

And in other spheres of life physical beauty and sexual versatility can still be rewarded with access to the private domains of the wealthy and powerful. The history of the minions and favorites reveals the erotic undercurrents beneath the surface of political life that could direct the tide which led some on to fortune, others only to disappointment and death.

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### MINORITY, HOMOSEXUALS AS A

In the 1970s some U.S. gay leaders began to speak confidently of gay men and lesbians "emerging as a people"—a stable minority within an America made up of a mosaic of such groups. Apart from the problem of whether there is to be one people or two—homosexuals per se vs. gay men and lesbians—such claims raise serious conceptual, historical, and sociological issues.

*Historical Precedents and Parallels.* Minorities in the sense of an array of peoples ruled by a dominant group have existed at least since the formation of the Assyrian empire in the ninth century B.C. Yet as long as the rule of the *Herrenvolk* remained unchallenged, the status of the incorporated groups remained unproblematic. The question of ethnic minorities first attracted modern analysis in the Austro-Hungarian monarchy at the end of the nineteenth century, when the introduction of a parliamentary system had made the issue acute. In 1898 Georg Jellinek contrasted the older concept of a parliamentary minority, that is a fluid and changeable interest group, with the more fixed situation of the minority as an ethnic or religious collectivity, whose membership is determined not by the changing tides of political opinion but by loyalty to the community in which one was born.

To be sure this late nineteenth-century situation had parallels. The Ottoman Empire retained its *millet* system,

granting official recognition to what might be called national minorities, though these were organized on a religious basis. In the United Kingdom from 1707 onwards there were three subordinate entities: Wales, Ireland, and Scotland—the last possessing de jure, but not de facto, equality with England. Two characteristics seem essential in minorities of this general type: (1) they are communities of lineage or genealogy in the sense that a Romanian child is born of Romanian parents, a Welsh child of Welsh ones; and (2) each ethnic group has a territory which it occupies or occupied and which its members regard as their homeland, even if they reside, say, in Vienna or London.

The minority issue took on general European urgency when the representatives of the powers met in Paris in 1919 to redraw the map of Europe in the wake of World War I. The attempt to square logic with the principle of allocating the spoils to the victors led to many anomalies. In this atmosphere of the clash of conflicting rights, Kurt Hiller, the German left thinker and homosexual activist, conceived the idea of the sexual minority. In an address of September 19, 1921, he insisted that "human beings are marked not only by differences of race and character type, but also of . . . sexual orientation."

The coming of the world Depression in 1929 caused the issue to fall dormant, as economic problems dwarfed all else. In the 1940s in the United States, however, the second-class status of Negroes evoked increasing discussion and concern, which were to eventuate in the mass Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. As early as 1951, however, Donald Webster Cory (pseud. of Edward Sagarin) organized his widely read book *The Homosexual in America* around the idea of gay men and women as a minority who should be accorded their just rights. Cory and other leaders of the new homophile rights movement saw the opportunity of making a persuasive appeal to the traditional Anglo-Saxon virtue of fairness, while at the same

time allying themselves with a powerful emerging social movement.

*Changes in American Society.* During this period it was becoming all too evident that America could no longer sustain the "melting pot" myth of a society moving rapidly toward homogeneity. The process of assimilation predicted by such classic sociologists as Weber and Durkheim, as well as by the Marxists, was not preceding smoothly—and this continuing exceptionalism is not owing solely to lingering irrational discrimination. It was becoming apparent that minority resistance was sustained not merely by way of response to pressures from a nonaccepting society but by an internal sense of pride. In-group cohesiveness was becoming a function of a "quest for community," a felt need for intermediate structures between the atomized individual, on the one hand, and the universal institutions of the State, on the other. Alongside assimilation (which some groups were still experiencing) arose the "deassimilation" of groups that consciously rejected the supposed imperatives of the melting pot.

Once the cause of blacks had been taken up by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, other groups, first Hispanics then white ethnics, came forward to demand their place in the sun. With a few exceptions the new "unmeltable ethnics" differed from earlier groups in other countries, in that they were usually not territorial (though a few idealistic individuals were heard to voice a demand for a black homeland). Some of the newly recognized ethnic groups have little salience, that is to say they are on the way to being assimilated (Armenian-Americans) or largely have been (German-Americans). For many, ethnic consciousness lingers only in street fairs and such events as the annual marches on Fifth Avenue in New York City (which include a gay/lesbian one on the last Sunday in June).

