me because I’m a lesbian. And that’s just internally...oppressive. I’m just killing myself.” Nina notes the high level of alcohol and drug abuse not only among LBGT individuals, but among civil rights activists ranging from Phil Ochs to Huey Newton. Nina views alcoholism not only as a response to internalized oppression, but also the trauma that came with resisting oppression. As an alternative, she took up working with gay-identified Alcoholics

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<sup>143</sup> Deborah Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight Against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 3-5.

<sup>144</sup> Maskovsky and Davids, 122-23.

<sup>145</sup> Douglas Martin, “Kiyoshi Kuromiya, 57, Fighter For the Rights of AIDS Patients,” *The New York Times*, May 28, 2000, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/05/28/us/kiyoshi-kuromiya-57-fighter-for-the-rights-of-aids-patients.html>



Anonymous (AA) groups to help work through this oppression and self-abuse. Nina sees her work in AA as part of the resistance to oppression which she says she began learning about during her time in the civil rights movement.<sup>146</sup>

While her younger sister was an out lesbian before her, it took Joan Steinau Lester a number of years following Stonewall, an event she was not aware of, before she identified as a lesbian. Joan did not really connect with her sister and her sister's friends who lived on a lesbian separatist commune. In 1977, when she moved to Amherst to work on her Ph.D. in Multicultural Education, though, Joan started to meet more lesbians that she could identify with. A few years later, she met her partner of 31 years.<sup>147</sup>

Joan was not really involved in any gay organizations, though she did participate in pride parades and demonstrations. Her primary work was through Equity Institute, an organization she and her partner formed. The organization became a national non-profit and they brought in 16 other people to work in their training programs. They started by focusing on what they called race and sex desegregation training and added homophobia shortly thereafter. In the mid-1980s, they began a retreat for lesbian and gay schoolteachers, which was one of the first in the country. Joan says that through this program, she met many lesbian and gay activists who then went on to start their own programs. Moreover, Joan believes she was able to channel her past experiences in the civil rights movement and women's liberation to work on persistent problems surrounding racism, sexism and

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<sup>146</sup> Interview with Nina Boal, telephone interview by author, July 9, 2011.

<sup>147</sup> Interview with Joan Steinau Lester, telephone interview by author, July 11, 2012.

homophobia. In 1996, they closed Equity Institute so Joan could focus more on her writing.<sup>148</sup>

According to Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, “lesbians in L.A. who came of age in the uninhibited and politically lively 1960s were very different from their postwar ‘Silent Generation’ lesbian predecessors. Though a bit slower to fight for their own rights as lesbians, they were on the front lines of L.A.’s civil rights, antiwar, and feminist movements.” Activist Del Whan was one such lesbian who spent the 1960s involved in civil rights and antiwar movements. In 1971, she moved into lesbian activism and founded the Gay Women’s Services Center (GWSC), which was “the first organization in America that was incorporated as a social service agency exclusively for lesbians.”<sup>149</sup>

The following year, the services of the GWSC expanded under the stewardship of Sharon Raphael and her partner, Mina Meyer. Raphael had also been involved in the civil rights movement in Cleveland, Ohio. She attended national events like the March on Washington in 1963 and worked on local issues like housing integration in the Ludlow area.<sup>150</sup> Raphael and Meyer expanded the work of GWSC to include freeing women from mental institutions, providing them with bail to get out of jail, and offering shelter in times of need. They also offered a place to discuss society and politics and socialize with music and dance.<sup>151</sup>

Sharon Raphael and her partner, Mina Meyer, became important lesbian activists on other issues as well. Raphael served as coordinator of the Graduate

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<sup>148</sup> Lester interview.

<sup>149</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 169-70.

<sup>150</sup> Sharon Raphael to author, March 12, 2012.

<sup>151</sup> Faderman and Timmons, 170.

Behavioral Science Gerontology Program at California State University-Dominguez Hills. She and Meyer were instrumental in the formation of the National Association for Lesbian and Gay Gerontology. In 1987, Raphael's university, CSU-Dominguez Hills, hosted and Meyer coordinated the West Coast Celebration and Conference By and For Old Lesbians. A Bay Area women's newspaper, *Plexus*, called the conference a "historic first."<sup>152</sup> The organization attempted to deal with ageism while continuing to deal with persistent sexism and homophobia. Raphael is currently Research Gatekeeper for the group Old Lesbians Organizing for Change (OLOC).

