
The Teacher

Gay and Lesbian Politics

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“Stonewall” has become part of the American lexicon, a result of events at Sheridan Square in New York City in the early morning hours of June 28, 1969. The Stonewall Inn, one gay bar amid scores of others in Manhattan, was about to be raided by the New York Police Department. Nothing unusual for New York, or most other large cities for that matter. Gays and lesbians had become almost inured to police harassment. When one’s sexual preference is the object of criminal law, when one’s psychological status is continually demeaned, when one is denounced from the pulpit and ridiculed in the mass media, what is one more raid on an after-hours gay bar?

But the raid on the Stonewall Inn did not go as planned. Instead of the usual compliant crowd the police encountered “catcalls and cries to topple the paddy wagon.”¹ The crowd, in an unruly mood, was soon joined by sympathizers and other bystanders. Hundreds if not thousands of youths participated. Several nights of often brutal confrontations with the police followed.

As a young instructor in the political science department at Ohio University, I read the news stories about the Stonewall riots with incredulity. Like so many other gays and lesbians of my generation, I found it quite easy to identify with the plight of other minorities. The civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s was a great inspiration to all who identified with the demands for equality under the law. The anti-war and the women’s rights movements were similarly energizing. These movements demonstrated what could be accomplished through grassroots organizing. But the idea that gays and lesbians would one day organize

for the purpose of establishing their legal rights was an idea that I had never entertained—even in my dreams—until Stonewall.

Ten years passed before the idea of creating a course on the politics of the gay and lesbian rights movement dawned on me as a possibility. It was not until I was approached by a

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group of students active in the Gay and Lesbian Association in Athens, Ohio, that I began to consider teaching a class on the subject. They proposed a readings course on the subject of homosexuality and politics, and it was this readings course that first exposed me to the burgeoning literature on sexual orientation and to the politics of the gay and lesbian rights movement.

Due in large part to this readings

course, I became convinced that a regularly scheduled course might be of some benefit to those struggling with their sexual orientation. Having grown up during the 1950s and 1960s, I was only too aware of the emotional consequences of the isolation of young gay men and lesbians from one another and from their own history. One of the most valuable lessons we have derived from the civil rights and women’s rights movements is the vital connection between understanding one’s own history, developing self-esteem, and forming movements for social change. Just as women and racial minorities have come to understand the need to analyze the origins and functions of dominant racial- and gender-based ideologies, lesbians and gay men have begun to reexamine and challenge the numerous misconceptions of homosexuality rooted in the dominant heterosexual ideology.

Exposure to this literature also convinced me that a regularly scheduled course on the subject of homosexuality and politics was viable. My initial fears that there was insufficient research to support such a class proved to be unfounded. To be sure, there was little information on the gay and lesbian rights movement in the field of political science, but there was much on gays and lesbians in related fields such as history, sociology, theology, psychology, and law. This neglect of the gay rights movement by the political science profession regrettably has not changed. Hopefully, the formation of the Gay and Lesbian Caucus of the APSA will help to rectify this historical oversight.

This year, 1992, is the eighth year that “Gay and Lesbian Politics” has been offered on a regularly scheduled

basis. Within the department of political science it has become a natural complement to other course offerings on women and minorities such as "Women, Law, and Politics," "Feminist Political Theories and Movements," and "Black Politics." "Gay and Lesbian Politics" is also an elective for the Women's Studies Certificate at Ohio University. Perhaps because of the Women's Studies Program, many more students than in the past have been exposed to gender issues and have come to understand the desirability of acquiring a knowledge of gays and lesbians. But, for whatever reason, the class is in great demand. It is one of the few opportunities for students—heterosexuals as well as gays and lesbians—to learn about one of the most overlooked political movements of the twentieth century.

Objectives

The primary objective of "Gay and Lesbian Politics" is to impart an understanding of the historical inter-relationships between religious and psychological constructs of homosexuality, the embodiment of these constructs in European and American law, and their use in the political arena. This theme integrates the three major aspects of the course—the early homosexual rights movement in Germany, the pre-Stonewall gay and lesbian rights movement in the United States, and the discussion of contemporary developments in religion, law, and psychiatry.

At the very outset of the early homosexual rights movement, the emerging science of psychiatry became the foil for those who sought to reform the laws regarding the rights of homosexuals, laws which bore the imprint of their ecclesiastical origins.