Nonetheless, these social movements generated an academic counterpart in the form of ethnic studies in the univer-

sities. Some came to cherish a vision of a rainbow nation, in which most citizens would be bicultural. This exaltation of pluralism implicitly discounts the still-ongoing counterprocesses of amalgamation and homogenization—as shown by the fact that many recent immigrants and their children do wish simply to "be American." It is highly significant that homosexuality has not been admitted within the discourse of ethnicity, though (illogically) women's studies sometimes are. One can search through vast bibliographies of American minorities without finding a single reference to gay men and lesbians.

*Problems of Treating Homosexuals as a Minority.* While this exclusion may to some extent reflect prejudice and academic rigidity, it is also supported by real differences. In the personal process of psychoindividuation, homosexuals generally achieve self-awareness in defiance of the norms and counsels of the family. By contrast, among ethnic groups the family is the incubator for group consciousness and a refuge from the intolerance of the majority. Another difference is that homosexuals can "pass" more easily than most, which they tend to do in the belief (true or not) that in this way they are perceived like anyone else. Another key point is that homosexuals never constituted an ethnic group with contiguous territory, state formations, a distinctive language, and the like. Paradoxically, homosexuals do not rank as a minority in the usual sense because they were *always* a minority, usually unrecognized as such (there having been, until recently, no concept of sexual orientation as distinct from overt behavior). Lastly, the (ethnic) minority is typically a group that has immigrated into a country far more recently than the majority which claims to be autochthonous and resents the "self-invited guests" who have "disrupted its unity." This situation has no parallel with the distinctiveness of the homosexual group, which is disenfranchised for quite different reasons.

Still if one examines such indicators as residential enclaves ("gay ghettos"), self-help groups, religious organizations, travel guides, and distinctive taste preferences, homosexuals do indeed qualify—perhaps more than most groups. How many American ethnic entities can count as many bookstores, for example, as gays and lesbians? Another feature is the sense of identity and shared fate with homosexuals in other countries, cultures, and political and social systems—together with the emergence of gay subcultures modeled on the American one throughout the non-Communist world. With minimal social skills a foreign homosexual can pick up partners in a bar, bath, or cruising area. This facility suggests another paradoxical concept: that of a transnational minority.

The idea of homosexuals as a minority has obvious appeal to would-be political leaders as an organizing tool. But it also meets resistance from the rank and file who reject the role of "professional gays." Moreover, the concept of homosexual identity is of recent origin, and it may not last. As yet unmeasured is the impact of the social construction theory of historical development, which denies the stability of the homosexual orientation. To put it most sharply, if there are no homosexuals, they cannot be organized—as a minority or anything else. Then again, to the middle class, "minority" usually connotes underprivileged, oppressed, persecuted people, not members of a group who may on average be wealthier, more educated, and more intelligent than the majority in the given country. The affluent homosexual can retreat into a world of private clubs, social groups, and exclusive institutions invisible to the larger society. Thus the concept of homosexuals as a minority may appeal rather to the two extremes—street people and gay leaders—while having little to offer to the mass of homosexuals in between. While in principle the matter of political practicality should be separated from the epistemological question of whether homosexuals

are a minority, in real life the two are closely related.

In recent years the magnitude of the overall minority question has been recognized not only in the United States, but in such European countries as Britain, France, and Germany, where populations are changing. World demographic shifts and new migration patterns are likely to make the minority concept even more complex, while the place of homosexuals within it will remain scarcely less problematic.

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### MISHIMA YUKIO (1925–1970)

Japanese writer of fiction, drama, and essays. Born in Tokyo as Hiraoka Kimitake, the son of a government official and grandson of a former governor of Karafuto (now southern Sakhalin), he preferred to emphasize his descent from the family of his paternal grandmother, which belonged to the upper samurai class. He attended the Peers' School, where non-aristocrats were often treated as outsiders, and where Spartan discipline prepared young men to be soldiers rather than poets. A story entitled "The Boy Who Wrote Poetry" has strong autobiographical elements stemming from this period of his life, and describes the boy's fascination with words.

Mishima's mentors at the Peers' School not only encouraged him to study the Japanese classics but brought him into contact with the Nipponese Romanticists, a group of intellectuals who stressed the uniqueness of the Japanese people and their history. His later devotion to Japanese tradition, however, was tempered by fascination with the West. As a student he was much taken with the essays of Oscar Wilde, and even after war broke out with Great Britain and the United States, Mishima