

# **Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971**

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The Stonewall riot of 1969 has become enshrined within political and historical discourses as the birthplace of the lesbian and gay rights movement. In June of that year, a riot broke out during a police raid on a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, located in Greenwich Village in New York City. It was at that point, the story goes, that gay men and women, long silenced and made invisible, came onto the historical stage with a vengeance. So powerful is the Stonewall narrative that gay and lesbian historians have to battle the belief that, prior to 1969, the lives of gay men and women were bleak and brutal, eked out on the margins of society. Almost the entire corpus of gay and lesbian history can be read as an attempt to deconstruct the Stonewall narrative. No historian would argue that Stonewall was unimportant, indeed many have written on it, but it needs to be put into perspective. Despite the best efforts of professional historians, the Stonewall narrative continues to be repeated and cherished. Its rhetorical power brings out hundreds of thousands of people who gather yearly for marches commemorating the riot.

It comes as a great surprise, then, for readers familiar with the Stonewall narrative to turn to the New Left historiography on sixties' activism. James Miller's *Democracy is in the Streets* stops just short of 1969, choosing to end the 1960s before—as the Stonewall narrative would have it—they even began. When gay liberation is discussed in New Left historiography it is often framed in such a way as to diminish its importance. Todd Gitlin refers to Stonewall twice in *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage*.<sup>1</sup> It first appears at the end of a long list of "Battles ... known by their sites like scenes from a war or Stations of the Cross." Gitlin gives the wrong date, fails to name the "site" of the "battle," and makes no mention of its after-

math. While it is true that Stonewall was a riot, the failure to follow up on the significance of Stonewall is small improvement over Miller. Stonewall is eventually named in *The Sixties*. In the fall of 1969, Gitlin's friend, Marshall Bloom, committed suicide. To the surprise of his friends, "nude-boy magazines" were found in his room. Some "speculated that [for Bloom] the implications of the Stonewall gay riot, the new message of gay pride, hadn't sunk in."<sup>2</sup>

This historiographical oversight is due in part, as Winifred Breines has suggested, to the tendency of many New Left historians to juxtapose the "good sixties," or the early period of antiwar and civil rights activism, with the "bad sixties," the final years of the decade characterized by the turn towards totalizing critiques of "the system," a rejection of liberalism and electoral politics, and the advocacy of violent revolutionary action. Histories built around this dichotomy construct a narrative that describes the sixties as "years of hope" that, with the break-up of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the slow collapse of the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), were transformed into "days of rage." In Breines' words, "These accounts diminish the mass movement after 1968: regional and local activity that did not depend on a national organization, grass-roots organizing by students and other activists (including women and black people), the counterculture, and the birth of other movements such as the women's liberation and gay rights movements. Thus the enormous impact of the sixties then and now is narrowed."<sup>3</sup>

Even those New Left histories that challenge or modify the chronology and interpretive framework of the "good sixties/bad sixties" dichotomy fail to incorporate Stonewall and gay liberation in their analysis. The anthology *The 60s Without Apology* has only one entry, by Charles Shively, which directly addresses gay liberation's place in the sixties. However, the chronology of the sixties at the center of the collection makes no mention of Stonewall or gay liberation. Admittedly "very partial," the chronology stretches from 1957 to 1976. Listed under the year 1969, one finds the Woodstock and Altamont music festivals, the Days of Rage in Chicago, the cinematic release of *Easy Rider*, and the beginning of Northern Ireland's civil rights movement, but no mention is made of the pivotal event of the contemporary gay and lesbian civil rights movement.<sup>4</sup> Accounts that discuss the impact of the sixties on the present also fail to note the significance of Stonewall. Essays like Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin's "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism" discuss the lasting effects of sixties' activism without

mentioning gay and lesbian politics and culture. While Isserman and Kazin were writing their article, ACT UP was transforming the national debate on AIDS and health care, and "queer" radicals were challenging the heterosexist politics of the New Right.<sup>5</sup>

The representation of the sixties offered in New Left histories, as opposed to histories of Stonewall and gay liberation, reflect in part the politics of the late 1960s. Gay liberationists, inspired by the movements that preceded theirs, tried to integrate the politics of homosexuality into the consciousness and agendas of their fellow activists. Their efforts were rebuked. In turn, many gay liberationists turned their backs on the New Left. Consequently, the complex political and social connections between the New Left and gay liberation have been ignored. This article tries to correct this oversight and attempts to recuperate some of the progressive politics of the late 1960s. Focusing on New York City's Gay Liberation Front, it provides a window through which to examine the role that sexuality and gender played in sixties' activism and culture. This account places sexuality and gender at the center of the unfolding of the "days of rage" and locates the politics of the New Left at the heart of gay liberation.

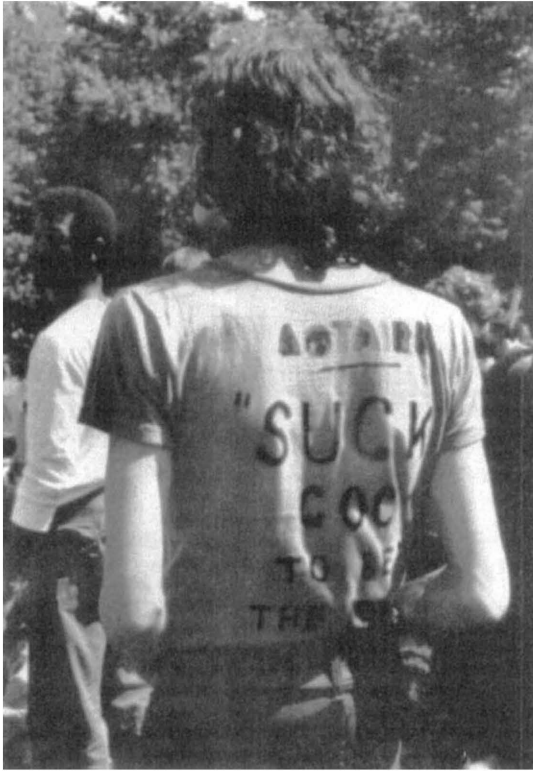
Formed in 1969, New York City's Gay Liberation Front was, in the words of one of their manifestos, "a militant coalition of radical and revolutionary homosexual men and women committed to fight the oppression of the homosexual as a minority group and to demand the right to the self-determination of our own bodies."<sup>6</sup> The Front was among the first of the hundreds of gay liberation groups that spread across the United States like wildfire in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Shortly after the New York group's founding, Gay Liberation Fronts appeared in cities such as Philadelphia, Los Angeles, and Chicago, in college towns such as Austin, Tallahassee, and Berkeley, and in London, England.

Gay Liberationists were not the first organized gay and lesbian rights activists. In the 1950s and 1960s, homophile groups such as the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis pushed for the integration of homosexuals into society and an end to overt discrimination.<sup>7</sup> In pursuing these goals homophile leaders had stressed the need to tone down what they considered the more flamboyant aspects of gay and lesbian culture to avoid alienating potential supporters. At the Yearly Reminder, a silent protest held in front of Philadelphia's Liberty Hall on the Fourth of July, participants were required to dress "appropriately" (women in skirts and men in dress shirts and ties) and to refrain from public displays of affection.

Though homophile groups had become increasingly militant in their demands during the mid- and late 1960s, for the most part they remained wedded to a politics of respectability. This conservative slant was particularly strong in New York City's homophile groups. The Gay Liberation Front was critical of what they saw as the homophile movement's reformist, if not reactionary, tendencies. Gay liberation sought to transform American society, not gain admittance to it. Like the New Left, Front members defined themselves in large part by the distance they traveled from their predecessor's perceived limitations.<sup>8</sup>

Though organized as a gay rights group, the Gay Liberation Front saw itself as part of the movement, the loosely defined coalition of New Left organizations, liberation movements, and counterculture formations of the late 1960s. "The current system," proclaimed the Front, "denies us our basic humanity in much the same way as it is denied to blacks, women, and other oppressed minorities; the grounds are just as irrational. Therefore, our liberation is tied to the liberation of all peoples."<sup>9</sup> The Gay Liberation Front not only acted in defense of gay and lesbian rights, but also participated in antiwar demonstrations, Black Panther rallies, and actions undertaken by radical feminists. The group also targeted the movement itself. In a letter to a friend on the West Coast, Front member John O'Brien wrote, "We have to start to play a bigger role in the Movement because we must change the Movement's position [on homosexuality] now and not after the revolution when it will be too late!"<sup>10</sup> Participants in a roundtable discussion printed in the Front's newspaper *Come Out!* on the subject of the Front's relationship to the movement echoed O'Brien's position. "I'm convinced," said Bernard Lewis, whose words were featured in bold print at the beginning of the article, "that only in getting our rightful place in the movement and demanding an end to our oppression can we ever really make changes for homosexuals."<sup>11</sup> If the movement was to be the force that would reshape America, then its heterosexism needed to be corrected. By allying itself with the movement, the Front placed itself outside the boundaries of homophile activism and self-consciously joined in the radical ferment of the 1960s.