The Oregon commune experience was essential to bringing Arthur Finn, who had been a civil rights volunteer in Mississippi, out of the closet. It was not only the accepting communal environment, but also the literature that he read while there that expanded his ideas about what was possible. *The Gay Manifesto* by Carl Wittman was a remarkable document for Arthur. In the pre-Stonewall era, the movement had been centered on the goals of groups like the Mattachine Society: making homosexuality acceptable to the mainstream of society. The image of a gay man in a suit and tie was the ideal figure of homosexuality. Wittman's manifesto turned this notion on its head. Even more importantly, Wittman moved to the Oregon town where Arthur was living and they became friends.<sup>153</sup>

Arthur was also influenced by the magazine that Wittman helped start called *Rural Fairy Delight*, which called on gay people to leave mainstream society. Harry Hay and Murray Adelman were also major figures for Arthur as their group, Radical Faeries, advocated that gay people not make any attempts to emulate straight

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<sup>152</sup> Del Martin, "West Coast Celebration for Old Lesbians," *Plexus* 13:1 (July, 1987), 1.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with Arthur Finn, telephone interview by author, July 7, 2011.

people. He eagerly became a part of this collective. In the mid-to-late 1970s, Arthur moved back East to New York. One of the important events taking place annually was the Christopher Street Parade, to show gay pride, a responsibility of “every solid citizen of the gay community.” Arthur did not care for the parade, which he viewed as disorganized and slow. However, he had an opportunity to get involved and took it. Twenty years later, he continues to be a part of the New York City Pride March as the co-chair of Heritage of Pride, the event’s organizing group.<sup>154</sup>

Much of what Arthur Finn learned in the civil rights movement carried on to his later activism. He also cites the continuing influence of women’s liberation. Arthur says the two struggles taught him to challenge the prevailing vision of the ideal society, which marginalized or excluded African Americans, women and gays and lesbians. Alternatively, the movements he participated in articulated and reinforced the notion that people have the right to be who they are. The idea of non-violence was also essential. In particular, in confrontations between gay demonstrators and police, Arthur continued to feel it was important to avoid physical and even verbal conflicts that could hurt the movement.<sup>155</sup>

Arthur Finn continues to organize the New York Pride March. It is a year-round organizational effort involving connecting with the press and publicizing, finding volunteers, obtaining funding and budgeting various expenses, and more. The organization has accomplished a great deal. Arthur believes one of the most important parts of dismantling homophobia is making lesbian and gay people more visible and creating a safe space for lesbians and gays to come out. Numerous

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<sup>154</sup> Finn interview.

<sup>155</sup> Finn interview.

people have expressed to him that Pride has been instrumental to this visibility. Moreover, the organization helps to get the message out about particular issues that are important, like AIDS education and research and marriage equality.<sup>156</sup>

Though she had come out more than a decade before, Joan Nestle became involved in gay liberation through the Gay Activist Alliance (GAA) in New York in 1971. Nestle writes, “Active in the civil rights, antiwar, and antinuclear armament movements, I had become experienced in confronting the more decorous face of the armed forces of the state. I was just beginning to see the connections between these liberation struggles and my own fem life; I had even begun to believe that ‘freaks’ such as us deserved to live our lives without constant terror of disclosure or attack.” She and other lesbians in the GAA created the Lesbian Liberation Committee, which became Lesbian Feminist Liberation, the first lesbian feminist group in the U.S. Nestle was also a part of the formation of the Gay Academic Union in 1973 in New York, which Achebe Betty Powell was a part of as well.<sup>157</sup>

Out of a consciousness raising group of the Gay Academic Union came the idea for the Lesbian Herstory Archives. Nestle was struck by a book they were reading, Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, particularly the passage, “The colonized are condemned to lose their memory.” Nestle and her partner, Deb Edel, began the Lesbian Herstory Archives in 1973 to prevent this loss of memory. The Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City is currently the oldest and largest archive of lesbian life. It served as a model for other community collections and

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<sup>156</sup> Finn interview.

<sup>157</sup> Joan Nestle, “A Fem’s Feminist History,” in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices From Women’s Liberation*, ed. by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998), 338-41, 344; Achebe Powell interview, 50-51.

contributed to the preservation of lesbian history. Nestle writes, “Memmi’s concept and my whole life became part of a resistant personalized fem feminism that was expressed in my work with the Lesbian Herstory Archives...”<sup>158</sup>

Charlotte Bunch, who had been involved in civil rights activism in North Carolina, was also important to forming the Gay Academic Union. Bunch was also a founder of The Furies, one of the most prominent, but short-lived, lesbian-feminist separatist groups. The group was formed in 1971 in Washington, D.C. but continued to publish its newsletter even after the collective broke up the following year. While Furies like Ginny Berson argued that, “The base of our ideological thought is: Sexism is the root of all other oppressions, and Lesbian and woman oppression will not end by smashing capitalism, racism, and imperialism,” Bunch and others continued to believe that ending racism remained important.<sup>159</sup>

Linda Seese, a white woman who had been a SNCC volunteer in Mississippi, became involved in lesbian separatism as well, primarily through the women’s land movement. After being involved in the women’s movement in Toronto and Chicago, she moved with a group to a commune near Portland, Oregon. Their group was two lesbian couples and one heterosexual couple. Linda says that when a group of women from Iowa visited their commune in Oregon, they convinced Linda and other lesbians to form a separate group. The first women’s commune Linda was involved in was the Oregon Women’s Land Trust, which was started in 1976 in the southern

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<sup>158</sup> Brenda J. Marston, “History Projects, Libraries, and Archives,” in *The Encyclopedia of LGBT History in America*, 45; Amy Beth, “Lesbian Herstory Archives,” in *The Encyclopedia of LGBT History in America, Part 2*, 167-68; Nestle, “Feminist History,” 344-46.