Prior to the mid-nineteenth century, secular laws proscribing what we now refer to as homosexual acts were framed exclusively in religious terms. The roots of secular legislation in the field of sexuality can be traced to the canon law and penitential literature of Roman Catholicism. Fornication, adultery, as well as all other forms of nonprocreative sexuality, were viewed as aberrant as

well as abhorrent. Early modern legal codes borrowed greatly from canon law and from Roman law which had proscribed homosexual acts from the time of Justinian in the 6th century.

The first full-fledged attack on the ecclesiastical conception of sexual ethics came from a most unlikely source, an attorney in the civil service of the Kingdom of Hanover by the name of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs. Ulrichs's twelve-volume *Researches on the Riddle of Love Between Men*,

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which appeared between 1864 and 1879, challenged the predominant view that homosexuals were reprobates. Instead, Ulrichs proposed an idea derived from embryology. Just as the sexual organs are not differentiated in the early developmental stages of a fetus, he reasoned, neither is one's sexual orientation. And, just as nature occasionally produced physical hermaphrodites, nature also occasionally produced psychical hermaphrodites, individuals whose psychical constitution did not match their physical constitution; a "womanly soul" trapped in a man's body, or vice versa.

The chief significance of Ulrichs's contribution was its effect on the nascent science of psychiatry and, through psychiatry, on the early homosexual rights movement. Neither an embryologist nor a psy-

chologist, Ulrichs's work nevertheless attracted wide attention including that of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Károly Mária Kertbeny [K. M. Benkert].

Krafft-Ebing, the eminent professor of psychiatry and neurology at the University of Vienna, credited Ulrichs with drawing his attention to the study of homosexuality. Never again would the debate over homosexuality be framed entirely by principles of theology and canon law. By challenging the predominant assumption that homosexuality amounted to immoral behavior, psychiatry set the stage for the twentieth-century gay rights movement.²

Károly Mária Kertbeny is credited for coining the term "homosexuality" in 1868 to refer to sexual relations between individuals of the same gender. His two pamphlets published the following year calling for the emancipation of the homosexual from repressive laws marks the beginning of the early homosexual rights movement in Germany.

Nowhere is the link between psychiatry and politics so manifest as it was in the work of the great German sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld.

Magnus Hirschfeld founded the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft [Institute for Sexual Science]. A forerunner of the Kinsey Institute for Sex Research, it was devoted to the research and documentation of sexual behaviors, sex education, counseling, etc. Housed in the same building was the Wissenschaftlich-Humanitäre Komitee [Scientific-Humanitarian Committee]. Founded in 1897 by Magnus Hirschfeld, among others, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee was the first homosexual rights organization in Germany. Its motto "justice through science" typified its approach to the issue of homosexual rights. Among its numerous accomplishments was the publication of a yearbook, *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* [The Yearbook for the Intermediate Sex], and the production of Anders als die Andern [Different From the Others], a film depicting the social injustice of homosexual persecution. Hirschfeld devoted his life to the proposition that enlightenment through science would ultimately dispel the misconceptions about homo-

sexuality. He authored numerous books and articles on sexuality, founded the World League for Sexual Reform, and championed the repeal of paragraph #175 of the German legal code, the paragraph which criminalized adult male homosexuality.

The repeal of paragraph #175 was the focal point of the early homosexual emancipation movement. Those who argued for its repeal focused on the presumption, drawn from the science of psychiatry, that sexual orientation was either tantamount to a genetic endowment, or it was an environmentally induced characteristic. Thus, the criminalization of sexual deviance among consenting adults was attacked as an inappropriate solution to the anomaly of homosexuality, tantamount to the punishment of left-handedness.

The focus on the early homosexual rights movement serves a number of useful ends. Most obviously, it covers an aspect of history with which few students are acquainted. From its inception in 1897 until its demise in 1933, with the ransacking of its headquarters in Berlin by fascist youth, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the coalition of groups which it spearheaded created the first broad-based political movement for the emancipation of lesbians and gays from repressive laws and social intolerance. The fate of the early homosexual rights movement at the hands of the Nazi party is a poignant reminder of the political volatility of issues concerning sexual orientation.

Focusing on the early period also helps set the stage for understanding the many issues characteristic of the modern lesbian and gay rights movement such as the impact of the medical model on the politics of the post-WWII lesbian and gay rights movement in the United States. Originally embraced by most prominent homosexual rights activists in Germany because it promised to dispel ancient prejudices inherited from the Judeo-Christian tradition, the medical model itself became the object of political controversy after the war. Its utilization by the psychiatric profession as the basis for the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) classification of homosexuality as a

pathology was one of the first political battles fought by the resurgent gay and lesbian rights movement.