The Stonewall riots led to the creation of the Gay Liberation Front. The Stonewall Inn was a bar located on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village, an area that by the late 1960s had the highest concentration of gay and lesbian bars in Manhattan.<sup>12</sup> Most of these bars were operated by crime syndicates and were subject to random police raids. At about 1 a.m. on 28 June



The shirt, worn by a participant at the first gay pride march commemorating the Stonewall riots in 1970, reads, "Suck Cock to Beat the Draft." This sex-positive, anti-war message exemplifies the ludic politics of Gay Liberation. "Gay Freedom 1970," published by *Queen's Quarterly* ©1970.

1969, police officers entered the Stonewall Inn. This time, however, the bar patrons proved resistant. As the raid proceeded, a crowd gathered. Mocking the payoffs made to police by bar owners, the increasingly hostile crowd threw coins at the officers. Some versions of popular mythology have it that a drag queen threw the punch that ignited the crowd. Whatever the case, a full-scale street riot suddenly erupted. The police officers retreated into the Stonewall Inn and signaled for help. The Tactical Police Force, a riot-control unit infamous for its bloody but effective tactics, cleared the streets. On Saturday night crowds took up where they had left off. Scattered confrontations occurred during the next few days with a bloody flare-up on Wednesday night, but by the end of the week an uneasy

calm returned to the Village. The dailies, playing upon the image of limp wrists transformed into fists, reported upon the riot in a "humorous," mildly homophobic style.<sup>13</sup>

The homophile groups responded to the riot, some more enthusiastically than others. Craig Rodwell, former member of New York's Mattachine Society and then-president of a small, proto-gay liberation group called the Homosexual Youth Movement, put out a flyer by Sunday morning excoriating the police raid and the Mafia-run bars.<sup>14</sup> Though approached by several people interested in organizing those drawn by the riot, Dick Leitsch, the president of the Mattachine Society of New York, was reluctant to act, fearing that it might damage the Society's relationship with Mayor Lindsay and others whose good graces he had worked hard to cultivate. In fact, the Mattachine Society of New York was uncomfortable with the riots. Suspecting the presence of provocateurs, the *Mattachine Newsletter* reported that during the riots "...queens were almost outnumbered by Black Panthers, Yippies, Crazies, and young toughs from street gangs all over the city and some from New Jersey. The exploiters had moved in and they were using the gay power movement for their own ends."<sup>15</sup> This rather dramatic vision of an incipient alliance between the forces of revolution and gay rebellion was, as events were to show, much overblown. Despite their trepidation, the Mattachine Society of New York moved to organize those who sought them out in the aftermath of the riot. A series of meetings was called, and an ad-hoc committee, the Action Committee, was formed to coordinate the response to the riot. The Daughters of Bilitis, partly on account of then-President Martha Shelley's prodding, agreed to co-sponsor demonstrations with the Action Committee.

The people drawn to the community meetings were less conservative than many of those in the homophile organizations. Unlike many in the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, they identified with the rioters. At one meeting, Madeline Cervantes, a Mattachine Society representative, spoke of the need to be firm yet "sweet" in formulating a response to the riot. Jim Fouratt, a close associate of Abbie Hoffman, reacted angrily to Cervantes' suggestion that "sweetness" be the guiding emotion of gay politics:

Sweet? Bullshit! There's the stereotype homo again, man!... Bullshit! That's the role society has been forcing these queens to play, and they just sit and accept it. We have got to radicalize, man!... No matter what you do in bed, if you're not a man out of it, you're going to get screwed up. Be proud of what you are man! And if it takes riots or

even guns to show them what we are, that's the only language the pigs understand!<sup>16</sup>

Fouratt stormed out of the meeting followed by a group who began meeting at Alternative U., a school and community center.

In his response to Cervantes, Fouratt took up the stance of a revolutionary "man of steel" to call for gay pride and activism.<sup>17</sup> His outburst was structured by metaphors of masculine strength and feminine passivity. Contrasting the need for political action with the fate of "queens" who passively accepted their proscribed role, Fouratt protested that "no matter what [he] did in bed," he was not going to let himself be seen as a "queen." He attempted to overcome the "passive" stereotype of homosexuals by claiming for himself an identity as a gay man, a man amongst men, and by rejecting the identity of the emasculated queen. He called upon his comrades to radicalize and, if necessary, to pick up the gun to protect their manhood. In keeping with his "man of steel" persona, Fouratt would eventually take a nom de guerre, "Total Assault."<sup>18</sup>

Fouratt's gendered language of resistance mirrored the rhetoric of many movement activists who, like Eldridge Cleaver, Abbie Hoffman, and Jerry Rubin, constructed a hard-edged, ultra-masculine persona. This persona was profoundly heterosexist. These men and other activists used the epitaph "faggot" as an all-purpose insult. Anyone who failed to meet their standards of revolutionary commitment and zeal were weak, and weak men were faggots who had sold out to the system. At the 1967 SDS Drawing Boards conference, Emmett Grogan, who crashed the conference along with his fellow Diggers, mocked those in attendance by yelling, "Faggot! Fags!... You're gonna make a revolution?"<sup>19</sup> At movement demonstrations, in books like Rubin's *Do It!*, and in countless leaflets and cartoons, Reagan, Nixon, university administrators, and police were called "cocksuckers."<sup>20</sup> Placards that read "Up the Ass of the Ruling Class" were carried in street demonstrations, and antiwar broadsheets portrayed the U.S. military as a conclave of macho homosexuals.<sup>21</sup>

Faggot-baiting was an easy way to establish revolutionary credentials. It may also have been a way in which male sixties activists countered attacks made on their manhood by their critics. Thomas Foran, the prosecutor of the Chicago Seven, lamented that "We've lost out kids to the freaking fag revolution."<sup>22</sup> Unfriendly depictions of "long-hairs" and antiwar pacifists often represented them as homosexuals.<sup>23</sup> What better way to deflect these charges than to

reverse the accusation, claiming for oneself the masculine high-ground? Even SDS member Staughton Lynd, who distanced himself from the rhetoric of the late 1960s, felt the need to reassure himself and his comrades that they were not unmanly or effeminate. Responding to the characterization of antiwar activists as soft or unmanly, Lynd declared that "the emotional thrust of the resistance movement is not ... emasculation but manhood."<sup>24</sup> Lynd's comment, though not in and of itself homophobic, reveals the extent to which sexualized codes of masculinity were a highly charged component of sixties' discourse. Radicals and their critics used the accusation of homosexuality to legitimize their own positions and delegitimize those of their opponents.

This weapon played a part in the unfolding of the "days of rage." The call for violent revolution could not easily be resisted. Commenting on the seeming inexorable rise of "revolutionaries" who demanded armed struggle and total resistance, Gitlin recalls that "it was hard to summon up the standing to criticize" those who advocated violence. "*They're crazy, one heard, but you have to admit they've got guts.*" [Italics in original.] Men who challenged the notion that "guts" was what would change America risked having their own "standing" as men called into question by those ready to fag-bash those who opposed them. The fear of being called a faggot elevated the "gut-check" to a political litmus test.<sup>25</sup>

Not surprisingly, women in the Gay Liberation Front felt doubly marginalized by the movement's masculine rhetoric. Already, feminists were portrayed by both male movement activists and conservative critics as lesbians intent on castrating American men. This caricature of the devouring, mannish woman resonated in a heterosexist culture and drew upon the deeply held fears of women who "get on top." To avoid guilt by association, mainstream women's rights activists such as Betty Friedan attacked "the lavender menace." Friedan took part in purges of lesbians in New York's chapter of the National Organization of Women.<sup>26</sup> The conflicts that developed in the Front between women and men reflected the debates occurring among feminists as to whether or not it was possible to carry out a successful transformation of gender and sexual relations from within the movement.

