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The GLBTQ Community in Cincinnati:

Civil Rights, Public Morals, and Civic Spaces, ca. 1970 to 2010

Introduction

The course of “gay history” in the United States has often been difficult to chart, given the stigmatization of homosexuality in America and the resulting self-repression of such sexuality by gay men and lesbian women. In the 1950s this repression and even fear of homosexuality played out in particular way in the “Lavender Scare,” Cold War-era persecution of gays and lesbians in the federal government in the context of communist paranoia and a fear of internal subversion in the United States. Out of the Lavender Scare, however, grew an incipient but important gay rights protest movement that drew from the strength and tactics of the black civil rights movement in the 1960s. In fact, black and gay/lesbian civil rights protest frequently overlapped, as can be seen in the activities of several black gay and lesbian activists. This early gay-lesbian movement culminated in the riots of 1969 in New York City at Stonewall, a notorious gay bar. Catalyzed by the riots and invigorated by the first ever gay pride march in New York City in 1970, nascent gay and lesbian communities grew into more coherent social groups, and eventually morphed into a political movement that ran concurrently with a social protest movement. Those involved in the GLBTQ (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer) movement and those opposed to it came to understand it as a social, political, and cultural struggle on many levels of civic life, public morality, and the public sphere.

In Cincinnati, this movement has followed a similar path, evolving from a pride march of seventy dedicated activists in 1973, to a full-blown parade of 1,500 marchers and spectators in 2001. The GLBTQ community moved from the goal of political protest to that of visibility, as the GLBTQ issues in Cincinnati also moved from securing mayoral proclamations about gay pride day, to protesting the passage of Issue 3 (which prohibited special ordinances designed to give members of the GLBTQ community a protected status), to fostering an atmosphere of tolerance and acceptance. Simultaneous with this movement, and indeed because of it, the community of Cincinnati began to accept members of the GLBTQ minority within its city limits. However, the most notable growth has taken place within the GLBTQ community itself. Although protest was an important historical factor in the evolution of the GLBTQ movement, today the ideas of visibility and acceptance have taken center stage in the struggle for GLBTQ rights and equality, but often at the risk of the actual identity of the community.

Furthermore, the terminology used in this study demonstrates the evolution of American culture in regards to the GLBTQ community on the micro level. The term “homosexual” was originally adopted to define GLBTQ people because it is a scientific word and the medical community used it essentially to stigmatize and ostracize gays and lesbians as “the other,” especially amidst the politics of Cold War paranoia during the mid-twentieth century. The word “gay” eventually became an acceptable synonym for homosexual in the latter twentieth century as this term came to encompass sexuality, lifestyle, and even a particular culture, allowing men and women alike to be denominated as “gay.” In fact, most early “pride” parades and celebrations were specifically *gay* pride celebrations, even if lesbian women or bisexuals participated. But since the word “gay” was identified almost by default with the male, this term had a sort of internal discriminatory effect. Hence, the important difference between

the terms “gay” and “lesbian” gained ground for identifying individuals as those within the movement became cognizant of their own prejudices and biases. However, with respect to the larger idea of a common identity, members of this community realized that the terms “gay” and “lesbian” were also too limited to describe the true spectrum of sexualities, particularly as other members of this spectrum entered into the fold, including bisexual and transgender individuals. Thus, the community and its allies began to use the acronym GLBTQ to describe this spectrum. In this paper the former terms will be employed when discussing contemporary information to avoid anachronisms and inappropriate interpretations of social history. However, the acronym GLBTQ will be used whenever possible in order to capture the full spectrum of this community.

Cold War Paranoia in the 1950s and 1960s

In many ways, the 1950s and 1960s represent the beginning of the GLBTQ movement as it began to take shape in response to Cold War-era political persecution in the federal government. In the United States, homosexuals had been, by and large, an ostracized and underground minority. But the stigmatization of homosexuality took a particularly more virulent turn in the context of the communist paranoia of the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, as David K. Johnson points out in his work *The Lavender Scare*, “the fears of Communists and homosexuals overlapped” and even resulted in the purge of ninety-one homosexuals from the State Department who were deemed to be “security risks.”¹ Thus, government leaders tied their fears of gays and lesbians to their fears of communist infiltration by Soviet agents in the postwar era.² A more sinister problem than Communism even was people who “exhibited signs of character

¹ David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare, The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 3.

² Ibid., 9.

weakness.” “Sexual perversion” was on par with a “criminal record” as a reason to exclude applicants from employment within the state department. The moral defects in such people, it was feared, would be more likely to lead them into association with a “subversive group.”³ Thus, homosexuality was conceived of as a form of perversion that would lead to subversion against the government during the Cold War. In this way, gays and lesbians working for the government were outsiders, sexual deviants, or even perverts, who represented an internal threat to American domestic security because they also represented a countercurrent to “mainstream” American culture.”⁴ The real threat, then, was not that homosexuals would be planting bombs on behalf of the Kremlin, or that they would somehow sell off American security secrets, but rather that they would undermine the proud American normative values that had allowed the nation to persist as one of the world’s two superpowers. Those deeply embedded values of the American psyche — manliness, courage, and generally hetero-normative behaviors — were directly challenged by a talented, competent gay member of the government, and so those who feared such people removed them from the government both rhetorically and literally.