<sup>159</sup> Clendinen and Nagourney, 234; Ginny Berson, “The Furies,” in *Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement*, 18; JoAnne Myers, *The A to Z of the Lesbian Liberation Movement: Still the Rage* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 123; Charlotte Bunch, “Lesbians in Revolt,” in *Lesbianism and the Women’s Movement*, 29, 34-35.

part of the state. She says there was a lot of consciousness raising around issues ranging from racism and classism to incest. Linda recalls it being a very integrated women's land, bringing together African American, Native American, Hispanic and white women, mostly from the Bay Area. Linda was among the core of 30 women who lived on the commune and stayed there until 1979. Following that, she moved to England for a year and a half and a women's land in Denmark for roughly the same amount of time. When she returned to the U.S., she settled on a women's land north of Santa Fe, New Mexico.<sup>160</sup> It is important to add that women and gay and lesbian communes drew ideas from African American life. Historian Todd Gitlin observes, "The template for this idea of separatism is black separatism."<sup>161</sup>

Like many other older activists, Igal Roodenko, who had been one of a handful of people on the first freedom ride in 1947, found it difficult to come out, even within activist circles. In a 1974 interview, Roodenko said that while he had known he was gay since high school in the 1930s, "It took a great deal of the gain in the last few years to make it easier for me to come out...Only within the context of the gay liberation movement of the last couple years...has it been, possible, easier, to live within my own small circle of friends in the radical and peace movement, and within the world at large." Though, he added, "It is still very awkward."<sup>162</sup>

The one group that Roodenko did become involved with was Black and White Men Together (BWMT, alternatively Men of All Colors Together, MACT, or People of All Colors Together, PACT). The organization was created in San Francisco

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<sup>160</sup> Interview with Linda Seese, telephone interview by author, February 22, 2012.

<sup>161</sup> Ariel Levy, "Lesbian Nation," *The New Yorker*, March 2, 2009.

<sup>162</sup> Interview with Igal Roodenko, interview by Charlotte Adams et al., April 11, 1974, transcript p. 63-64, Southern Oral History Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

in 1980 by Mike Smith, a white man, as a support group. A piece of the group's literature observed, "Black men who are primarily attracted to Whites and White men who are primarily attracted to Blacks have special interests and needs which are often overlooked, even derided, by the Gay community at large..."<sup>163</sup>

By 1983, the organization claimed 27 chapters and more than 2000 members. They also became more avowedly political as they wrote, "the International Association has as its primary agenda coalition-building among gays, blacks and other minorities in pursuit of civil rights and full equality. In the current political climate, it is clear that minorities must act in concert in carefully targeted areas of mutual concern." They worked specifically on efforts to oppose racism in gay communities and viewed themselves as a "living laboratory of integration-in-practice." The group also held national conventions which offered keynote addresses and featured speeches by gay men who had been involved in efforts to advance black civil rights like Richard Bruce Nugent, Bayard Rustin and Allan Spear. One of Roodenko's fellow group members, Mitchell Karp said, "He came to our group as an older member of the gay community and became a sort of instant father figure. He brought *all* of himself to Men of All Colors Together. He talked a lot about his personal experiences in civil rights and peace."<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> "Igal Roodenko: February 8, 1917--April 28, 1991," *The Nonviolent Activist* (July-August, 1991), p. 3, Roodenko, Igal, 1917-1991 folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives; Terry Rowden, "Black and White Men Together, National Association of," in *Gay Histories and Cultures: An Encyclopedia*, Vol. 2, ed. by George E. Haggerty (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), 122; News Release," undated, Black and White Men Together Records, box 2, folder 9, Black and White Men Together (BWMT) - Quarterly, 1983, undated, ONE Archives.

<sup>164</sup> International Association of Black & White Men Together to James Baldwin, June 20, 1983, BWMT Records, box 2, folder 18, Working Drafts, 1983, ONE Archives; BWMT Records, box 1, folder 8, Conferences and Conventions, 1981-2002, ONE Archives; "Igal Roodenko," 6. Emphasis in original.