During his attack on Cervantes, Fouratt himself acknowledged that the movement's commitment to gay liberation was limited at best. He protested that, although he had made several calls to his connections in the movement during the riots, "Not one straight radical group showed up at Stonewall!" Whatever the fears of some



Mattachine Society of New York members, there was little danger of a united front of street queens, butches, New Leftists, and black nationalists. In actuality, few activists—and among them almost no men—rallied to the cause of gay liberation. Some radical feminists such as Ti Grace-Atkinson did support the struggles of lesbians. Surprisingly, given the attitude of most Black Panther Party spokespersons, one of the only movement men to indicate support for gay liberation was Huey Newton, who, in August 1970, released a statement asking Panther Party members to confront their discomfort and hostility to gays and lesbians and to support gay liberation and women's liberation.<sup>27</sup> Nonetheless, Fouratt insisted that to change the social order, gay liberationists would have "to work with *all the New Left*" [emphasis in original].<sup>28</sup>

In the early days of the Gay Liberation Front, Fouratt defended the use of the word "faggot" by the Black Panther Party and others as a metaphor "used to describe any castrated male made impotent by the system." He called for patience and argued that "radical groups must be confronted by the sexual liberation issue, but underlined that this confrontation must be an understanding of how our oppressions make us all brothers and sisters." Echoing Fouratt's rationalization, some African-American Gay Liberation Front members protested the "verbal and physical abuse of [homosexuals by] masculinity-deprived Third World males."<sup>29</sup> Despite his call for solidarity, Fouratt was not comfortable with the persistent use of homophobic discourse on the part of movement activists. In May 1970, he openly criticized the Black Panther Party at a rally in Hartford. The movement's homophobia was a major issue within the Gay Liberation Front and led to tension between those members who identified with the movement and those who felt alienated from its goals and rhetoric.

In spite of their negligible response during the Stonewall riots, the Action Committee persisted in seeking an alliance with movement groups. Having seen flyers for a Black Panther Party rally, they decided to call for a gay presence at the rally. Knowing that the Mattachine Society of New York would not approve of such a plan, the Action Committee formed its own ad-hoc group, giving it the name Gay Liberation Front. The name, modeled on that of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, had an obvious appeal to those who felt connected to the movement. Martha Shelley, then president of Daughters of Bilitis, remembers pounding her fist on the table and shouting, "That's it! That's it! We're the Gay Liberation Front!"<sup>30</sup> Not everyone was charmed by the name. Kay Lahusen,

who was also active in the Daughters of Bilitis, recalls that , "I was convinced that this was a Communist or a New Left plot. I even made an effort to investigate these people for taking over our movement."<sup>31</sup> In spite of her suspicions, Lahusen and her lover Barbara Gittings attended the early meetings of the Gay Liberation Front, which combined former members of the Action Committee with the group that had been meeting at Alternative U.

Gay Liberation Front meetings were tumultuous. Gittings, tongue in cheek, called the meetings "the best theater in town."<sup>32</sup> Rejecting parliamentary procedure and representative government as hopelessly hierarchical and inequitable, the Front embraced participatory democracy and the ideal of consensus. What resulted was a group described by Front member Lois Hart, a former follower of Meher Baba and Timothy Leary, as having a "structureless structure." Facilitators were chosen by lot, served for four meetings, and were then replaced by someone of the opposite sex. There were no membership fees, no officers, and anyone who came through the door was made a member in good standing. Because of this system, the participants at the weekly general meeting varied greatly over time. Since there was a constant influx of people and no clear agenda, debates could and did repeat themselves endlessly.

Far from finding the meetings unbearable, some members embraced the chaos. Hart found that meetings were a "turbulent, violently divisive collection of opposing and attracting forces ... new members, [and] new structures emerged—unexpected accords were discovered. And all the while the spirit gets stronger and stronger."<sup>33</sup> Like the SNCC song that called for activists to "do as the spirit say do," Hart saw the free-flowing, rancorous meetings as having worth precisely because they were so inchoate and "free."<sup>34</sup> The power of expressive politics lay not in its instrumental value as much as in its power to evoke the spirit and form of the world to come. In the words of a former SDS activist, "Freedom" was "an endless meeting."<sup>35</sup>

The meetings brought together a diverse group of people. Some, like Martha Shelly and Kay Lahusen, were ex-members of homophile organizations, others were movement activists new to gay and lesbian politics, while still others were people drawn by the Stonewall riots whose experience with radical politics, if any, consisted of attending marches and rallies. Some had little previous contact with gay and lesbian subcultures. Bill Weaver, "came out *with* the Gay Liberation Front ... and went to a Mafia-controlled [gay] bar *after* I had already been to a Gay Liberation Front dance!"

[emphasis in original].<sup>36</sup> Karla Jay and Allen Young recall that "While many gay people from all walks of life came to the weekly meetings ... the mainstay 'members' of the Gay Liberation Front ... were street people, men and women in working-class jobs who had no great worries about career advancement, students, artists, unemployed hippies, and college-educated Marxists subsisting in the New Left movement."<sup>37</sup> Most—but by no means all—of the members were young, white men. Bob Kohler, who was himself in his early forties, was happy that Lois Hart and Martha Shelley, both in their thirties and therefore "not extremely young women," were in the Gay Liberation Front. "So," he continued, "you were getting an age thing, and you were getting women in the organization—which I had never seen before: women being active."<sup>38</sup> The Front was a volatile coalition of people who came together to fight a common oppression, yet who were divided along lines of ideology, gender, age, life experience, and race.

The politics of the Gay Liberation Front reflected the group's mixed membership. Front members were influenced by both the New Left and the critique of sexism that was being formulated by radical feminists. These two strains of thought at first mixed relatively easily, though in time many members would come to see them as incompatible. The political and theoretical analysis that came out of the Gay Liberation Front was not, in general, very sophisticated. The oppression of homosexuals was often linked, functionally, to capitalism, racism, or sexism. Gay Liberation Front broadsides called for the overthrow of patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, or all three as the means to end oppression of homosexuals. This analysis reflected the New Left critique of "the system" as a seamless, interlocking web of oppression. Despite the sometimes clumsy use of theory, gay liberations' political analysis was an improvement over that of the homophile movement, which was, for the most part, blind to its own class and race biases and which, with the exception of work found in the Daughters of Bilitis's journal *The Ladder*, tended to ignore the role of sexism in gay oppression.

Along with "structureless structure"—indeed, partly because of it—the Front evolved rather quickly into a set of cells, organized on the basis of shared interest and/or function. The June 28th Cell was responsible for the publication of *Come Out!*, "a newspaper by and for the Gay Community." The Aquarius Cell planned Front dances and communal dinners and published the short-lived *Gay Liberation Front Newsletter*. Other cells, such as Gay Youth, were affinity groups that offered their members a safe space. Almost all the cells,

including June 28th and Aquarius, were politically active. The Red Butterfly was "an association ... of revolutionary socialists," which argued that gay liberation was "linked to the class struggle."<sup>39</sup> By late spring and early summer of 1970, Radicalesbians, a women's group, and Third World Gay Revolution, an organization of people of color, were formed.<sup>40</sup>

The process of cellular formation had been stormy. John Lauritsen, a member of the Red Butterfly, was initially wary of the cells, which he attacked as "some Murray Bookchin inspired notion."<sup>41</sup> Lauritsen, a Marxist-Leninist, argued that the Gay Liberation Front needed to be a disciplined vanguard party and despaired of its anarchic tendencies. Despite his efforts, Front members remained closer to Bookchin than to Lenin. Ralph Hall, who reported on the Front for *Gay Power*, a soft-core porn tabloid that carried news about gay liberation groups, was upset by the turn toward cells. He was put off by the "politically articulate dogmatists" of the June 28th cell and the Red Butterfly. "I find it quite ironic," wrote Hall, that "an exclusive cell for gay liberation has not been formed by someone before now." Hall expressed the frustration felt by Front members who were not versed in the discourse and politics of the New Left.<sup>42</sup>

For some, the contradictions between the movement's broad agenda and the goals of gay liberation were too great to bridge. A number of events in the fall of 1969 brought these tensions to a breaking point. Some Front members argued that the Front needed to become a force in local politics, specifically the upcoming mayoral elections. Others, dismissive of a government that seemed intent on pursuing war in Southeast Asia and political repression at home, scoffed at the idea of local reform. The real question, these activists argued, was not which candidates the Front should endorse, but rather, "Do any of the candidates deserve the support of the people. More explicitly, does the power structure, which the capitalist politicians maintain deserve even to exist."<sup>43</sup>

Front members also debated whether the group should contribute to the legal defense fund of the Panther 21, New York Black Panther Party members who had been arrested for allegedly planning to rob subway token booths and bomb department stores and a botanical garden. Those opposed argued that the Black Panther Party was homophobic, as evidenced by their spokespersons' frequent use of the word "faggot," and that the Front should not fund organizations that did not support gay rights. After several votes, the Front finally passed a motion to fund the Panther 21. The battles led to strong

reactions among the opposing factions. In the words of Bob Kohler, "That whole 'John Birch Society' freaked out." Kohler's wording suggests the polarized atmosphere that the debates produced. Jim Owles, who had opposed funding the Black Panther Party, resented the "more radical than thou" tone of the Panther supporters and accused them of "begging [the movement] for that same kind of acceptance they had accused some of the older homosexuals of wanting."<sup>44</sup>

These debates led a group of disaffected Front members to form the Gay Activists Alliance in December of 1969. The Alliance brought together young moderates and ex-homophile activists. To assure that the Alliance would not become embroiled in movement politics, the group's constitution carried a bylaw that stated the alliance "will not endorse, ally with, or otherwise support any political party, candidate for public office, and/or any organization not directly related to the homosexual cause."<sup>45</sup> The alliance had elected officers and clear rules for membership and expulsion. Its meetings were run according to Robert's Rules of Order. To those who stayed in the Gay Liberation Front, the Gay Activists Alliance's politics were antidemocratic, hierarchical, and inequitable and served to reinforce the power relations that they were trying to overthrow.