However, perceptions of the Cold War subversion of homosexuals did not merely foster isolation and unemployment among gay government workers. In fact, the homosexual witch-hunt within the government sparked a backlash among the homosexual community in Washington, D.C., and in several other cities across America, in an important though nascent “gay pride” movement. In the first place, a real gay and lesbian subculture did exist within Washington, which socialized, communicated, and organized. Consensus grew among this community that “something ought to be done” about their persecution by the anti-gay and virulently anti-Communist forces within the government.⁵ Borrowing from recent organizational

³ Ibid., 21.

⁴ Ibid., 31 and 37.

⁵ Ibid., 169-171.

moves by gay men in Los Angeles, Dwight Huggins created an organization called “the Council for the Repeal of Unjust Laws,” in direct opposition to the unfair and discriminatory hiring and firing policies on homosexuals within the federal government.⁶ Frank Kameny, dismissed by the Army Map Service for falsifying an application form (in which he misidentified his arrest for “lewd and indecent acts” in a known gay cruising area), charged in 1960 before the Supreme Court that, through the government’s rooting out of homosexuals and its employment policies, he and other gay and lesbian Americans “were being treated as second-class citizens.” This represented a shift in the conceptualization of some sort of coherent homosexual movement and group identity, because it meant for the first time that gays were publicly protesting *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination through legal avenues. Although it was not always a coherent movement, these individual actions, when viewed collectively, demonstrate the beginnings of a GLBTQ pride movement intent on resisting discrimination.

After the Supreme Court denied his petition, Kameny went on to found the Washington chapter of the Mattachine Society to fight the discrimination perpetrated against gays and lesbians within the federal government in a more grassroots manner.⁷ Despite being monitored by the FBI and facing multiple financial problems, Kameny fostered the development of the Mattachine Society in Washington, including lobbying the Civil Service Commission and picketing the White House to protest the government’s treatment of gay employees and its hiring policies that discriminated against homosexuals.⁸ As the 1960s progressed and groups of gays and lesbians began to organize against the government’s policies, the federal government’s campaign against homosexual civil servants entered its denouement.

Nonetheless, the 1950s were a decade of paranoia and witch hunts against both

⁶ Ibid., 172.

⁷ Ibid., 181-183.

⁸ Ibid., 201-203.

subversive Communists and perverted homosexuals that went against the hetero-normative American values and so were seen an internal threat to American stability and power. But “the rising tide of public protest over both civil rights and the war in Vietnam” encouraged some of the first public protests and demonstrations against the unfair discrimination of homosexual government employees.⁹ These first public protests — including picketing outside of the Civil Service Commission’s offices, which was responsible for firing many gay federal employees — would later inspire the public protest of gay pride marches in cities such as New York and Cincinnati. Thus, the GLBTQ movement came more or less to be understood by those involved in it and those opposed to it as a socio-political struggle and a cultural clash on many levels that involved aspects of not only private morality, but more importantly aspects of public life, public morality, and the political sphere.

The GLBTQ Cause and the Civil Rights Movement

In the public sphere of the 1960s racial, pacifist, and student movements represented a direct assault on the discriminatory actions, both politically and socially as the country moved in a more liberal direction in the context of a rising tide of protest by pacifists and racial minorities. Just as a fear of homosexuals existed within the political establishment, so too did it exist even within those movements fighting the establishment in the 1960s. The career of Bayard Rustin best exemplifies these difficulties. Rustin exemplified extraordinary leadership qualities and rose through the ranks of the civil rights movement to work alongside Dr. King.¹⁰ However, there was one major obstacle to Rustin’s career path and his ability to effect change within the black civil rights movement: he was gay. After being arrested in Pasadena for lewd public behavior

⁹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰ John D’Emilio, “Homophobia and the Trajectory of Postwar American Radicalism: The Career of Bayard Rustin” in *Queer History*, edited by Allida M. Black, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 82-83.

with two other men in a park, Rustin was psychologically tormented, and rumors of his sexuality hindered his work with the black civil rights movement.¹¹ However, Rustin's persistence in the civil rights movements, both as an activist black man and a determined gay man, demonstrated the internal conflict within the black civil rights movement, while it also often unintentionally furthered the GLBTQ cause merely through his indefatigable work among blacks.¹² Although Rustin was not a proud, open homosexual directly advocating the "gay cause," he refused to be marginalized within the black civil rights movement and so in a way brought gays into the fold. Indeed, "Rustin's political perspective was unique among those who had shared his political history," and since he was plagued by the "sexual perversion" label throughout his life, he "lost all attachment to left-wing romanticism," which pushed him in new directions within the civil rights movement.¹³ But the most important factor in the example of Bayard Rustin's life was that "his identity provoked a series of confrontations within the American Left about homosexuality that can be characterized — at least in its *public* manifestations — as a movement from ostracism to acceptance."¹⁴ Thus, the career of Bayard Rustin demonstrates the frequently unintentional confluence of the black civil rights movement and the incipient GLBTQ cause in the 1960s. This confluence is one example of a more open visibility adopted by gays and lesbians in the context of the 1960s as more men and women began to "come out" and to form a true community with real importance amidst the growing leftist countercultural movements of the 1960s.

The GLBTQ cause thus found common ground with other minorities, including those isolated within the civil rights movement. A new type of black feminism emerged within the

¹¹ Ibid., 85-86.

¹² Ibid., 89.