Perhaps one of the most striking results is the degree to which gay and lesbian activists in the civil rights movement were not involved in later efforts. This was especially true of older activists. Some, like Lillian Smith, died in 1966, before gay liberation came of age. Similarly, Lorraine Hansberry died in 1965 at a young age. Though, she has been noted for her numerous letters to *The Ladder* and *ONE* and her efforts to forge connections with the homophile movement of the 1960s. Martin Duberman writes that David McReynolds did not place gay liberation high on his list of political concerns. Though living in New York City, McReynolds was not strongly influenced by the Stonewall Rebellion. He had attempted to get into the Stonewall Inn some time before the rebellion and been refused admittance. When the uprising occurred, he went to the Stonewall Inn to give his support, but did not feel like he belonged and could not find any men that appealed to him. While he welcomed the increasing visibility and openness of gays and lesbians following the Stonewall Rebellion, he “wasn’t able to find any alternative sense of comfort in the increasingly--and political--gay community.”<sup>165</sup>

During the time that gay liberation was becoming more prominent, McReynolds continued to work with the War Resisters’ League. Following the US withdrawal from Vietnam, he spent much of his time focused on advancing the cause of unilateral disarmament, creating links with black churches in the South and organizing rallies in support of Soviet dissidents. While the War Resisters’ League rented out space in its building to the Gay Activist Alliance, McReynolds never became involved with the group despite its proximity. Though, the WRL was noted

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<sup>165</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 155, 181, 221; Interview with David McReynolds, telephone interview by author, July 20, 2011.

for making gay people welcome in its ranks and its magazine *Win* released an issue on gay liberation.<sup>166</sup>

Even when McReynolds ran for President on the Socialist Party of the USA ticket in 1980, he did not run on gay liberation. Rather, Martin Duberman writes, “In his itemization of the country’s ills and possible solutions for them, David particularly emphasized the long-standing and intractable issue of racism and racial divisions. He offered no quick solution, but he did insist that socialists should view the building of alliances with communities of color as a high priority.” While he became involved with gay groups in the early 2000s, he still did not feel a part of the cause. Duberman concludes, “David remains unconvinced that either [gender or sexual orientation] ranks in importance with oppressions based on class and race. They are the inequities that continued most intensely to call out his committed concern.”<sup>167</sup>

After completing his sentence for his civil rights activities, Pat Cusick, a white man, was banned from North Carolina for five years and forbidden from associating with civil rights workers. But, this did not last long as he went to Boston to take a job with Action for Boston Community Development. In early 1965, Cusick helped coordinate a march to Boston Common which brought together 70,000 people to commemorate James Reeb, a white minister beaten to death in Selma while advocating for black civil rights. Shortly thereafter, he served as assistant director of security for a march that brought Martin Luther King, Jr. to Boston. Cusick then became the leader of the South End Neighborhood Service Center of Action for

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<sup>166</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 195, 209, 221.

<sup>167</sup> Duberman, *A Saving Remnant*, 214, 245.

Boston Community Development, assisting thousands of low-income families remain in their neighborhoods.<sup>168</sup>

Cusick came out in the mid-1980s and became involved in gay rights for about six months on the Boston Lesbian-Gay Political Alliance. However, he says, “I soon got out of that. I don’t like single issue politics, and my efforts are almost totally devoted to building the Rainbow Coalition.” Cusick served on the Boston executive committee of the Rainbow Coalition and became a member of the Democratic National Convention’s platform committee from Michael Dukakis’ home state of Massachusetts, though he was actively pushing the agenda of The Rev. Jesse Jackson. *South End News* reported that Cusick “saw the 1988 Democratic National Convention as the continuation of the movement begun a quarter of a century ago.”<sup>169</sup>

Upon his death in 2004, historian James T. Sears wrote that Cusick was, “a longtime advocate for gay rights and that being openly gay is central to understanding his life’s work.”<sup>170</sup> Similarly, Barney Frank said,

...Pat Cusick was a leader in the fight against racism. At the same time, he was a proud gay man, who knew from his own life experiences that while the fights against racism and against homophobia have some differences, they almost always confront the same enemy. His courageous dedication to human rights cuts across all efforts to divide us.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> E. Jane Smith, “New South, old memories,” *South End News*, August 4, 1988, 4, 16; Gloria Negri, “Patrick A. Cusick, 72, a voice for the poor in South End,” *The Boston Globe*, May 13, 2004, p. C16.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Pat Cusick, interview by Pamela Dean, June 19, 1989, transcript p. 66, SOHP; Ottaway News Service, “’63 sit-in veteran in thick of convention,” *Chapel Hill Newspaper*, July 20, 1988; Smith, 4, 16.

<sup>170</sup> James T. Sears, “Remembering Pat Cusick: A Key Civil Rights Organizer,” *Gay Today*, May 24, 2004, <http://www.gaytoday.com/people/052404pe.asp>

<sup>171</sup> Quoted in Sears, “Remembering Pat Cusick.”