Gay Liberation Front members continued to pursue their political goals within the parameters of the movement. While the Gay Activists Alliance attacked the misrepresentation of homosexuality in mainstream media, Front members focused much of their efforts on the alternative press. Prior to the split, Front members successfully picketed the *Village Voice* because it refused to allow the use of the word "gay." The editor ultimately agreed to allow the word "gay" to be used in the paper, but refused to ban homophobic articles and cartoons, arguing that such a move would constitute self-censorship. Martha Shelley and Dan Smith participated in the split of the *Guardian* Collective—which published the *Guardian*, a radical newspaper—in April 1970. The split occurred because of debates within the collective over content and ideology. "The Gay Liberation Front demanded and received space in the *Liberated Guardian*," the journal that succeeded the *Guardian*.<sup>46</sup>

The Gay Liberation Front not only protested heterosexism in the movement press, but also helped to create an alternative press for gay men and lesbians. The rapid spread of gay liberation was, in part, a result of the rapid growth of a gay press.<sup>47</sup> In addition to the June 28th cell, the Gay Flames Collective and several other Gay Liberation Front cells published materials. The Gay Flames collec-

tive published *Gay Flames* and reprinted influential articles such as Carl Whitman's "Gay Manifesto" as pamphlets. The collective pushed Liberation News Service, where Gay Flames member Allan Young worked, to carry articles on gay liberation. Eventually, periodicals such as *The Kaleidoscope* (Milwaukee, Minnesota), the *Willamette Bridge* (Portland, Oregon), and the *Ann Arbor Argus* (Ann Arbor, Michigan) carried essays and graphics that first appeared in *Come Out!*<sup>48</sup> This outpouring of gay-positive media served to reach those who might otherwise have been isolated. A boy of fifteen who felt "utter and complete isolation and alienation" sent a letter of thanks to *Come Out!* after he had run into a copy at the "peace center" in his town.<sup>49</sup> The development of a political gay press that circulated among activists and counterculture institutions opened up avenues that might otherwise have been closed to the Gay Liberation Front and extended the reach of their publications and manifestos.

Front members were also active in the creation of alternative institutions and spaces that served as gay and lesbian "safe space."<sup>50</sup> In the very first issue of *Come Out!* and continuing in almost every issue thereafter, money was solicited for the establishment of a community center. In the winter of 1970-71 a Gay Liberation Front center, run by a collective, opened its doors. The center reflected the complex structure of the Front. John Murphy, a Front member, wrote that, "The women have a special room of their own [at the center and that] ... other spaces are used by the Third World Gay Liberation Front, the gay youth group, political education caucuses, and the like."<sup>51</sup> For a brief time Front members hosted a "gay day" at The Coffee Grounds, a movement coffee house."<sup>52</sup>

Prior to the founding of the center, the Gay Liberation Front had organized dances at Alternative U. In contrast to the inflated prices at gay bars, entrance was \$1.50, and beer and soda were twenty-five cents. Dances featured strobe lights, "go-go boys," lounges, and "frantic rock and acid-rock." The dances were very popular even among gay men and women who did not identify themselves as politically militant. In the words of one of those who attended, "At a dance, the vibrations are certainly a lot better than at a bar." The dances were among the most successful efforts undertaken by the Front and were one of the most important connections between gay liberation groups and New York's gay and lesbian communities.<sup>53</sup>

Because of their popularity, the dances became a focal point of tensions between Gay Liberation Front men and women. The women resented the control that the male majority exerted over the

planning and the atmosphere of the dances. This conflict itself reflected long-simmering tensions in the Front. From the beginning, some Front women were critical of the chauvinism of the men. Gay Liberation Front men responded defensively. "It's about time," wrote Ralph Hall, "those women liberationists pulled up their pants and confronted all men, gay and straight, let them know what their grievances are, instead of poking us in the ribs with their middle finger.... Bring your case out in the open more often ... and maybe your rights will be recognized."<sup>54</sup> John Lauritsen claimed that the tension in the group did not result from the sexism of Gay Liberation Front men, but from the hostile attitude of the women. "Women we had never seen before would say that not only were gay men *more* sexist or *more* male chauvinist than straight men, but men in the Gay Liberation Front were among the worst of all" [emphasis in original].<sup>55</sup>

The dances had always drawn more men than women, and eventually this imbalance, along with the tone set by the presence of "go-go boys," produced animosity between men and women in the Front. In an article written collectively by the women's caucus—who adopted the name Radicalesbians—the "pack 'em in" attitude of the Gay Liberation Front men was criticized. The women claimed that the dances were "overwhelmingly male," and that they "simulated a gay men's bar ... an overcrowded, dimly lit room, where packed together subway rush hour style, most human contact was limited to groping and dryfucking."<sup>56</sup> In the spring of 1970, women from the Aquarius Cell left the group, taking with them a portion of the cell's funds, and began to organize their own dances.

Though some of the women had disapproved of men "groping" and "dryfucking" in the mixed dances, the women's dances were not without an eroticism of their own. The Radicalesbian's article described the women's dances as "An environment of women rapping, drinking, dancing ... relating with fluidity and grace its beautiful [sic]."<sup>57</sup> Martha Shelley's recollection of the dances are a bit less restrained. "We had dances where we were stripped to the waist, and some of the women just stripped to the altogether. It was primeval ritual time."<sup>58</sup> In a time in which, even in lesbian and gay bars, same-sex dancing, much less sexual contact, was restricted, Gay Liberation Front members created spaces in which their sexuality found freer expression.

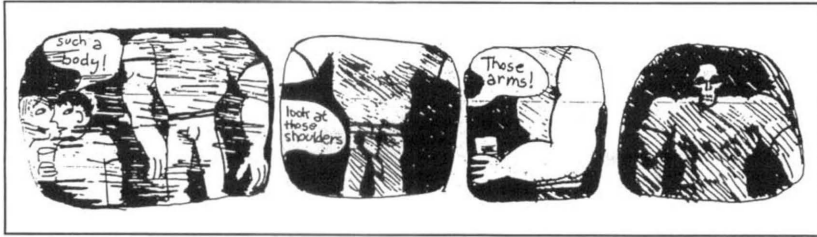
The distinction between women's sexuality, described as "fluid" and "graceful," and male sexuality, described as cold and mechanical, reflected the emerging critique of patriarchy that radical femi-

nists were constructing. Sue Katz, a Radicalesbians member, characterized the differences between male sexuality and female sexuality as being one between "sex," which was an institution that oppressed women, and sensuality, which was a realm of woman-identified pleasure. "I sleep with women," wrote Katz, "make love with women, am a woman, a lesbian. But I don't have sex with anyone." Katz proclaimed that her sexual desire was not going to be defined by that of a man. Like her contemporaries, Katz used sex metaphorically to legitimize her own choices and to attack what she felt was a heterosexist culture that denied women any real sexual agency and choice.<sup>59</sup>

The desire to differentiate between "good" and "bad" sexuality was not exclusive to Gay Liberation Front women. Some male Front members were critical of what they saw as the commercialized, commodified, and alienated sexuality of gay pornography and bar culture. This critique reflected the New Left analysis of the culture of capitalism. Other men in the Front, such as Perry Brass and Steven Dansky, who called themselves effeminists, adopted the feminist critique of male sexuality. Gay men, Brass and Dansky argued, were caught up in an oppressive gender system in which effeminate gay men were marginalized both by straight society and by "straight-identified" gay culture. A cartoon in *Come Out!* that accompanied Brass' favorable review of a gay liberation pamphlet put out by Times Change Press, entitled "Unbecoming Men: A Man's Consciousness-Raising Group Writes on Oppression and Themselves," illustrates the effeminist critique of gay bar culture. The cartoon depicts two men in a bar who stare at and gush over a large, well-built man whose back is turned toward the reader. The final panel reveals the face of the well-built man to be a skull's head. The cartoon implies that gay male sexuality, as long as it remained wedded to an aesthetics of hypermasculinity, would replicate the values that oppress gay men.<sup>60</sup>