Pre-Stonewall political activism revolved to a considerable degree around the scientific credibility and political efficacy of the medical model. The founder of the first prominent gay rights organization in the United States, Harry Hay, attacked the premises of the medical model as early as 1952, the year in which the Mattachine Society was founded. From the standpoint of the early Mattachine activists, homosexuality was not a psychiatric disorder but a legitimate ethical alternative to heterosexuality. The Mattachine's early opposition to the tenets of the medical model founded in the 1950s, however, due to Hay's affiliation with the Communist Party of the USA and his subsequent expulsion from the Mattachine Society in the midst of anti-communist hysteria.

His successors, as well as Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin, founders of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first lesbian organization in the United States, took what could only be called an accommodationist posture. The idea that the gay and lesbian lifestyle represented a legitimate alternative to heterosexuality was replaced by the dominant medico-legal perspective of homosexuality; namely, that it was a treatable pathology. Thus, the politics of both the Daughters of Bilitis and the Mattachine Society during the 1950s and 1960s was characterized by "their reliance on professionals as the agents of social change" and their abandonment of "collective, militant action. . . ."³

This remained the norm until the Stonewall riots of 1969. In the wake of the riots the leadership of these mainstream homophile organizations was found wanting. A new style of leadership was called for—a more militant approach to political change based on the direct action techniques of the civil rights and anti-war movements, a style of leadership that the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis proved incapable of providing.

The first political objective of the resurgent gay rights movement was the deletion of homosexuality as a

category of mental illness from the APA's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Psychiatric Disorders*. In a series of often explosive confrontations at APA national conventions between 1970 and 1973, gay activists such as Frank Kameny challenged psychiatric professionals to accept the gay and lesbian lifestyle as a legitimate alternative lifestyle and to abandon their commitment to aversive conditioning techniques. The deletion of homosexuality as a category of mental illness by the APA in 1973 and its subsequent adoption of a progressive gay and lesbian civil rights stance remains a most important victory for the lesbian and gay rights movement, one which presaged the political battles of the 1980s and 1990s.

The balance of the course is devoted to discussions of contemporary gay and lesbian issues. Lesbian feminism, homosexuality and the religious establishment, the impact of lesbians and gay men on electoral politics, the current status of legal reform, and AIDS and the gay and lesbian community are the final subjects of discussion.

One of the most interesting topics is the discussion of lesbians, gay men, and the contemporary religious establishment. A representative panel of local clergy reflects the wide diversity of opinion among Christians and Jews on this subject and never fails to elicit class discussion. Although religious tolerance for gays and lesbians seems at times to be as distant as ever, considerable progress has been made within particular denominations of Judaism and Christianity. The class discussion elicits this diversity.

Among the most significant unresolved legal issues is the status of sodomy statutes in the United States. As a result of the *Bowers v. Hardwick* Supreme Court decision (478 U.S. 186 1986), the criminalization of sodomy remains the prerogative of individual states. Roughly half of the states in the United States still include sodomy statutes in their criminal codes. These statutes can be categorized into roughly three groups: those statutes that criminalize homosexual sodomy; those that criminalize sodomy between unmarried partners, including heterosexual

partners; and those which criminalize sodomy between individuals regardless of their sexual orientation or marital status. The wide diversity of state criminal statutes (and their corresponding criminal penalties) provides an appropriate framework for a discussion of the regulation of sexual mores by the state, including references to other contemporary issues such as birth control and abortion.

Other legal issues discussed include the status of local, state, and federal legislation protecting the rights of lesbians and gay men in employment, rental housing, and public accommodations, their rights in custody and adoption proceedings, the right to serve in the armed forces of the United States, and immigration and deportation.

AIDS has had a devastating impact on the gay and lesbian community as well as a profound impact on the political priorities of gay men and lesbians. Focusing on AIDS during the closing week of the class provides an opportunity to discuss such topics as the impact of AIDS on the sexual mores of gay men, the response of the federal government to this health crisis, and numerous civil rights issues relevant to people with AIDS (PWAs).

Closing the course with a discussion of sexual orientation law and the civil rights of PWAs also provides an opportunity to discuss the current status of civil rights law in general. A concern for civil rights, I argue, might provide a basis upon which women, racial minorities, and gays and lesbians could act collectively.