¹³ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴ Ibid., 94.

civil rights movement in response to the “movement’s masculinist definitions of rights for Blacks.” This women’s movement and their ideological path sought to do politics “within the cracks” and the gap between “masculinist Black politics and racist white feminist politics.”¹⁵ This independent movement of Black feminists exemplifies the struggle of a minority group within a larger minority group, essentially a social movement of concentric circles of minorities. This idea was brought to fruition by Black feminists’ critique of the heterosexism predominant in the black civil rights movement.¹⁶ The civil rights-era feminist Combahee River Collective in Boston tied black feminism to the lesbian movement, and more generally to “heterosexual oppression” against all homosexual members of the black community. The Collective used members’ identity of “black lesbian socialist feminists” as a way to gain ground in the social justice movement at the time, grafting the goals of lesbian feminists onto those of black feminists within the broader civil rights movement.¹⁷ Though they did not equate lesbianism with feminism, or vice versa, this renaissance of black lesbian feminism served in important ways to further both the black civil rights movement, the feminist movement, the GLBTQ movement, and especially the lesbian movement within these broader contexts. The GLBTQ movement expanded its self-definition and its particular socio-political goals as a result of its dialogue with the black community and the larger civil rights movement.

The Public Cultural Formation of the GLBTQ Movement

It is thus obvious that the GLBTQ movement was not simply one coherent political movement, but rather a coalitional and multifaceted group of individuals. Nor was this

¹⁵ Kimberly Springer, “Black Feminist Organizations and the Emergence of Interstitial Politics” in *Queer History*, edited by Allida M. Black, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 181.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid., 190.

incipient movement limited to political activism, and so should not be conceptualized exclusively as such. Rather, politics overlapped with the formation of a cultural community identity, as the events surrounding the Stonewall raid, riots, and the first gay pride march in New York City in 1970 demonstrate. As Martin Duberman describes, gay men and lesbian women came together in small groups to carry out both political protest, and simply to meet and share ideas on the cultural and political situation of the GLBTQ community, whether in an organized manner or not.¹⁸ More often than not, a sense of community and common identity developed through informal meetings and informal settings, as notable gay bars and restaurants became sites for forming friendships and political allies.¹⁹ Gradually, gay men and lesbian women began to form their own (sub)culture, which was particularly strong in New York and San Francisco, but which was also taking shape in Cincinnati. When New York City police carried out a raid on the Stonewall bar in 1969, it proved to be a combination of timing and community activism that turned into several days of riots and a new, invigorated gay and lesbian movement. In this way, a community identity forged through socialization and common political goals ignited both an immediate political protest, as well as a more long-term cultural and political movement. Most importantly, a variety of groups, especially those within the Stonewall clientele and everyone from “dykes” to “queens” came together to protest police raids on gay bars, social persecution, and political harassment.²⁰ It was the beginning of a true GLBTQ movement with common goals and a multifaceted though coherent identity. Members of this community conceived of themselves along the lines of their individual traits such as “a black person, a woman, and a lesbian,” but envisioned a “classless society in which [they] would no longer be excluded and

¹⁸ Martin Duberman, *Stonewall*, New York: Penguin, 81-82.

¹⁹ Ibid., 82-84.

²⁰ Ibid., 196-198.

forced to choose among [their] several identities.”²¹ Thus, the underlying idea of a fundamentally tolerant and open society dominated many in the GLBTQ community’s consciousness and spurred them to political action on behalf of this self-conceptualization and cultural vision.

Politicizing the Movement

The Cold War and civil rights-era aspects of the GLBTQ movement discussed above exemplify the kind of broader politicization the movement underwent as it moved into the 1970s and 1980s and actually began to form around certain ideas and goals as a real socio-political movement. It is quite possible that “gay liberation never thought of itself as a civil rights movement,” but it most certainly did exist as a social and political struggle, especially as the GLBTQ community was catalyzed by and coalesced around the events at the Stonewall bar in 1969 and its aftermath. In fact, new “militant” gay and lesbians groups (whether formal or informal) emerged from “New Left movements” that had been “radicalized by their experience in black and student organizations.”²² The GLBTQ groups, organizations, and movements of the 1970s thus borrowed directly from earlier protest movements. The 1970s and 1980s became an important era of transformation for the GLBTQ movement because during this time the movement became increasingly organized and politicized in the face of a rising tide of reactionary “New Right” organizations. For gay men and lesbian women, the 1970s became a period of developing and realizing concrete goals, particularly insofar as they represented opposition to the cultural norm, especially in conservative Cincinnati. In response to the growing visibility of the GLBTQ community, and especially its activists, they faced cultural and political

²¹ Ibid., 92.

²² Barry Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 132.

opposition from “pro-family” groups that sought to re-marginalize or curtail this rising activism.

Such political and social conservatives have viewed gay life, lesbian culture, and the GLBTQ identity have essentially as both a social and political countercurrent for decades. More traditional and conservative citizens and politicians usually take issue over the public morality aspect of the idea of homosexuality, “practicing” homosexuals, or the trending acceptance of homosexuals by the larger population in particular. Citizens for Community Values, which has been active in curtailing the acceptance of the GLBTQ community and their rights since 1983, has asserted and continues to assert on their website that there are “inherent dangers of the homosexual activists’ agenda — dangers both to society and to the individual.”²³ This battle over private morality in a public space was demonstrated concretely by the controversy at the Cincinnati Contemporary Arts Center over the exhibition of photography by the sometimes controversial Roger Mapplethorpe.