Though, Pat Cusick's gay rights activism is not readily apparent. Cusick devoted his life to a number of issues and black civil rights and anti-poverty activism were most prominent.

Like Cusick, fellow Chapel Hill activist Quinton Baker did not view himself as part of any "gay culture." In an interview in 2002, he said, "...what I don't understand, or what I have not been able to deal with, is understanding what people call the 'gay culture' because I don't live a gay life in that sense. So, I don't know what we are talking about."<sup>172</sup> At the same time, Baker never really tied together issues of race and sexuality. For him, the issue of race was about being able to live a free public life, while sexuality was more of an internal and emotional issue.<sup>173</sup>

Moreover, Baker says,

Some of the people who expressed the most overt racism were white gays. The people who have been the least involved were white gays—unless they had been radicalized. So I would have not made any connection with someone being gay and *any* affinity for human rights. Of course I wouldn't say that there were no gays in the movement—there were many—but the gays pretty much wanted to maintain the social structure as it was.<sup>174</sup>

Like Cusick, Baker continued to work on issues of racial justice and poverty. When he was paroled after being imprisoned for civil rights activism in North Carolina, he transferred to the University of Wisconsin to complete his degree in the mid-1960s. After graduation he moved from Madison to Milwaukee where he worked for the Poverty Program and then directed the Milwaukee Inner City Arts Council. He says their goal was to improve "cultural awareness and sensitivity in

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<sup>172</sup> Interview with Quinton E. Baker, interview by Chris McGinnis, February 23, 2002, SOHP.

<sup>173</sup> Interview with Quinton Baker, interview by James T. Sears, September 25, 1996, James T. Sears Papers, Rubenstein Library, Duke University.

<sup>174</sup> Sears, *Lonely Hunters*, 150.

the black community through arts.” Following that, he moved to Boston and worked for the Mayor’s office of Cultural Affairs and, later, the Education Development Center, a non-profit organization. At that point, he transitioned from a life as an activist and community organizer to the private sector, working in a department store, a stock brokerage and opening his own restaurant.<sup>175</sup>

In 1990, he returned to North Carolina to work for the Community Based Public Health Initiative, assisting community organizations, scholarly institutions and public health agencies work with communities of color. He says that, while the civil rights movement was important, “we left a lot of promises, but we really haven't radically shifted the power relationship for poor communities in the dominant society. And so, a lot of my work is about shifting that relationship.”<sup>176</sup> Alternatively, John Dunne left North Carolina to complete his undergraduate degree at Harvard and his law degree at Yale in 1972. He also married a woman, which Quinton Baker says was painful for him. Baker and Dunne stopped talking to each other. Dunne became founding partner of a law firm in Norwich, Vermont. He died of cancer in 1982. There is no evidence that he was ever involved in any gay rights efforts.<sup>177</sup>

Jane Stenbridge, a white woman who served as SNCC’s first full time staff member, was not aware of Stonewall and never became involved in gay or lesbian liberation. While she was important in SNCC and believed it was a loving

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<sup>175</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis.

<sup>176</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis.

<sup>177</sup> Baker interview by McGinnis; “John B. Dunne - Biographical Information,” Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina, [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/d/Dunne,John\\_B.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/d/Dunne,John_B.html); “Weddings; Sarah Taylor, Matthew Dunne,” *The New York Times*, June 30, 2002.

community, she came to realize that she was more effective as a writer for the movement than in direct action. But, she did not believe there was any place in SNCC for a writer. Her desire to avoid direct action protest in later years may explain why she never became very involved in women's liberation or lesbian and gay liberation. At the same time, she decided to stop writing and could not advance either struggle in that way.<sup>178</sup>

James Baldwin also did not identify with gay liberation or join any gay rights organizations. The publication of his novel *Giovanni's Room* in 1957 led him to be publicly identified as a homosexual more than a decade before Stonewall. Shortly before the publication of *Another Country* in 1962, Baldwin told biographer W.J. Weatherby, "Times are slowly changing. In this bar a lot of people identify now with *Giovanni*; they feel as oppressed as blacks. But a breakthrough is coming, a willingness to listen. Great changes are on the way. It's difficult now to remember how difficult it was to get *Giovanni* accepted."<sup>179</sup>

However, when the Stonewall Rebellion came in 1969 and gay liberation rose to prominence, Baldwin never became a strong supporter. Instead, he said, "All these movements--women's liberation, gay liberation--all these eruptions. Perhaps I'm old-fashioned, but I feel very dubious about all that. You don't have to prove you're a woman, and if you happen to be homosexual or whatever, you don't have to form a club in order to learn to live with yourself."<sup>180</sup> According to biographer David Leeming, Baldwin generally avoided taking a stance on the issues raised by gay

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<sup>178</sup> Interview with Jane Stembridge, telephone interview by author, March 3-4, 2012.