The critique of sexuality articulated by Katz and the effeminists created a Manichean world view in which some sex was male-identified—and therefore bad—while other sex was woman-identified—and therefore good. Metaphoric use of gender polarities hardened into biologicistic dogma. The analysis became a proscription, and rigid categories of male and female behaviors were classified. This had the effect of reinscribing the rigid gender polarities that were precisely the problem that that critique had hoped to expose in the first place. A whole new set of sexual desires and gendered behaviors were deemed off-limits. Butch/femme, leather, sadomasochism, and





From *Come Out!* 2, 8 (Winter 1972): 17.

other forms of sexuality were set beyond the pale. The effeminist critique produced a catch-22 situation in which gay male sexuality became simultaneously a site of liberation and oppression. Effeminists, who after all identified as *men* attracted to *men*, had a problematic relationship to their critique of male sexuality. The distinction between male and female sexuality exacerbated tension both between and within the sexes in Gay Liberation Front.<sup>61</sup>

The influence of feminist thought and practice in the Gay Liberation Front extended far beyond the critique of sexuality. From the beginning, Front women had been involved in consciousness-raising groups. Lois Hart wrote that the purpose of these groups was both to "trace the outlines of our pain" and to "delineate the scaffolding of a society that has arranged our crucifixion."<sup>62</sup> Hart and her peers were joined by women from radical feminist groups, such as Rita Mae Brown, who used consciousness raising as a political tool to unpack the overlapping systems of gender and sexual oppression. Like the process of coming out, consciousness raising attempted, through a process of deconstructing an older sense of self and constructing a new one based on "feminist consciousness," to change a person's self-conception. For lesbians in the Gay Liberation Front, consciousness raising was an important element in the creation of a positive identity that empowered them both in their personal lives and in their political pursuits.

The Radicalesbian manifesto "Woman-Identified-Woman" was written collectively by women who were in one of the Gay Liberation Front consciousness-raising groups. Perhaps the most influential work to emerge from the Front, the manifesto begins with a powerful definition of who a lesbian is: "A lesbian is the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion ... this consciousness is the revolutionary force from which all else will follow."<sup>63</sup> This formulation draws upon the rhetoric of revolution and posits lesbians as the vanguard of women's liberation. The definition of a

lesbian as "woman-identified-woman" could be embraced by women who were not necessarily sexually involved with women. Any woman who recognized the primacy of her bonds with women over men could be considered a lesbian. It is in this sense that Ti Grace-Atkinson was able to claim that "feminism is the theory, lesbianism the practice." "Woman-Identified-Woman" was one of the earliest examples of lesbian-feminist thought and was a key text in the development of lesbian-feminist separatism.<sup>64</sup>

Radicalesbians carried out one of the most successful actions undertaken by Gay Liberation Front members. In May 1970, forty lesbians zapped the second Congress to Unite Women, held in New York City. While three hundred women waited for the conference to begin, the lights in the hall went out. When the lights came back on, women wearing "lavender menace" tee-shirts had appeared on stage. The "lavender menace" asked that the conference participants confront the issue of lesbianism in the women's movement. In response, some of the women in the audience joined the women on stage and for the next couple of hours women talked amongst themselves about their desires and fears. Copies of "Woman-Identified-Woman" were distributed, and the conference passed a resolution that stated that "Women's liberation is a lesbian plot." Not all of the women present were pleased. According to Alice Echols, some women renamed the conference the "Congress to Divide Women."<sup>65</sup> But for many the conference was a turning point. Of the women at the conference "a very large majority ... turned out to be active lesbians, latent lesbians, closet lesbians, one-beautiful experience lesbians, freaked-out lesbians, spaced-out lesbians ... from the ranks of women's liberation they responded."<sup>66</sup>

The lesbian-feminist analysis was not embraced by all of the women in the Gay Liberation Front or in other lesbian activist groups. A small group of women in the Front choose not to separate themselves from the Gay Liberation Front proper and continued to attend the largely male general meetings. Other lesbians did not accept the "political" definition of a lesbian. *The Ladder* carried a letter from a woman who wrote that "Nowadays in New York we have lots and lots of Lesbians who belong to the now generation and look just like any other hippie and who in fact rather seldom sleep with other girls." Having heard a "political lesbian" talk at a Daughters of Bilitis meeting, she satirized the speech. "I quote exactly," she wrote, "'We've got to find out where everybody's head is at, we've got to get our thing together and like wow really be beautiful and relate to each other and be real in a meaningful way.'"<sup>67</sup> Obviously, the

speaker was not communicating with the Daughters of Bilitis member in a meaningful way. The gap between the two was both generational and ideological.

Lesbians who identified as butches also felt alienated by the Radicalesbian critique of "male-identified lesbians." Writing in the first *Come Out!*, Marty Stephan spoke of her unpleasant experience in a consciousness-raising group in which she felt excluded as an "old line homosexual." With an ironic tone, she predicted that at some point a cell, "Drag Queen and Drag Butch Anti-Defamation and Liberation League," would have to be formed to protect the rights of cross-dressers.<sup>68</sup> Gay Liberation Front women were also encouraged to reject behavior that reflected false-female consciousness. Karla Jay recalls that she was praised by various women for having cut her long—and hence feminine—hair, though according to Jay "the decision had really been based on annoyance with rampant split ends."<sup>69</sup> The attempt to steer clear of the Scylla of masculinity and the Charybdis of femininity, though liberating for some, produced new gender norms that could be as oppressive as the gender system it meant to transcend.

Butch lesbians were not the only "transgendered" people to face problems in the Gay Liberation Front. Transvestites and transsexuals were attacked by some gay liberationists and lesbian feminists, who claimed that drag reinforced gender stereotypes and was insulting to women. Despite this hostility, the Front did provide a means by which transgendered people became politicized. The fourth issue of *Come Out!* published a short essay that called for transgendered individuals to come together in "strong social organizations" and linked the struggle for transgender liberation to the "political actions of homosexuals, blacks, women, etc."<sup>70</sup> As a means of providing a support network for street transvestites, many of whom were prostitutes, several transvestites, including Sylvia Rivera, Marsha Johnson, and Bambi Lamour, started Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries in the fall of 1970. Here the paradox of the "street-fighting" queer revolutionary was brought to its logical extreme. Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries used the pose of the "revolutionary" to challenge the whole notion of normative masculinity.

Gay Liberation Front men also formed consciousness-raising groups. Some of the living collectives that Front members established incorporated consciousness raising into their daily practice. John Knoebel, who lived in the 95th Street Collective recalls that "We always thought that CR was about the most important thing

we did together."<sup>71</sup> The day-to-day organization of the collective reflected a blend of radical democratic procedure and consciousness-raising techniques. Knoebel and his roommates discussed all decisions together. "All decisions made by the group, both inside and outside of meetings, were reached by consensus. Everyone had to speak on every issue, and nothing could be done until everyone was in agreement."<sup>72</sup> Not surprisingly, even though few consciousness-raising groups were as introspective as the 95th Street Collective, Gay Liberation Front members who did not feel that they required political enlightenment felt alienated. However, many men in the Front joined consciousness-raising groups, and for some the experience was transformative. Jim Clifford, who belonged to a group of effeminists who called themselves the Flaming Faggots, claimed that his group alone helped to start fifty consciousness-raising groups in New York City during the early 1970s. Though largely aimed at gay men, these efforts reached outside the gay community as well.<sup>73</sup>

The Flaming Faggots collective, which included Kenneth Pitchford—the husband of radical feminist Robin Morgan—Steven Dansky, Jim Clifford, John Knoebel, and Perry Brass, was formed in the aftermath of a confrontation between Gay Liberation Front members and members of a Venceremos Brigade. The Venceremos brigades brought Americans to Cuba to experience firsthand a socialist state. In the summer of 1970, both brigadistas and Front members had unknowingly rented out the Elgin movie hall on the same night. The Front members, whose activities were part of the Stonewall commemoration, refused to give up the hall. The brigadistas verbally attacked and physically threatened the Front members.