The Mapplethorpe Case

On April 8, 1990, a grand jury indicted the director of the center, Dennis Barrie for using minors in pornography and for “pandering” illicit works because he displayed the Mapplethorpe exhibit. Just as government officials has feared the “subversion” of homosexuals in the State Department during the Cold War, in the 1990s in Cincinnati, authorities feared the moral subversion created by the Mapplethorpe exhibition. The sheriff’s office and the Cincinnati police even closed the center in order to videotape the photography exhibition for evidence. The shut-down of the arts center, however, drew over 1,000 protestors, advocates of free speech, and friends of the GLBTQ community who disagreed with the pursuit of the case by the prosecutor’s

²³ “Where Do We Stand?”, Citizens for Community Values, <http://www.ccv.org/issues/homosexuality/where-do-we-stand/>, accessed November 29, 2011.

and sheriff's offices (the latter of which was then headed by the notoriously conservative Simon Leis).²⁴ A week later, the county prosecutor handed off the case to the City Solicitor, but many in city government, including the mayor, asserted that the case and its transfer to the city was unnecessary and indicative of the prosecutors' inability to win the obscenity case.²⁵ These events demonstrate that many within Cincinnati and its government agreed with the assertion that the exhibition of the photos was a matter of free speech, regardless of whether the prosecutor's office would try to find it obscene. The museum and its director were eventually acquitted, and the results of the trial were hailed by those involved as victories for free speech and for the freedom of expression through art, as well as the public's right to view such art.

Thus, although largely a case of free speech, the art museum's Mapplethorpe trial also represents a contemporary landmark in the history of the GLBTQ community. The prosecutors' offices essentially embarked on a crusade to sanitize public morality, which they viewed as improper for tolerating the exhibition of "pornographic" artworks and artworks involving homosexual acts. Almost every time the controversy was reported, the newspaper articles at the time mentioned both the pornographic and the *homosexual* nature of the photographs. As opposed to the 1950s, when homosexuals were ostracized and persecuted as "subversives," by the 1990s, the rallying point for opposition to the GLBTQ community had become issues of public morality and "decency." At the heart of the controversy in Cincinnati was the issue of a public display of homosexuality in a city noted for being rather conservative. The victory for the museum, then, also represented a victory for the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati, because the alternative would have meant another defeat for acceptance, openness, and tolerance in the city. The Mapplethorpe controversy proved indirectly that the prosecutor's and sheriff's offices

²⁴ Isabel Wilkerson, "Cincinnati Gallery Indicted in Mapplethorpe Furor," *New York Times*, April 8, 1990.

²⁵ "County and City at Odds in Mapplethorpe Case in Cincinnati," *The New York Times*, April 15, 1990.

were not allowed to legislate morality and to impose upon an unwilling public their definition of obscenity. In this way, protest, free speech, and to a degree homosexual identity were tied together in a public way in the Cincinnati civic sphere through the ideas of “moral subversion.”

The Battle over Issue 3

In the context of the increasingly political GLBTQ movement of the 1980s and 1990s, and similar to the civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, GLBTQ groups began to organize themselves to achieve equality in the legal sphere. In the 1980s, gay and lesbian organizations advocated for the passage of more expansive civil rights legislation to protect themselves from discrimination, but they were often met with opposition. Such was the case when Houston voters repealed a 1992 civil rights ordinance favorable to homosexuals amidst an politicized AIDS scare.²⁶ A similar situation occurred in Cincinnati. In November of 1992, the City Council passed an ordinance that prohibited “private discrimination in employment, housing or accommodation because of sexual orientation.” But only a year later, after being harangued by the conservative group Citizens for Community Values and its most prominent advocate Phil Burress, Cincinnati voters adopted the charter amendment Issue 3 (which then became Article XII). This amendment prohibited “municipal protections based on gay, lesbian or bisexual ‘orientation, conduct, status or relationship.” A lengthy battle in the courts followed, as members of the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati and their allies changed the legality of the charter amendment, which U.S. district judge S. Arthur Spiegel struck down as unconstitutional. The Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals then overturned Judge Spiegel’s ruling, but in the meantime the City Council simply voted to remove the protections based on sexual orientation from the

²⁶ Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 133.

Human Rights Ordinance. Eventually, after further review by the Sixth Circuit and a refusal to review the case by the Supreme Court, the Issue 3 charter amendment stood.²⁷ Indeed, Article XII was law until Cincinnati voters finally repealed it in 2004 and City Council more or less reinstated the previous protection ordinance in 2006.²⁸

The tensions over Issue 3/Article XII clearly reflected a development in the larger political culture in Cincinnati in the 1990s: the New Right of the 1980s had organized and emerged victorious with the passage of Issue 3 and the prohibition of special protections for the GLBTQ community.²⁹ Moreover, the passage of the initial Human Rights Ordinance in 1992 demonstrated a level of organization within the GLBTQ community in a manner similar to that of the civil rights movements of the 1960s. The tensions over the ordinance indicated an on-going struggle in Cincinnati over the status of the GLBTQ community in an increasingly tolerant and open society vis-à-vis the 1970s. As Suzanne Goldberg, one of the lawyers who challenged Issue 3, claimed in 1998, “This is not the end of the battle over Issue 3,” and indeed the battle did continue in the public arena in the ensuing decade.³⁰ But the battle over Article XII also damaged the morale of the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati. In the *Greater Cincinnati GLBT News*, Bruce Beisner wrote that the passage of Issue 3 “had a chilling effect on the local Gay and Lesbian community activism.” Although some small GLBTQ events were held from 1996 to 1999, by and large Issue 3 stunted what until then had been a growing movement.³¹ Although the exact meaning of the wording of Article XII was debated inside the courthouse, outside of it, the amendment impeded the goals of the GLBTQ community and the equality movement in

²⁷ “Amendment Chronology,” Cincinnati Enquirer, October 14, 1998.