<sup>179</sup> William J. Weatherby, *James Baldwin: Artist on Fire, A Portrait* (New York: D.I. Fine, 1989), 129, 156.

<sup>180</sup> Weatherby, 344.

liberation activists and felt sexuality should remain a private matter. It remains difficult to understand how a man who was, for many, a role model for being openly gay more than a decade before Stonewall could argue for the privacy of sexual orientation and remain aloof from efforts to advance gay rights. But, Baldwin also began avoiding the political issues of African Americans. For example, when Jesse Jackson ran for President, Baldwin reaffirmed his lack of faith in the political system and continued to abstain from electoral politics.<sup>181</sup>

Pauli Murray, who had been a forerunner in the civil rights movement and second-wave feminism, never became involved in lesbian and gay rights organizing either. In fact, she remained closeted until she passed away in 1985. Sara Azaransky notes that even when her contemporaries, like James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, addressed issues of sexuality, Murray did not. However, she did leave many materials about her sexuality in the archives she organized so that part of her life would not be lost to historians.<sup>182</sup>

Stanley Wise, who had served as Executive Secretary of SNCC, leading demonstrations and coordinating voter registration across the South, also remained closeted his entire life. Upon his death, Congressman John Lewis observed, "He was a very persistent and determined person with a great sense of commitment and dedication." Marion Barry referred to Wise as "one of those unsung heroes who fought for freedom and justice."<sup>183</sup> While Wise boldly stood at the forefront of

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<sup>181</sup> David Leeming, *James Baldwin: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1994), 367.

<sup>182</sup> Sara Azaransky, *The Dream Is Freedom: Pauli Murray and American Democratic Faith* (New York: Oxford, 2011), 119.

<sup>183</sup> Hollis R. Towns, "Stanley Leroy Wise, 53, helped lead students in '60s civil rights movement," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution*, April 18, 1996, p. 10E-11E.

efforts to advance the black freedom struggle, he found it difficult to come to terms with his sexual orientation. Though most of his family members knew or surmised he was gay, Stanley continued to brush the comments off as rumors. Married until the late 1970s, Stanley had two children with his second wife. She recalls that when their son was born, they each shared their greatest fear. Stanley said the worst thing that could happen to his son is that he turn out to be gay. It seems that Stanley long struggled with both self-acceptance and social acceptance as a black gay man. He died of AIDS-related complications in 1996.<sup>184</sup>

Around 1975, Mary Jo Osgood, a white SNCC volunteer, finally came out. She figured out she liked women around age eight, but, unsurprisingly, kept this part of her life hidden for a long time. Mary Jo was not really influenced by the Stonewall Rebellion and for much of her life a strong gay movement could not be imagined. Rather, she learned much about lesbianism from the women's movement, though she not was heavily involved in that either. Instead, Mary Jo remained focused on efforts for social justice for African Americans. Part of this had to do with what she saw as racism in the gay movement. The other major factor was that she was too busy building a life and no longer could dedicate much of time to activism and had to be selective. At the same time, though, she did donate money to gay rights causes and occasionally attended their functions. Today, Mary Jo connects her professional work to social justice activism, working for a program in Texas that provides legal counsel for low-income, predominantly minority populations.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Interview with Kathy Veit, telephone interview by author, July 18, 2011.

<sup>185</sup> Interview with Mary Jo Osgood, telephone interview by author, July 10, 2011.



When the rebellion at Stonewall took place in New York, Ivy Young was working on building the Center for Black Education in Washington, D.C. The Center was a Pan-African organization which offered Black Studies courses, sent African Americans to study and work in African countries, published a bi-monthly newspaper called *Pan-African* and was affiliated with the Drum and Spear Bookstore, opened by former SNCC activists. Young says, "In spite of dealing with homophobia, I didn't have the luxury to focus on it because racism was at the forefront of my daily struggle. People were literally dying in the streets from the aggression of the state and its discriminatory laws." Young says, "I was in and out of the closet to protect my safety." She finally came out in 1973 and the following year joined the National Black Feminist Organization, which had many lesbian members but was not an avowedly lesbian organization.<sup>186</sup>

While it should be acknowledged that some lesbian and gay activists remained aloof from gay liberation activism, most became involved. Even many of those individuals who did not join efforts for gay liberation remained activists, believing their efforts to advance racial justice, fight poverty, and more remained unfinished. For most, participation in the civil rights movement provided the experience and training to use in their later efforts for lesbian and gay liberation. Gay and lesbian activists in the black freedom struggle went on to have a transformative impact on law, politics, and society as they relate to LGBT individuals. They were major contributors to gay liberation activism, the fight

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<sup>186</sup> Asanti, 82; Craig Collisson, "The Fight to Legitimize Blackness: How Black Students Changed the University," Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 2008, p. 41; "Says Education System Makes Proxy Oppressors," *Jet*, November 12, 1970, p. 27.

against HIV/AIDS, building gay-identified social organizations, transforming our consciousness and understanding of sexuality, preserving gay history, and more. Understanding their lives is critical to appreciating the intersection of social movements and the long civil rights movement.