In reaction to the confrontation, Kenneth Pitchford wrote the manifesto/poem "The Flaming Faggots." The poem depicts a revolutionary "rubbing white macho hands" and asking his gay "comrade" to "give up certain little quirks" that hinder the progress of the revolution. "Quirks?" the gay man asks. To which the "revolutionary" responds, "Well, like your homosexuality, like wearing your hair too long, like acting—well, just generally being effeminate, unmanly; that gets the people uptight as much as women wanting to be engineers or something." Sounding like a cross between the stereotypical uncool father and a Soviet factory manager, the revolutionary berates the "effeminate" man for his "unmanly" behavior.

Pitchford's "effeminate" man rejects the "macho's" revolution as false. He claims that his politics are "to the left [of the revolutionary's] ... because we're the majority—and we're rising up, we're on the

move: we're all those people who can't and won't and mustn't fit into this pattern of white male sado-dominance." Pitchford presents the Left as being made up of oppressive, sadistic, straight, power hungry, white men. It is effeminate gay men and women who represent "the majority" of the people, and the "male left" is part of the system against which they must struggle. In his poem Pitchford reverses the value of "machismo" and "effeminacy," but he retains the notion of vanguard action. The "macho" revolutionary is in the wrong, destined for history's dustbin, while "flaming faggots" and liberated women have taken his place at the forefront of the revolution.<sup>74</sup>

The gendered antagonism between some gay liberationists and the New Left reflected in part the experience of women's liberationists. The animosity Gay Liberation Front members felt was overlaid with the history of sexism that women activists had confronted within the movement. For example, at the 1968 anti-inaugural demonstration held in Washington D.C. and organized by Mobe, women liberation speakers were viciously attacked when they tried to address issues of sexism. During Marilyn Webb's address, men in the audience chanted, "Take it off!" and "Take her off the stage and fuck her!" Shulamith Firestone, a member of Redstockings, a radical feminist group from New York, recalled that "a football crowd would have been ... less blatantly hostile to women."<sup>75</sup> Alice Echols claims that by the late 1960s, as a result of this and similar events, increasing numbers of women's activists shared "the conviction that feminism and the left were antinomies."<sup>76</sup> Gay Liberation Front women, like Rita Mae Brown, who had been active in Redstockings, and others in the Front who were influenced by radical feminists, shared the growing sense of antipathy toward the left.

Gay Liberation Front women had their own reasons for feeling alienated from the movement. In the fall of 1970, the Front participated in the Black Panther Party's Revolutionary Peoples Constitutional Convention, which was held in Philadelphia. Workshops for both gay men and lesbians had been scheduled by the Panthers, in consultation with Lois Hart and other Gay Liberation Front members. The gay male workshop met and presented their demands to the plenary session. Despite a few snickers, they were applauded. The lesbian workshop, however, prevented from meeting independently by conference coordinators, was made to meet with the women's workshop where, surrounded by Black Panther "security," they found themselves silenced. Though a complaint was lodged, no action was taken. There was no address by an independent lesbian caucus to the plenary of the convention.

Understandably, few Front women attended the second session of the convention, held in Washington, D.C., over Thanksgiving in 1970. The convention itself failed to convene due to poor planning on the part of the Black Panther Party organizers. Despite this, *Gay Flames* reported that the conference was a success. Dan Smith of New York's Gay Liberation Front made sixty-nine berets, which members wore to be easily visible. Over one hundred and fifty gay men, including members of Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries and the Third World Gay Revolution, met in "the largest gathering of revolutionary homosexuals since the [gay liberation] movement began a year and a half ago." While in D.C., the gay activists engaged in some direct action against a local "lily-white, right-wing cabaret." The bar had refused service to several gay conference-goers and in response the men staged a sit-in. When bouncers tried to eject the men, they fought back. Some of the gay activists were arrested. The "D.C. 12," as they came to be known, were eventually acquitted, and they sued the police for false arrest.<sup>77</sup>

While the convention failed to meet its own objectives, Gay Liberation Front men considered it a success. They were exhilarated by their coming together with other gay liberationists. Gay Liberation Front women, on the other hand, felt betrayed and angry. The contrasting feelings of male and female members mirrored "the emotional divide separating men and women in the late sixties New Left."<sup>78</sup> This divide resulted from movement men feeling that their world was collapsing, while movement women were being swept up in the wave of radical feminist activism. In the Gay Liberation Front these dynamics played themselves out differently. Both the men and the women in the Front felt that they were moving forward, although they were increasingly alienated from each other and from the movement they had once identified with.

In addition to the Black Panther Party's handling of the RPCC, the support of Cuba by many movement activists continued to be a point of contention in the Gay Liberation Front. Cuba had previously been a target of gay activism due to that country's poor record on gay and lesbian rights. In the mid-1960s, Cuba imprisoned homosexuals in re-education camps. Members of the Mattachine Society of New York were among those who protested the camps. In 1966 they demonstrated outside the United Nations, carrying placards that denounced the mistreatment of homosexuals in Cuban and Russian work camps, as well as in the United States.<sup>79</sup> Despite this history, the Cuban regime was supported by many in the New Left. C. Wright Mills, widely admired among student activists, had written

a defense of the Cuban revolution. The critique of United States neo-imperialism had made solidarity with Cuba a popular cause for many in the movement, including some Gay Liberation Front members.<sup>80</sup> Allen Young, in particular, had spent a considerable amount of time working to create links between Cuba and American leftists. Fouratt and Young helped plan the Venceremos Brigades from which, ironically, homosexuals were initially excluded.

In 1971, *Come Out!* published a resolution passed by the Cuban First National Congress on Education and Culture, which denounced "the social pathological character of homosexual deviations" and called for the expulsion of gay men and women from jobs involving contact with youth and from the Party."<sup>81</sup> *Come Out!* also published a letter from a group of gay Cubans, which stated that "since its beginning—first in veiled ways, later without scruples or rationalizations—the Cuban revolutionary government has persecuted homosexuals."<sup>82</sup> The Cubans wrote the letter after they received a Gay Flames pamphlet featuring Third World Gay Revolution's manifesto. They sent the letter to Allen Young, who agonized over whether or not to release it to the Gay Liberation Front and Liberation News Service (LNS). He eventually gave the letter to both organizations and shortly thereafter moved to Massachusetts to live on a commune. LNS circulated the letter, however, only after some of the more pointed critiques of Cuba's homophobic policies had been removed. Even so, some within LNS denounced the release of the letter, which they blamed on "political confusion and journalistic incompetence."<sup>83</sup>

The Cuban Congress's resolution, the letter from Cuban gays, and the LNS's ambivalent reaction created a furor within the Gay Liberation Front. A group of members who had gone to Cuba denounced the Congress's statement and declared that "a policy of ruthless and incessant persecution of gay people is contradictory of the needs of all people, and such a policy is reactionary and fascist."<sup>84</sup> Steve Gavin, who had visited Cuba, attacked what he now called "the sexist left." In an article entitled "Is Socialism the Answer?" he excoriated those who "went as far as suppressing reports of persecution." How, he asked, was the Gay Liberation Front to work with "our friends" who "called us faggots in bold newsprint for all to see?"<sup>85</sup> Though not all of the New Left supported Cuba, the fact that the homophobic policies of Cuba were played down, if not endorsed, by some movement activists led many in the Gay Liberation Front to associate the Left in any form with antigay sentiment.

By the spring of 1971, the Gay Liberation Front had become

increasingly attenuated. Fewer and fewer people attended meetings or participated in Front actions. The Gay Activists Alliance's tangible successes drew away many of the men. There had been a steady decline in the number of women participating in the Front since the formation of Radicalesbians in the spring of 1970. The Gay Liberation Front tried a number of internal reforms to deal with the factiousness within the group and to establish clearer policy. In April 1971, the Front acted to establish membership requirements. To be allowed to vote, members were required to "have been in consciousness-raising and political education groups for a period of at least one month." Further, it was decided that minutes would be kept during the meetings "to show what has been decided in the past and to show where we stand." Speakers, who would have to be Front members, "would use the policy log & platform as a frame of reference in engagements." Essentially, the reforms would have moved the Front toward the Gay Activist Alliance model.<sup>86</sup>

It was, however, too late. By the summer of 1971, most of the Front's institutions had collapsed. The community center closed after a collective member made off with the rent money. Because the Gay Activists Alliance had opened their own community center in an empty firehouse—which the Front had once considered as a possible site for their own center—there was less of a need for the center to reopen. The firehouse was very popular and it quickly became a center of gay male culture and politics. The June 28th Cell collapsed because of internal debates. The last issue of *Come Out!*—the Winter 1972 issue—carried two articles, "S and M and the Revolution" and "A coCKsuCKing seminar [sic]." The first article was a defense of sadomasochism, and the second a celebration of gay male sexuality. The articles were sharply criticized and accused of legitimating oppressive sexuality and "male domination/intimidation." In response to the articles, former June 28th members, including Perry Brass and the June 28th Cell's two women members, published a spoof of *Come Out!* entitled *Come Out! is Dead*. The contents of the paper, which featured self-criticisms by former June 28th members and excoriations of those deemed responsible for the articles, was neatly summarized by the title of the back cover, which proclaimed that "Gay Male Liberation is Dead."