²⁸ Eric Resnick, “Cincinnati passes LGBT human rights ordinance,” *Gay People’s Chronicles*, March 17, 2006.

²⁹ Linda Greenhouse, “Justices Leave Intact Anti-Gay Measure,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1998, A-19.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Bruce Beisner, “Cincinnati’s First Pride Parade,” *Greater Cincinnati GLBT News*, May 2003. Provided via cincyglbt.com and email by Michael Chanak.

Cincinnati, as well as curtailed the formation of the identity of this community.

The Beginning of Gay Pride in Cincinnati

These political firestorms, however, did not simply manufacture themselves in a vacuum in Cincinnati. Rather, they were the product of decades of buildup of the GLBTQ movement as both a cultural and political idea. “Gay Pride” in Cincinnati started as a march and a rally; it was a protest against inequality and discrimination that drew on the model of the civil rights movements of the 1960s, built off of the nation-wide unrest of the 1970s, and eventually generated its own socio-political movement in the 1980s. The gay pride movement in Cincinnati began in the early 1970s, and attempted to build off of the controversy and success of the Stonewall riots and New York City Pride. A small group of dedicated activists in the early gay and lesbian movement organized the Cincinnati Gay Community (CGC) in 1972. The CGC began drawing activists from around Cincinnati, most notably from the University of Cincinnati. Their early organization resulted in the first pride celebration in Cincinnati from April 6 to 8, 1973, which culminated in a parade through downtown to Fountain Square. Terry Flanigan, one of the founding members of the CGC, “recalled that ‘there was much heckling along the route’” of the parade of 1973, and that only a small local team from Channel 9 covered the story.³² The 1973 pride parade and the events surrounding it emulated the beginnings of pride in New York after the Stonewall riots. Cincinnati pride started as a vanguard movement intent on making itself seen and heard, as well as battling the stigmas attached to the GLBTQ community.

After the 1973 parade, the CGC quickly disintegrated, and pride fell by the wayside until it was revived in 1978 by the Greater Cincinnati Gay Coalition (GCGC). The 1978 revival

³² Ibid.

was met with opposition from both conservative activists and even the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. The June 19, 1979 report on the upcoming pride festival of June 30 was more concerned with making mayor Bobbie Sterne's actions look impolitic because she recognized gay rights day, but did not issue a similar proclamation about the anti-abortion, right to life day the previous year.³³ In the aftermath of the pride parade of June 30, 1979, the *Enquirer* ran two large front-page photos above the fold that demonstrated the heated exchanges caused by the parade and the rally at Fountain Square. L. Robert McNee of Cincinnati's Metropolitan Community Church engaged in arguments with both Kenneth Wells, a Baptist Preacher, and Tom Craner, an "self-avowed Christian."³⁴ Thus, most of the controversy surrounding the first major pride that was reported on in 1979 involved religious beliefs and a very public exchange of ideas in a public civic space, just as the black, lesbian, feminist civil rights movement had done decades earlier. GLBTQ marchers in the parade were not just "marching," but rather demanding better treatment for members of their community, and more broadly, for the acceptance of the stigmatized homosexual population in a public exchange of ideas, particularly with the pro-GLBTQ speeches that followed the march's arrival at Fountain Square.³⁵

The nascent GLBTQ movement in Cincinnati did indeed largely grow out of, or at the very least draw from the liberation culture of the 1970s. Phebe Beiser, a lesbian activist during the 1970s and 1980s and today one of the archivists at the Ohio Lesbian Archives in Clifton, said that "the real 'l-word' in the 1970s" was not "lesbian," but rather "liberation." For Beiser, the GLBTQ movement in Cincinnati began underground (as it had in New York), almost as if gays and lesbians were a subset of a larger, "alternative" or "hippie" culture.³⁶ Early on, especially

³³ Kathy Kishman, "Sterne Faces Criticism for Gay Pride Day," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 19, 1979, C-3.

³⁴ "Point-Counterpoint," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 1, 1979.

³⁵ Joye Cunningham, "Speakers Mark Gay Pride Day on Square," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, July 1, 1979, B-5.

³⁶ Personal interview with Phebe Beiser, Clifton United Methodist Church - The Ohio Lesbian Archives, November 17, 2011.

in the lesbian feminist liberation movement in Cincinnati, the community was defined by informal meetings at bars and bookstores, such as the Crazy Ladies Bookstore in Clifton. Similar to Martin Duberman's assessment of the beginning of New York City pride, the emphasis in Cincinnati was on a common need for support, networking, and finding a niche with like-minded people, as opposed to organizing a political movement.³⁷ Nonetheless, according to Beiser there was "a hunger to get involved...to 'come out' and meet people [i.e., fellow members of the GLBTQ community]". She attended the early pride parades indeed "to make a good showing of people for the news."³⁸ Beiser was clearly concerned with both her personal place within the Cincinnati GLBTQ community in Cincinnati, as well as the image of the community within the city. On the one hand, Beiser asserted that in the 1970s she could be social among lesbian groups without being political. On the other hand, she admitted that even events among the GLBTQ community that did not seem political, such as a concert, did in fact have political connotations. Thus, Phebe Beiser demonstrates that even the early and somewhat unformed GLBTQ community in Cincinnati was necessarily both a social and political movement about personal and group identity.