## **CONCLUSION - "A DREAM THAT FREEDOM WOULD INCLUDE US"**

Gays and lesbians made significant contributions to the African American civil rights movement and many went on to play important roles in the quest for LGBT equality. This dissertation documents the contributions of sixty lesbian and gay activists whose work ranged from the higher echelons of leadership to local, grassroots efforts. These activists advanced the cause of black civil rights by marching and demonstrating, working on voter registration, defending the cause as intellectuals, working for integrated education, and more. Since many of these activists did not identify as gay or lesbian at the time or even accepted the prevailing pathological view of homosexuality, at the core of their motivation was a common belief shared by others in the movement: that society must recognize African Americans as equals, ensure their basic liberties, and affirm their human dignity. At the same time, some white activists did identify as gay or lesbian and felt a connection with African Americans as an oppressed group. Further, a few black gays and lesbians, though they felt oppressed both because of their race and sexual orientation, believed that the cause of racial justice was the only socially acceptable one to fight for at the time or privileged the struggle for racial justice over the struggle for gay and lesbian equality.

The movement experiences of the activists profiled in this study often contributed to the ways they thought about their sexual identities. Despite their many connections to each other in the civil rights movement, the fact that these activists were almost all closeted prevented them from building a network of gay

rights activists out of their existing network in the civil rights movement. Still, their experiences in the struggle for racial justice were instrumental to building their consciousness and training them in direct action, which many would draw on and use to advance gay liberation in later years.

While scholars have done an excellent job of documenting the ways in which second-wave feminism grew out of women's experiences in the civil rights movement and New Left, this dissertation expands on that work by looking at the longer trajectory from black civil rights to feminism to lesbian liberation. For lesbian activists in the civil rights movement, women's liberation further expanded their consciousness about issues of gender and sexuality, laying the groundwork for lesbian activism. To them, feminism served as an important bridge from the civil rights movement to lesbian liberation.

While these women formed connections between civil rights, women's liberation and lesbian liberation, opposition forces intersected in massive resistance to civil rights, anti-Communist and anti-gay attitudes and groups. Organizations like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission as well as white supremacist groups and propagandists brought together a host of fears about black equality, Communist revolution, and homosexuality. However, the closeted status of many lesbian and gay activists and the ineffectiveness of many opposition forces prevented them from using accusations of homosexuality as a roadblock to stop the advance of black civil rights, though they did succeed in a couple of individual instances.

In the pre-Stonewall era, religious denominations were often entirely silent on issues of sexual orientation. The lack of hostility among organized religions at this time kept many gays and lesbians in churches and synagogues. Moreover, a number of gays and lesbians were motivated by their religious denominations to advance black civil rights. However, with increasing gay visibility by the end of the decade, many religious sects stood in opposition to equality. For a number of those gays and lesbians who had been religiously motivated to join the civil rights movement, religion ceased to play a role in their activism. In other denominations which adopted inclusive and progressive stances in the early 1970s, gays and lesbians continued working through churches and synagogues to promote equality. Still others opened a new front in the struggle for social justice by working to transform religious institutions to recognize LGBT equality.

Just as their roles in the civil rights movement varied, so too did these activists play varied roles in efforts to advance gay and lesbian rights. Many took on key roles for long periods of time while a few did not get involved at all. A number of them also sought to forge alliances. The post-Stonewall era saw greater out activism for gay liberation and a number of these groups turned to the black freedom struggle, particularly the Black Panther Party, in search of allies. Other black lesbian and gay activists, who did not connect with gay or black liberation groups later formed gay-identified black civil rights groups. While some gay and lesbian activists from the civil rights movement of the 1960s never became involved in efforts for gay rights, many more did. They drew on the consciousness, strategies

and tactics they had developed in their earlier activism and learned from the successes and failures of the previous era of struggle to advance LGBT equality.

Understanding their role helps us to replace a missing piece of the history of the black freedom struggle and to better comprehend the intersections of various struggles for justice during this period. Their activism for black civil rights also lead us to consider how adding a new dimension to the civil rights movement, the role of sexual orientation, alters our understanding of major issues in the movement historiography, like the nature of white supremacist opposition and the role of religion. Finally, assessing the role of these activists should help us better understand the long-term impact of the civil rights movement. Beyond simply inspiring other movements, the African American civil rights movement was the training ground for many activists in other struggles. Efforts for black civil rights helped lay the foundation for gay and lesbian liberation.