Syllabus

Class: Two hours each session, twice a week.

Text: Barry Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*.

Reserve Readings:

A.C.L.U. *The Rights of Gay People* (selections).

Robert Amsel. "Back to Our Future?: A Walk on the Wild Side of Stonewall."

Ronald Bayer. *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry* (chs. 3-4).

Allan Bérubé. "Coming Out Under Fire."

Vern Bullough. "Homosexuality and the

Medical Model."

Peter Frieberg. "Gay Catholic Controversy."

Sigmund Freud. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (ch. 1).

Marilyn Frye. "Lesbian Feminism and the Gay Rights Movement: Another View of Male Supremacy, Another Separatism."

Erwin Haeberle. "Swastika, Pink Triangles, and Yellow Star: The Destruction of Sexology and the Persecution of Homosexuals in Nazi Germany."

Alfred Kinsey, et al. *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (ch. 11).

Carol Matlack. "Gay Clout."

John Preston. "Goodbye Sally Gearhart: Gay Men and Feminists Have Reached a Fork in the Road."

James M. Saslow. "Hear, O Israel."

James R. Smith. "Silent No More: Rev. John J. McNeill's Time to Speak Out."

Stuart Timmons. "Mainstream Turbulence: Stumbling Blocks in Traditional Religious Paths."

Schedule:

Class 1. *The Legacy of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*. Adam, ch. 1. A survey of references to homosexual behavior in scripture, penitential literature, and canon law. The origin of the criminalization of homosexuality in secular law is traced to Christendom.

Class 2. *The Third Sex Theory and the Evolution of the Medical Model of Homosexuality*. Adam, ch. 1, and Bullough. The origin of the scientific construction of homosexuality is explored through a discussion of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs's third sex theory and its subsequent impact on psychiatric thinking; the origins of homosexuality as a mental illness, or the medical model, is discussed.

Class 3. *The Early Homosexual Rights Movement*. Adam, ch. 2. The inception of gay and lesbian political activism in the 19th century: Magnus Hirschfeld's effort to repeal paragraph #175 of the German legal code is chronicled. His appeal to the medical model of homosexuality as a basis for the repeal of paragraph #175 is analyzed.

Class 4. *Freud and Freudianism: Liberation or Oppression?* Freud, ch. 1. Freud's theoretical rejoinder to Ulrichs's and Hirschfeld's medical models of homosexuality and his assertion of universal human bisexuality. The abandonment of Freud's assertion by subsequent generations of Freudian psychiatrists and the subsequent classification of homosexuality

as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association.

Class 5. *The Demise of the Early Homosexual Rights Movement*. Adam, ch. 3 and Haeberle. A synopsis of the efforts to repeal paragraph #175, the rise of the Nazi party, and the collapse of the German homosexual rights movement; the pink triangles.

Class 6. *Meanwhile . . . in the United States: World War II, the Kinsey Reports, and the Creation of an Urban Gay Subculture*. Bérubé, Kinsey. A discussion of the impact of World War II on the creation of an American gay and lesbian subculture and the role of the Kinsey reports in the formation of a gay and lesbian identity.

Class 7. *Midterm*.

Class 8. *The Mattachine Society, the Daughters of Bilitis, and the Rebirth of the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement: The McCarthy Terror*. Adam, ch. 4. The events surrounding the formation of the first gay and lesbian rights organizations in the U.S. are discussed: organizational structures, goals, and tactics are analyzed.

Class 9. *The Civil Rights, Anti-War, and Women's Liberation Movements and the New Gay and Lesbian Militancy*. Adam, ch. 4. An overview of the philosophy and political tactics of the civil rights, anti-war, and women's liberation movements and their impact on the fledgling gay and lesbian rights movement.

Class 10. *Video: "Before Stonewall."* Amsel. A documentary covering the gay and lesbian rights movement in the U.S. prior to Stonewall.

Class 11. *Homosexuality and Psychiatry*. Bayer. A history of the debates pertaining to the declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association.

Class 12. *Lesbian Feminism*. Adam, ch. 5, Frye & Preston. An exploration of the congruities and incongruities of lesbian feminism, the women's movement, and the gay and lesbian rights movement.

Class 13. *Homosexuality and the Contemporary Religious Establishment*. Saslow, Smith, Timmons, & Freiberg. A panel discussion composed of local rabbis and ministers on the changing status of homosexuality within their respective denominations.