The gay pride celebration in Cincinnati thus began mostly as a protest movement, having grown out of the counter-cultural waves of the 1960s and 1970s, and having manifested itself in a public celebration within the culture of the street and public exposure. Robert Orsi's investigation into the "problem of the dark-skinned other in Italian Harlem" provides a useful analogy for this phenomenon of community identity formation and the maintenance of this identity. As Orsi argues, "Each of northern Mannhattans' peoples defined themselves *against* a racial other whom they declared themselves not to be" (my emphasis). Italians did not want to be

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

seen as blacks, who did not want to be seen as Puerto Ricans, who did not want to be seen as either of the previous two groups.³⁹ In many ways, this is how the GLBTQ defined itself, at least initially: if one were to be a member of the GLTBQ community, one was then *not* a member of “straight” society — the cultures were mutually exclusive. Orsi asserts that “Italian-American identity meant denying the proximity of the too proximate racial other,” and so the Italians’ response to this racial other (i.e., Puerto Ricans) was to maintain the inferiority of the other, as well as to maintain current cultural traditions , such as the street *festa*, which set the Italians apart and made them unique.⁴⁰ Although the GLBTQ community did not and could not deny the proximity of a pervasive straight society, straight society did often deny the proximity of the GLBTQ community. Moreover, the GLBTQ community did create and maintain unique “cultural” traditions such as the pride parade that fostered and promoted a common and unique identity against the backdrop of straight society, and also often with the intent of effecting political change. Just as the Italian community identity played itself out and expressed itself most vehemently through street culture and celebrations, so too did this identity among the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati find expression in the street, but through the markedly different event of the pride parade, along with various rallies and political protests.

The years 1980 and 1981 represented a greater challenge to the incipient GLBTQ pride protest movement and community identity. In 1980, then-mayor Ken Blackwell refused to issue a proclamation declaring June 22 as Lesbian-Gay Pride Day, which, like Bobbie Sterne’s similar lack of support for pro-life day, created tensions with the GLBTQ community.⁴¹ Coverage of this refusal of a proclamation was the only news article that appeared in the major Cincinnati dailies

³⁹ Robert Orsi, “The Religious Boundaries of an Inbetween People: Street Feste and the Problem of the Dark-Skinned Other in Italian Harlem.” *American Quarterly* 44:3, 321.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 329-330.

⁴¹ “Lesbian-Gay Pride Day Refused,” *Cincinnati Post*, June 23, 1980.

about the gay pride march at that time, indicating that some of the acceptance of the 1978 and 1979 parades had been lost. More conservative forces had taken the helm in city government, as David Mann's lack of a proclamation also indicated in 1981.⁴² Pride nonetheless continued, doubling its numbers as compared to those of a decade ago, and speakers continued to be one of the main draws at the rally after the parade in Fountain Square, including city council candidate Joshua Moore, who promised to run a government based not only on equal treatment for gays and lesbians, but also ran on a platform of employment, anti-poverty, and housing programs.⁴³ In 1985, the headline was "solidarity" in response to Mayor Charles Luken's refusal to issue a proclamation about lesbian-gay pride day, following the examples of Blackwell and Mann. But by 1985, the parade had grown to 200 supporters and sympathizers, including seventeen different GLBTQ organizations. According to the *Enquirer*, the parade ended in a "rally" at city hall that involved "picketing" of the building in protest of Mayor Luken's refusal to issue the proclamation. Michael Chanak, a long-time active member of Cincinnati's GLBTQ community, described the parades of the 1980s as "street drama[s]" that "had an urgency and expectancy to them."⁴⁴ Moreover, the GLBTQ community performed in a public space "in costume and waving rainbow banners."⁴⁵ Clearly, by the mid-1980s, the pride parade had become a significant annual event, and the necessary accompanying rally/protest was a cornerstone of the movement and a centerpiece of the display of the GLBTQ community. The pride movement in Cincinnati thus came to embody more strongly the characteristics of the early protests of Frank Kameny and the Mattachine Society of New York, the black civil rights movement, and the communal

⁴² Kathleen Haddad, "Gay Lesbian Pride Day Snubbed By City Hall, Draws 150 Downtown," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 29, 1981, D-2.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Personal interview with Michael Chanak, the Gay and Lesbian Community Center in Northside, November 11, 2011.

⁴⁵ Kimberly Crockett, "'Pride Day' Emphasizes Gay Solidarity," *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 9, 1985, B-4.

cultural identity described by Martin Duberman above. The pride parade in Cincinnati was simultaneously about protesting anti-gay political actions in an organized and traditional way, and about garnering visibility for the cause and acceptance of the GLBTQ community through a confrontational display of behavior in a public space.

