THE 1980S: OUTING BY AIDS

In the eighties Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome unexpectedly became the outer. The stigma attached to it reduced the coming out of American males from the feverish pace of the previous decade. AIDS, ARC, and HIV-positive status, on the other hand, outing more homosexual men than any single agent had in all previous history and more than all others together ever had. More than 100,000 have died in the United States alone since 1981. By 1992 more than 1,000,000 Americans were infected. Globally more than 1,000,000 have died and ten to twenty million are infected, mostly in underdeveloped countries too poor even to test, much less to treat or succour the victims. By the early years of the next century the toll will exceed that of the Black Death, the greatest scourge in history. A Hindu religious leader even warned his followers that two-thirds of the human race will die of AIDS--but unlike Catholic theologians sensibly instructed his flock to use condoms.

AIDS, long perceived, even by the "responsible" media as the "gay disease," may have come from East Africa, although the indigenous variety spreads mainly through heterosexual intimacy. First discovered among gay men in California and New York, the
illness rapidly spread to IV-drug users, hemophiliacs, and recipients of blood transfusions. 
Fetuses became infected in their mothers' wombs. The various levels of government and the 
medical profession in general were both crippled by Reagan's budgetary cuts, which coincided 
with the plague's onset. The establishment was not ready for a wholly new disease unknown 
even to tropical medicine. Third World countries, where at first it spread more slowly, 
overwhelmed as they were by debt and falling commodity prices stood completely helpless. The 
media long paid little heed, maintaining a virtual blackout. Even gay leaders with few 
exceptions defended life as usual and the recently won sexual freedoms--helping keep baths and 
backrooms open--while the plague relentlessly spread.

Almost alone, Larry Kramer of Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC), founded in 1981 in New 
York, argued indefatigably and at times shrilly, even obnoxiously that the volunteer efforts of 
such groups would be inadequate to stem the plague. Instead of concentrating on helping the 
afflicted--a task beyond their meager resources--gay leaders should, he argued, become more 
political. They had to pressure the government, which alone could provide adequate funding. 
The small clusters of concerned, in fact consternated physicians in New York, San Francisco, 
Paris, Copenhagen, and Harvard, some of whom made contact with certain activists, could also 
achieve little headway against the massive ignorance, indifference, and homophobia, as the 
journalist Randy Shilts brilliantly analyzed in his columns in
the *San Francisco Chronicle*, on which his best-selling *And the Band Played On* (1987) was based.

As time passed without adequate response, the frustrations and feelings of rejection and alienation turned to desperation and rage. Such emotions led activists to ACT UP [AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power] and its single-issue focus. ACT UP spread as far as Australia and Italy, growing exponentially with its slogan "SILENCE = DEATH." Its supporters revived the tactics, if not the ideology, of the late 1960s: confrontation, guerrilla theatre, sit-ins, non-violent civil disobedience. Above all, its grievance against the establishment for failure of leadership and want of decisive action paralleled the indictment of normative culture by the radicals of 1969. But only its heir, Queer Nation, a multi-issue group that broke off from ACT UP early in 1990, was to give a theoretical backing and an institutional basis for outing.

More people were outed in the 80s than came out during the ebullient 70s. But the main agent of their outing was not police action or newspaper exposés. It was the HIV virus. Just as syphilis and other venereal diseases had previously outed the sexually uninhibited (in spite of all the talk about getting the germs from toilet seats), AIDS outed even the rich and celebrated. Neither connections nor the best therapeutic procedures could help the most fortunate once they were infected. Never before had so many been outed so quickly and so brutally.

There is a crucial distinction. Unlike ordinary folk, many
of whom came out on their own, celebrities had to be outed--either by AIDS or by threat of actual suit. Not a single prestige-laden queer American (except a handful of intellectuals and entertainment figures) has ever--even now--come out on his own. AIDS outed Rock Hudson in his final months and Liberace after his death. Tom Selleck, the television and film actor, sued those who outed him and won his case. Others in public life, including Congressmen Studds, outed by former partners, and Barney Frank, on the verge of being denounced by a hustler whom he had kept, were both reelected, breaking an old tradition. In spite of this climate of opinion which lessened the penalties imposed upon those who came out or were outed, it was not until the very end of the decade that desperate, frustrated activists, often with the HIV virus in their own bodies, decided to out our reluctant superstars.