In 1983, civil rights groups decided to organize a 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemoration of the March on Washington and declare a re-dedication to ending oppression based on race, gender and class, as well as advancing the cause of global peace under the New Coalition of Conscience. Despite their call for a broad-based alliance, the coalition was unwilling to include a gay or lesbian speaker in the march. The National Coalition of Black Gays (NCBG) led the efforts to include a lesbian or gay speaker, not only to represent them as a key group of civil rights activists, but also to challenge the persistent invisibility of gay people of color.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexis de Veaux, *Warrior Poet: A Biography of Audre Lorde* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 323-25.

Representative Walter Fauntroy, the former chair of the Congressional Black Caucus who had a long history of civil rights activism, opposed the inclusion of gay speaker as the issue of gay rights was too divisive and his group did not want to appear to advocate homosexuality. He was quite notably attacked for comparing gay rights to “penguin rights,” though Fauntroy denied saying that. Fauntroy opposed a gay speaker in spite of the fact that he was, at the time, listed as a sponsor on two pending pieces of gay rights legislation. Moreover, he said that the organizers of the march were “unanimously supportive” of gay rights and expected many gays to attend.<sup>2</sup>

One of the arguments those opposing a gay speaker made was that, “...Gay groups in general have not been visible in the black civil rights movement.”<sup>3</sup> While it was certainly true that gays were not widely visible in the black freedom struggle, lack of visibility should not be confused with absence. If none of the analogies between black civil rights and gay rights hold, it should be clear that gays and lesbians played key roles in the civil rights movement.

However, this was not recognized in 1983. Instead, gays and lesbians were forced to use the tactics of the civil rights movement in order to have a voice at the march. When Fauntroy refused to meet with seven members of the National Coalition of Black Gays, they staged a sit-in at his office for more than two hours on August 24, just days before the event. Four were arrested. Lesbian and gay activists also received support from religious groups, like Faith Temple, a predominantly

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<sup>2</sup> de Veaux, 324-25; Karlyn Barker, “March Bars Abortion, Gay Issues,” *The Washington Post*, August 23, 1983, p. C1.

<sup>3</sup> Lou Chibbaro Jr., “King march leaders pressed to include a Gay speaker,” *Washington Blade*, August 19, 1983, p. 1, 6, Civil Rights Movement and Gays folder, ONE Subject Files Collection, ONE Archives.

black gay church, and from civil rights leaders like Marion Barry. Finally, it was agreed that there would be an openly gay speaker at the “Litany of Commitments to Jobs, Peace and Freedom,” which brought together speakers from a variety of movements at the end of the march. The National Coalition of Black Gays chose Audre Lorde.<sup>4</sup>

As with previous civil rights efforts, the marchers faced opposition forces motivated by a host of fears. On the Saturday prior to the march, Rev. Carl McIntire of New Jersey brought together 300 people at the Washington Monument warning, “What they do next Saturday will help the communists take over the world.”<sup>5</sup> But, as with previous attempts to oppose the civil rights movement, claims like these were largely ineffective and their receptive audience appeared to have further waned.

With more than 250,000 people in attendance on August 27, 1983, the commemoration and rededication was a major event. Many spokespersons suggested, “...the inclusion of an openly Gay speaker at the event marked an important milestone in efforts to link Gay rights with the overall civil rights movement.” Despite troubles having her speech approved and getting on stage, Audre Lorde, who had been in the crowd at the 1963 March on Washington, addressed the audience that day. In the face of some audience hostility, Lorde affirmed the unity of all struggles for freedom. She declared, “We marched in 1963 with Dr. Martin Luther King and dared to dream that freedom would include us,

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<sup>4</sup> de Veaux, 324-25; Karlyn Barker, “March to Seek New National Agenda,” *The Washington Post*, August 24, 1983, p. A1; Chibbaro, Jr., “King march leaders pressed,” 1, 6; Lou Chibbaro, Jr., “Gay presence scattered at King march,” *The Washington Blade*, September 9, 1983, p. 5, Civil Rights Movement and Gays folder.

<sup>5</sup> John Mintz, “March on Washington Called Communist Front,” *The Washington Post*, August 21, 1983, p. B5.



because not one of us is free to choose the terms of our living until all of us are free to choose the terms of our living.”<sup>6</sup> Her words are a fitting tribute to the contribution of lesbians and gay men in the black freedom movement, as well as the intersection of the civil rights movement, second-wave feminism and gay liberation.

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<sup>6</sup> de Veaux, 326-27; Karlyn Barker and Peter Perl, “250,000 Assemble To Mark ‘63 March,” *The Washington Post*, August 28, 1983, p. A1; Chibbaro, Jr., “Gay presence scattered,” p. 5.

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