As the 1980s progressed, the *Cincinnati Enquirer* began to publish articles about the parade simply as an annual event, with entertainment details about its planned concerts and rallies.⁴⁶ To the organizers of the parade (i.e., the Greater Cincinnati Gay and Lesbian Coalition), the public rally meshed perfectly with musical guests, AIDS education, and political protest. By the early 1990s, support for the event had grown from small beginnings to a full-fledged movement within Cincinnati. In 1993, the pride parade had grown to an estimated 700 people, and garnered a second-page Metro article. According to marchers that year, “it was important to be there to be seen and to be heard,” and to remind Cincinnati that members of the GLBTQ community “are not different from anyone else.”⁴⁷ Thus, the focus of members of the movement had grown from political protest to include the goal of creating visibility for themselves and their community, and asserting their membership in the broader Cincinnati society.

Lesbian-gay pride day thus more or less reached an apex before the derailment of the event and the movement after the passage of Issue 3. With the passage of Issue 3, however, news coverage of the lesbian-gay pride parade dwindled to a smattering of stories. In the aftermath of Issue 3, the parade almost ceased to exist, or at the very least went underground. Michael Chanak asserted that pride “ground to halt” after the passage of Issue 3, and that the “Aware on the Square” events held in Fountain Square during the late 1990s after Article XII became

⁴⁶ “Gay Pride Week set; concert, rally planned,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 4, 1990, A-8.

⁴⁷ Jane Prendergast, “700 march to Fountain Square to celebrate gay, lesbian pride,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 13, 1993, B-2.

law were “a joke.”⁴⁸ Phebe Beiser concurred with this assessment when she observed that in the wake of Issue 3, many in the GLBTQ community were “burned out” from years of activism that did not result in progress, and subsequently withdrew from public political life.⁴⁹ This burnout and withdrawal thus fractionalized and marginalized the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati, as well as diminished the significance of the public event of pride.

Pride: Return and Renewal

When the pride parade returned in 2000 after a four-year hiatus, it had a distinctively different air about it, marked by some degree of earlier political protest, but also much more focused on the public celebration of the identity of a community. According to Chanak, the gay attorneys in charge of fighting Issue 3 were quietly urging the more “rag-tag” activists of the GLBTQ community to “tone down” their protest while they took care of the situation in the courts. The community was divided to some degree over how to pursue and continue the movement of the past several decades in light of the recent events at city hall and the amendment to the charter. Some activists refused to sit by, however, and after a four-year interlude Chris Good, along with Michael Chanak and an independent committee, organized a “rally” at Burnet Woods Park and a “parade” through Northside that culminated in a “festival” at Hoffner Park on June 11, 2000.⁵⁰ That year, Good described the return of the parade as fulfilling “a need for visibility,” and Chanak agreed with him, declaring that it was “time we started coming out in the light of day again.”⁵¹ The GLBTQ pride parade returned in 2000 essentially as a visibility movement instead of a protest movement, as it moved away from its civil rights origins and

⁴⁸ Personal interview with Michael Chanak.

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Phebe Beiser.

⁵⁰ Personal interview and correspondence with Michael Chanak, November 11, 2011.

⁵¹ “Gay Pride Parade will return in June,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 3, 2000.

towards the formation of the cultural identity of a community within the broader society of Cincinnati. The reporting about the event and the attitudes toward it were much more focused on raising awareness and countering the negative press the GLBTQ community had received in previous years, especially in the form of the Issue 3 controversy, than in political demonstrations against a particular idea, such as the Mapplethorpe controversy or Article XII.

The *Cincinnati Enquirer* also reported that the parade had been moved to Northside because of its “‘friendlier’ locale.”⁵² Phebe Beiser recalled that she herself moved to Northside in 1990 in part because it was known as an up-and-coming gay-friendly neighborhood in Cincinnati.⁵³ Since Northside was known as a gay-friendly area, it was chosen by the parade organizers in 2000 as a more worthwhile and useful location for the event than downtown, where the parade and its sister events had been held from 1973 to 1999. In the 2000s, the pride parade no longer embodied a picket or a protest, as the Mattachine Society had done in Washington, or even as GLBTQ activists in Cincinnati had done fifteen years earlier. In these ways, the return of the pride parade in 2000 represented a revival and a redefinition of the Cincinnati GLBTQ community’s major annual event, as well as the strengthening of the particular identity of the Northside community.

The pride parade certainly met its goals of visibility in 2000, since over 1,500 people marched in or watched the parade that year, and the return of pride caused a flurry of reporting in 2000 and 2001.⁵⁴ In fact, on the weekend of pride in 2000, the *Enquirer* featured an in-depth article about the increasing acceptance of the gay rights movement and the GLBTQ community, as well as the fact that Northside had become more or less the locus of gay life in Cincinnati. The article featured a bevy of positive news for the GLBTQ community, including the creation

⁵² “Gay Pride Parade will return in June,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 3, 2000.

⁵³ Personal interview with Phebe Beiser.

⁵⁴ Ellen Lord, “1,500 celebrate Gay Pride,” *Cincinnati Post*, June 12, 2000.

of a welcoming statement by Xavier University for gays and lesbians there. The articles also featured a brief interview with Jeff Thomas, a resident of Cincinnati who reminded readers that ““The black community didn’t get anywhere without the white community [in the civil rights movement and] the only way we’re going to evolve is to have to help, too.”” According to the *Enquirer*, Thomas epitomized the new kind of awareness and acceptance of the GLBTQ community among the larger Cincinnati community. In fact, with the renewal of the parade in 2000, grassroots and corporate support from the Cincinnati community materialized, including a sponsorship from Procter and Gamble. Thus, pride came to focus primarily on visibility, support from the community, and the repeal of Issue 3, which had created a difficult atmosphere for GLBTQ people in the city in recent years.⁵⁵ The return of the pride parade was clearly the result of several dedicated individuals, but also benefited from an increase in tolerance and acceptance of the GLBTQ community on a national level. The parade both enjoyed the benefits of an increasingly liberalized society in the early 2000s and fostered this kind of acceptance.