The Gay Liberation Front broke up for a number of reasons. The acrimonious debates between leftists, effeminists, and Radicalesbians polarized Front politics and made consensus impossible. Although these debates reflected internal Front politics, there can be no doubt that the homophobia of many movement



spokespersons added fuel to the fire. Many of the criticisms made by Gitlin and Miller of late sixties' activism apply to the Gay Liberation Front. The goals of the members were stymied by their adherence to the notion of "total revolution." The rejection of short-term goals and reformist strategies proved counterproductive. We should consider, however, the possibility that adopting the persona of the revolutionary, with all the excesses that that implies, may have enabled some gay men and women to bring forcibly into public discourse what had been a carefully hidden aspect of their private lives. The language of revolution and rage described and perhaps facilitated the experience of coming out for Front members who struggled with homophobia both internally and in the larger society.

In the years that followed the collapse of the Gay Liberation Front, gay politics became increasingly characterized by groups resembling the Gay Activists Alliance.<sup>87</sup> However, the gay left, lesbian-feminism, and gay male "effeminism" did not collapse with the passing of the Gay Liberation Front. Journals such as *Off Our Backs*, *RFD*, *Morning Due: Journal of Anti-Sexist Men*, *The Furies*, *Fag Rag*, *Detroit Liberator*, *Gay Sunshine*, *Gay Community News*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *The Body Politic* recorded the history of radical gay and lesbian politics in the 1970s and beyond. During this time, lesbian-feminists' efforts to build and create resources for lesbians and other women continued and indeed widened in scope.<sup>88</sup> Gay and lesbian radicals worked with more moderate groups in expanding and protecting gay and lesbian civil rights. Scholars influenced by the gay left developed a historical perspective on homosexuality and helped to create the field of lesbian and gay studies.<sup>89</sup> The accomplishments of these activists should be considered in future accounts of the 1960s and of its impact on American culture and politics.

Our understanding of the 1960s can be greatly enhanced in a number of ways by including groups such as the Gay Liberation Front within the historiography of the period. Doing so opens a window onto the conflicts over sexuality and gender identities that occurred in the political movements of that period. Historians should also consider the function of sexual metaphors in political and social discourse. Sexuality—especially deviant sexuality—is "a primary way of signifying relationships of power."<sup>90</sup> Even a cursory examination of popular political discourse in the 1960s illustrates this fact. There is, of course, already a body of work in women's history that addresses these issues, and this article has drawn on that historiography. However, we need to examine sexuality and gender conflicts *within*, as well as *between*, the sexes.

The chronology of sixties' activism is shifted and complicated when we include gay liberation in our analysis. Focusing on gay liberation politics allows us to see how the activism of the sixties fed into that of the seventies. New Left figures like Martin Duberman, whose "straight" work is featured in the anthology, *60s Without Apologies*, continued their political activism in the 1970s, but from new perspectives. Including gay liberation in the historiography also helps to link sixties activism to the fifties. As John D'Emilio has shown, the roots of gay liberation were connected to and shaped by the struggles, accomplishments, and limitations of the homophile groups founded in the 1950s. Similarly, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis's work has looked at the way in which social and cultural developments of the 1950s helped prepare the ground for Stonewall. This work complements that of Maurice Isserman, Verta Taylor, Leila Rupp, and others who have seen in the politics and culture of the 1950s the seeds of the 1960s.<sup>91</sup>

We need to make sure that our representation of sixties activism does not obscure the complexity of the past. The Gay Liberation Front and its sister organizations reflected and shaped the politics and culture of the 1960s. Gay liberationists and lesbian feminists came to an understanding of their oppression and acted upon that understanding in the context of the activism of the period. They articulated a critique of heterosexism and introduced, on their own terms, the issue of sexual difference into political and social discourse. The contradictions and possibilities arising from the conjunction of the politics of the 1960s and the politics of homosexuality are still with us today.

#### Notes

The author would like to thank Jeffrey Escoffier, Molly McGarry, Regina Kunzel, Martin B. Duberman, Joy Rich, Rich Wandel, Bill Walker, Fred Wasserman, and the RHR anonymous readers for their insightful comments and support.

1. James Miller, *Democracy is in The Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987). Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1987), 342.

2. Ibid., 406. "For me," Gitlin writes, "Marshall Bloom died of the movement's sins."

3. Winifred Brieness, "Whose New Left," *Journal of American History* 75, 2 (September 1988): 531.

4. Frederic Jameson, Anders Stephanson, and Cornel West, "A Very Partial Chronology," in *The 60s Without Apology*, ed. Sonya Sayres, Anders Stephanson, Stanley Aronowitz, and Frederic Jameson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 210-15.

5. Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, "The Failure and Success of the New Radicalism," in *The Rise and Fall of the New Deal Order, 1930-1980*, ed. Steven Fraser and Gary Gerstle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 212-42.

6. "What is Gay Liberation Front?" flyer, spring 1970 (GLF File, Lesbian Herstory Archives).

7. The Mattachine Society was founded in 1951 and was largely a male organization. The Daughters of Bilitis was founded in 1955 to serve the needs of lesbians. Both originated on the West Coast. The homophile movement was begun by former Communist Party U.S.A. members. See John D'Emilio, "Dreams Deferred: The Birth and Betrayal of America's First Gay Liberation Movement," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 17-56.

8. For the homophile predecessors of Gay Liberation Front, see 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); and Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1981), 3-48. Laud Humphreys describes homophile politics as "reformist and civil libertarian ... symbolized by dependence on lawyers and ministers for leadership and defense." See *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1972), 10.

9. "What is Gay Liberation Front?" See note 6.

10. Letter from John O'Brien to "Bruce," 27 January 1970 (GLF File, Archives of the Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, New York).

11. "Homosexuals in the Movement," in *Come Out!* 1, 3 (April/May 1970): 8.

12. Martin S. Weinberg and Colin J. Williams, *Male Homosexuals: Their Problems and Adaptations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 31-34. See also 39-46. According to Weinberg and Williams, Greenwich Village in the late 1960s and early 1970s had twenty-six gay bars, five of which were women's bars.

13. Martin Duberman, *Stonewall* (New York: Dutton, 1993), 181-219. See also, Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality*, 71-99.

14. Duberman, *Stonewall*, 210-11.

15. Quoted in Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 28.

16. *Ibid.*, 35.

17. See Echols, *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 120.

18. I owe this priceless piece of information to Jeffrey Escoffier who attended a conference where "Total Assault" spoke.

19. See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 225-31.

20. See Step May, "An Open Letter to Jerry Rubin" (Gay Flames Pamphlet #3, GLF File).

21. See Alice Echols, "We Have Gotta Get Out of This Place: Notes Towards a Remapping of the Sixties," *Socialist Review* 22, 2 (April-June 1992): 9-33, for an interesting discussion of the relationship between gender, rhetoric, and sixties' activism. Echols makes the observation of movement men that "Just as their attitudes towards women mirrored those of the dominant culture, so did their attitudes toward homosexuality. Over the course of the period intolerances seems to have increased as many white New Leftists equated militance with machismo and liberalism with wimpiness" (31).

22. Quoted in Duberman, *Stonewall*, 215.

23. Isserman and Kazin report such an occasion, but fail to comment on it other than supplying a denial of the allegations, "The Failure and Success of New Radicalism," 223. See Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (New York: Doubleday, 1983) for an illuminating discussion of how heterosexist discourse is used to control male behavior.

24. Quoted in Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 38.

25. Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 398.

26. See Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 212-13, 219.

27. See Dennis Altman, *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Avon, 1971), 201-02. Altman's discussion is representative of the reaction that Newton's announcement produced. Newton's statement was widely reprinted in gay journals. Edmund White writes that Jean Genet, who supported the Black Panther Party and was himself uncomfortable with the heterosexism of the Party, convinced Newton to release the statement. See Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Vintage,

1993), 527–28.

28. Fouratt quoted in Duberman, *Stonewall*, 211.

29. Jim Fouratt, "Word Thoughts," *Come Out!* 1, 2 (10 January 1970). See "The Oppressed Shall Not Become the Oppressor" flyer (GLF File, LHA).