Class 14. *Video: "Harvey Milk."* Adam, ch. 6. A documentary of the

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life of the first openly gay man to be elected to public office.

Class 15. *Lesbians/Gays and U.S. Electoral Politics*. Adam. Ch. 6, and Matalack. An assessment of the political influence of lesbians and gays in U.S. electoral politics by a panel of local and state-wide lesbian and gay political leaders.

Class 16. *Lesbians/Gays and the Law*. ACLU, pp. 1-130. An overview of the legal rights of lesbians and gays in the U.S.

Class 17. *AIDS and the Gay and Lesbian Rights Movement*. Adam, ch. 8. The impact of AIDS on gays and lesbians and on the movement for equality under the law; the rights of PWAs are discussed.

Class 18. *Final Exam*.

within Christendom from the Roman period to Aquinas is explored.

Bérubé, Alan. 1990. *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two*. New York: The Free Press. Based on extensive interviews and recently declassified government documents, the author discusses the plight of lesbian and gay GIs during World War II. The concluding chapter, "The Legacy of the War," contains a particularly good discussion of the significance of the war for the gay and lesbian rights movement.

Brundage, James A. 1987. *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. An excellent compendium of penitential literature, canon law, and secular legislation on human sexuality from the Greek and Roman periods to the Council of Trent.

D'Emilio, John. 1983. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. The emergence of the gay and lesbian political movement in the U.S. is chronicled; the impact of World War II, McCarthyism, and the civil rights movement on lesbian and gay politics is analyzed.

Duberman, Martin, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey Jr., eds. 1989. *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*. New York: New American Library Books. A wide variety of historical essays in cross cultural perspective on lesbians and gay men written by some of the leading scholars of homosexuality.

Dynes, Wayne R. 1990. *Encyclopedia of Homosexuality*. New York: Garland Publications. A valuable reference source.

Faderman, Lillian. 1991. *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*. An invaluable history of the lesbian subculture from the earliest decades of the twentieth century to the present.

criminal law, employment law issues, student and faculty rights in public schools, marriage, custody, adoption, foster care, immigration and deportation, public accommodations, and other selected issues.

Journal of Homosexuality (1974-). New York: Haworth Press. The only scholarly journal devoted exclusively to gay and lesbian issues.

Katz, Jonathan Ned. 1976. *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Co. An invaluable documentary of lesbian and gay American history from the colonial period to the post-Stonewall period.

Katz, Jonathan Ned. 1983. *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: A New Documentary*. New York: Harper & Row. A companion to his *Gay American History*.

Martin, Del and Phyllis Lyon. 1972. *Lesbian/Woman*. San Francisco: Glide Publications. A treatise on the lesbian lifestyle and lesbian liberation by the co-founders of the Daughters of Bilitis.

Shilts, Randy. 1987. *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic*. New York: St. Martin's Press. A hard hitting exposé of the U.S. government's response to the AIDS epidemic during the Reagan years.

Timmons, Stuart. 1991. *The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement*. Boston: Alyson Pub. A biography of the co-founder of the Mattachine Society.

Notes

1. Robert Amsel, "Back to Our Future: A Walk on the Wild Side of Stonewall," *Village Voice*, 15 Sept. 1987.

2. Sigmund Freud also opposed the criminalization of homosexuality, although he took exception to the argument that sexual orientation amounted to a genetic endowment. See Henry Abelove, "Freud, Male Homosexuality, and the Americans," *Dissent*, 1986, 33:59-69.

3. John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, p. 81.

References

Bayer, Ronald. 1981. *Homosexuality and American Psychiatry*. New York: Basic Books. A succinct history of the debates within the American Psychiatric Association which led to the eventual declassification of homosexuality as a mental illness.

Boswell, John. 1980. *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. The vacillating attitudes toward homosexuality

Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: Introduction*. Vol. I of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books. The focus is on the construction of sexuality in the early modern period. Insightful analysis of the hetero/homo polarity.

Harvard Law Review, eds. 1990. *Sexual Orientation and the Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. An overview of the law as it pertains to gays and lesbians. The subjects covered include

About the Author

Ronald J. Hunt is an assistant professor of political science at Ohio University. He presented a paper on "Epistemology, Homosexuality, and Politics" at the APSA 1989 annual meeting in Atlanta and a paper on "Beyond the Medical Model: The Politics of Gay and Lesbian Self-Affirmation" at the 1990 APSA meeting in San Francisco.