After Chris Good brought the parade back in 2000, Ken Colgrove along with an independent committee took over its organization in its new home of Northside from 2001 through 2004, when the parade was transformed into a two-day event on a weekend in June. After the 2004 pride parade and until 2009, the Center in Northside took the helm and organized the Burnet Woods Rally and the parade through Northside, including fundraising and obtaining permits from the city. As the *Enquirer* proclaimed to readers in 2004, for its fifth annual event since its return, “gay pride” was “on the march” through Northside, supported by the larger community.⁵⁶ The article and its analysis demonstrated how pride in Cincinnati had grown since its inception during the counter-cultural protest movements of the 1970s and the

⁵⁵ “Gay: Rights movement sees more acceptance,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 11, 2000.

⁵⁶ Maggie Downs, “Gay pride goes on the march,” *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 14, 2004.

politicization of the 1980s. In the article, the aims of the parade as asserted by both participants and the newspapers were aims of “visibility.”⁵⁷ Thus, by the mid-2000s, pride had recaptured its importance as an event in Cincinnati, and was still called a “march,” but its aims had moved definitely away from the political protest of Article XII (which by then had been repealed), and towards visibility and acceptance.

Conclusions

These ideas of visibility and acceptance would come to define the conceptualization of the pride parade throughout the 2000s. The very fact that pride was reported on as its own weekend event speaks volumes to the larger community’s acceptance of such a movement and the presence of the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati. Moreover, with the repeal of Article XII, the Cincinnati community defined its increased acceptance of the GLBTQ community in a concrete way. However, this increasing acceptance and success (i.e., normalization) of the GLBTQ movement have led to a slight unraveling of the movement. Since the days of open persecution of homosexuals in the State Department, civil rights protest, and Article XII are past, in many ways the GLBTQ movement has lost a coherent rallying point and a focused political agenda. In some sense, this is indicative of the success of a larger movement that has been accepted into “mainstream” society. But in another sense, it represents a challenge to community identity. The community that for years has built its identity around the idea of a pride parade and a march of protest now struggles to create coherency out of what many see as “just another parade.”

On the one hand, the “consumable” nature of the “festival” in Northside and now

⁵⁷ Ibid.

downtown in recent years has broadened participation and attendance, and it also importantly represents a certain level of victory by the movement since its inception over forty years ago. One might even argue that this sort of continuing tradition of permanent visibility is what the movement had been working towards years ago, and activists such as Frank Kameny would be proud of where it has gone. On the other hand, this “consumable” and “festival-type” nature of the parade and even of the GLBTQ movement itself has allowed for the marginalization of the event in many ways, and is indicative of the ability either to consume it and move on, or to ignore it all together. Phebe Beiser has watched the parade both in Northside and downtown, but admits that it is more of a social outing for many people now.⁵⁸ Demonstrated in part by its move downtown in recent years, the pride parade has become just one more day on the calendar. Indeed, beginning in 2000 with the return of pride in Northside, the parade began to garner corporate sponsorship. But Michael Chanak asserted that this has become even more pronounced in the past two years with the parade downtown.⁵⁹ The event merits an article or two in the *Enquirer*, and then is often forgotten, while the very real problem of the bullying of gay and lesbian teens continues in schools across America. Echoing Michael Chanak, the days of “costuming,” “bells and whistles and bamboozles,” and heavily politicized marches have been replaced by a more broadly accepted, quotidian community. But this has occurred at the cost of making pride into merely a consumable festival, so much so that the major facets and goals of the “original” gay movement have been lost in many ways.⁶⁰

Thus, the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati now faces the dilemma that any relatively successful protest movement eventually does: once the movement achieves what it was fighting for or eliminates what it was fighting against, how can the movement continue to define itself in

⁵⁸ Personal interview with Phebe Beiser.

⁵⁹ Personal interview with Michael Chanak.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

a coherent and meaningful way? Cincinnati has witnessed a GLBTQ movement rise out of the countercultural trends of the New Left and the Stonewall movement of the early 1970s, but some within the Cincinnati community have fought successfully against the goals of this GLBTQ movement. Nonetheless, the GLBTQ community in Cincinnati, particularly through the pride parade, has achieved a certain political and cultural vision epitomized by the repeal of Article XII and the increased acceptance of the GLBTQ population in Cincinnati. But more importantly, the movement itself has transformed from a series of countercultural political protests in the 1970s to a parade of visibility today. This visibility has been a great benefit for the GLBTQ community, both in regards to the political victory over Article XII and the social victory of a more tolerant Cincinnati. Yet by and large today the GLBTQ community of Cincinnati, like many similar communities in cities across the United States, now struggles to define itself, its vision, and even its identity. The GLBTQ community has always been a multifaceted and diverse one. Perhaps with a sense of this diverse history both on the micro and macro level it will be able to face the increasing social challenges of the twenty-first century in a constructive way as a coherent and united community.

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