30. Martha Shelly quoted in Eric Marcus, *Making History: The Struggle for Gay and Lesbian Equal Rights, 1945–1990: An Oral History* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992), 181.

31. Kay Lahusen quoted in Marcus, *Making History*, 214. At the time, Lahusen used the alias Kay Tobin. As Tobin she helped edit a collection of biographies of gay liberation activists entitled *The Gay Crusaders*, eds. Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker (New York: Arno Press, 1975).

32. Barbara Gittings quoted in Marcus, *Making History*, 213–14.

33. *Come Out!* 1, 1 (14 November 1969), 10.

34. See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 134–35.

35. Quoted in Ellen Willis, "Foreword," *Daring to be Bad*, 16.

36. Quoted in Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 51.

37. Karla Jay and Allen Young, "Introduction," *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1992 [1972]), xxxv. See also Humphreys, *Out of the Closets*, 33–34.

38. Quoted in Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 52.

39. See Bob Kohler, "Aquarius Cell," Ellen Bedoz, "GLF News," and "28th of June Cell," in *Come Out!* 1, 2 (10 January 1970): 16. On Red Butterfly, see *Gay Liberation* (Red Butterfly publication, 4 April 1970, GLF File, LHA).

40. "The Oppressed Shall not Become the Oppressor" flyer (GLF File, LHA).

41. Letter from John Lauritsen to "Bruce," 29 October 1969 (GLF File, AGLCSC). Murray Bookchin is an anarchist whose pamphlet "Listen, Marxist!," which had Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Bugs Bunny on the cover, had been passed out at the 1969 SDS convention. See Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 387.

42. Ralph Hall, *Gay Power* 1, 9. Within a year, Hall himself would be attacking the Gay Activists Alliance for being "sizest, and sexist, classist, and racist." See *Revolutionary Limpwristed Faggot* (International Gay Information Center, Revolutionary Limpwristed Faggot File, New York Public Library, n.d.).

43. Ronald Ballard and Bob Fontella, "Re: The Forthcoming Mayoral Election in N.Y.C." *Come Out!* 1, 1 (14 November 1969): 4.

44. Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 105–06.

45. Quoted in Arthur Bell, *Dancing the Gay Lib Blues* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971), 23.

46. "News," in *Come Out!* 1, 4 (June/July 1970). See also Abe Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties: The Life and Times of the Underground Press* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 235.

47. For more on the gay press, see Willard Spiegelman, "The Progress of a Genre: Gay Journalism and its Audience," *Salmagundi* 58–59 (Fall 1982/Winter 1983): 308–25. See also Susan Hebst, *Politics at the Margin: Historical Studies of Public Expression Outside the Mainstream* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

48. See *Kaleidoscope* (13–26 February 1970); *The Williamette Bridge* (17–23 July 1970); and *Ann Arbor Argus* 39 (April 1971).

49. *Come Out!* 2, 8 (11 January 1971) [sic]: the year should be 1972.

50. On the importance of "counter-institutions" in the New Left, see Brienens, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962–1968: The Great Refusal* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 52.

51. John Murphy, *Homosexual Liberation* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 136.

52. See "People's Coffee Grounds," *Come Out!* 2, 7b (Spring-Summer 1971): 20.

53. Teal, *The Gay Militants*, 58.

54. Ralph Hall, "Gay Liberation News," in *Gay Power* 10 (February 1970).

55. John Lauritsen, "Disruptions, Censorship, Bigotry," in *The New Gay Liberation Book: Writings and Photographs about Gay (Men's) Liberation*, ed. Len Richmond and Gay Noguera (Berkeley: Ramparts Press, 1979), 157.

56. "Radicalesbians" flyer (GLF File, LHA). Reprinted in *Come Out!* 1, 4 (June/July 1970).
57. Loc cit.
58. Martha Shelley quoted in Marcus, *Making History*, 184.
59. Sue Katz, "Some Thought After a Gay Woman's Lib Meeting," *Come Out!* 7, 1 (December-January 1970): 14.
60. *Come Out!* 2, 7b (Spring/Summer 1971): 17.
61. Throughout the 1970s and well into the 1980s, sexuality created tension in lesbian politics and culture and remained a source of conflict between gay men and lesbians. See *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, ed. Carole S. Vance (London: Pandora, 1989); and *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
62. Lois Hart, "Community Center," *Come Out!* 1, 1 (14 November 1969).
63. "Woman-Identified-Woman," *Come Out!* 1, 4 (June/July 1970).
64. See *Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology*, ed. Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope (London: Only Women Press, 1988). "Woman-Identified-Woman" is the first text in the anthology.
65. Alice Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 214.
66. "Radicalesbians," flyer (GLF File, LHA).
67. Quoted in Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality*, 257.
68. Marty Stephan, "Bitch: Summers not Forever," *Come Out!* 1, 1 (14 November 1969).
69. Karla Jay and Allen Young, "Introduction," in *Out of the Closet*, xxxviii.
70. Laura McAlister, "The Transvestite in America," *Come Out!* 1, 4 (June/July 1970): 18.
71. John Knoebel, "Somewhere in the Right Direction: Testimony of my Experience in a Gay Male Living Collective," *Out of the Closet*, 307.
72. *Ibid.*, 304.
73. Jim Clifford, conference notes, Circa Stonewall: Gay Lives and Liberation in Greenwich Village and New York City, 12 April 1994 (New York University). See also Elliot Linzer, "On Recurring Debates," in *The 60s Without Apology*, 301-04.
74. "The Flaming Faggots: And Two Other Poems of Rage and Beauty" (Gay Flames Pamphlet #2, IGIC Collection, GLF File, NYPL).
75. Echols, *Daring to be Bad*, 117.
76. *Ibid.*, 135.
77. "Gay Tribes Come Together in the Nation's Capitol," *Gay Flames* 8 (14 December 1970): 13; "D.C. 12 Go Free, Put the Pigs on Trial," *Gay Flames* 12 (May 1972).
78. Echols, "We Gotta Get Out of this Place," 14.
79. Jack Onge, *The Gay Liberation Movement* (Chicago: Alliance Press, 1971), 8. On the left, homosexuality, and Cuba see Allen Young, *Gays Under the Cuban Revolution* (San Francisco: Grey Fox Press, 1981). For a different perspective, see Lourdes Arguelles and B. Ruby Rich, "Homosexuality, Homophobia, and Revolution: Notes Toward an Understanding of the Cuban Lesbian and Gay Experience," in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, ed. Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey, Jr. (New York: Meridan, 1989), 441-55.
80. On Cuba's popularity among American radicals see Van Gosse, *Where the Boys Are: Cuba, Cold War America and the Making of the New Left* (London: Verso, 1993); and Gitlin, *The Sixties*, 274-81.
81. "Declaration by the First National Congress on Education and Culture," *Come Out!* 2, 7b (Spring/Summer 1971): 4.
82. "Letter from Cuban Gay People to the North American Gay Liberation Movement," loc. cit.
83. See Peck, *Uncovering the Sixties*, 273-76.
84. "Letter from Gay Committee of Returned Brigadistas," *Come Out!* 2, 7b (Spring/Summer 1971): 5.

85. Steve Gavin, "Is Socialism the Answer?" loc. cit.

86. Notes from 28 March 1971 to 11 April 1971 (IGIC Collection, GLF File, NYPL).

87. Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality*, 307–33. See also Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987).

88. See Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Penguin, 1991) 181–246; and Verta Taylor and Leila J. Rupp, "Women's Culture and Lesbian Feminist Activism: A Reconsideration of Cultural Feminism," in *Signs* 19, 1 (Autumn 1993): 32–61.

89. See Jeffery Escoffier, "Generations and Paradigms: Mainstreams in Lesbian and Gay Studies," in *Journal of Homosexuality* 24, 1–2 (1992): 7–26; and Jeffery Escoffier, "Inside the Ivory Closet: The Challenges Facing Lesbian and Gay Studies," *OUT/LOOK* 3, 2 (Fall 1990): 40–48. For an early example of left analysis of homosexuality, see The Red Butterfly, "The Anthropological Perspective," in *Out of the Closets*, 157–65.

90. I have borrowed this formulation from Joan Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 42. I do not mean to collapse gender into sexuality or vice versa. See also Gayle Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Pleasure and Danger*, 267–319.

91. See Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer...: The Death of the Old Left and the Birth of the New Left* (New York: Basic Books, 1987); and Verta Taylor and Leila Rupp, *Survival in the Doldrums: The American Women's Movement, 1945 to 1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).