During the 1970s, it became clear that the American gay model had arrived in all advanced industrial countries (and even to some extent in the so-called Third World). Surging forward in the industrialized nations, gay liberation lagged behind in fundamentalist Islamic societies as well as in hard-line Stalinist countries. In spite of the Latino cult of machismo, the movement nevertheless seemed to have become self-sustaining even south of the Rio Grande. This American model might interact fruitfully with all national cultures, while the United States would stride happily beyond its past achievements. Alas, this optimistic scenario was not to be played out--at least not
without our first undergoing some travail in the slough of despair. A conservative reaction that had begun in the late seventies swept America while AIDS began to decimate our ranks. The "gay plague" bolstered the arguments of homophobes and made fundamentalist bigots rejoice at this token of God's wrath.

**AIDS and Reagan**

Two major processes acting in combination changed North America. Ronald Reagan's election victory in 1980 wrote finis to the radical wave. Far more important was the onset of AIDS, tragically identified as the gay disease. Although Reagan's ideology proved to be less damaging than had been anticipated, his budget cuts proved much more destructive because they crippled the national health machinery just when it needed to make a massive response to the plague. The gay political community, which had placed most of its eggs in the left-liberal basket, found the neo-conservative climate trying. The beginning of the crisis augmented the apprehensions raised by the rightward shift of politics. The new disease, unnamed and unknown, first received public attention in 1981. An predictably paranoid reaction ensued. Calls were heard for the "quarantining" (including possible deportation) of homosexuals. The Catholic conservative intellectual and talk show host William F. Buckley (one of whose closest associates, Marvin Liebman, recently came out, but did not object at the time to Buckley's proposal) recommended branding on the buttocks those carrying the virus, presumably to deter them from luring active
partners into anal intercourse. Although in Africa AIDS is mainly transmitted heterosexually, it was first diagnosed in North America and Western Europe among homosexual men. Even physicians at first called it "Gay Related Immune Deficiency" (GRID). In this instance first impressions proved almost tragic. The media, like the government and the health establishment, largely ignored the subject, in sharp contrast to the spectacular coverage accorded the much less significant Legionnaire's Disease. By 1983, however, the statistics for the toll of the dead and infected documented a major crisis that no epidemiologist foreseeing its future spread could any longer deny. By 1985 the gay male communities of San Francisco, Los Angeles, and New York were being decimated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Half-year</th>
<th>Cases diagnosed</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
<th>Case-fatality rate</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before 1981</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>3083.5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1981 Jan.-June</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>3893.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>July-Dec.</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>8691.1</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982 Jan.-June</td>
<td>392</td>
<td>15390.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>July-Dec.</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>28289.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1983 Jan.-June</td>
<td>1,276</td>
<td>51992.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec.</td>
<td>1,639</td>
<td>92292.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984 Jan.-June</td>
<td>2,549</td>
<td>38190.3</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>July-Dec.</td>
<td>3,360</td>
<td>93791.2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1985 Jan.-June</td>
<td>4,8372</td>
<td>78090.1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>July-Dec.</td>
<td>6,2183</td>
<td>78788.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>8,204,980 87.2</td>
<td>9,852,357 84.3</td>
<td>14,144,736 78.7</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>10,249,698 69.1</td>
<td>11,744,600 60.0</td>
<td>13,305,300 60.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>114,338,636.6</td>
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Bigots seized upon the epidemic as a sign of God's displeasure. Some hospital staffs named it WOG [Wrath Of God], alluding to Romans 1:18. Sensationalized, often still misinformed and homophobic media coverage reached a peak in the fatal illness of Rock Hudson, who died on October 21, 1985. It led many to distrust repeated official and medical assurances that casual contact could not spread the virus. Incidents of homophobic violence and undisguised prejudice increased markedly. The earlier backlash personified by Anita Bryant now revived with new ammunition and new leadership. "Until recently," Hannah Arendt noted in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), "the inner inconsistency of the scapegoat theory was not sufficient reason
to discard it as one of many theories which are motivated by escapism.” Half-informed opinion blamed us all (including lesbians who were unscathed by the epidemic) for the spread of AIDS, which in the United States was only rarely and doubtfully acquired by heterosexual transmission. An even more marginalized and despised category of victims were IV-drug users, whom public opinion, led by fundamentalists and Roman Catholic bigots, also stigmatized as "guilty."

Only gradually did we respond to the health crisis by altering our sexual behavior. We were slow to renounce the sexual freedom and promiscuity that our movement had cherished during the 70s. At first the disease baffled the medical establishment: it had no idea of what caused it or how it was transmitted. Because the bath houses and other vested interests of the "new order" represented major investments, their owners, who had often contributed generously to the movement, struggled to justify them and to keep them open. Monogamy and even quasi-marital relationships eventually returned to favor, and condoms and dental dams became *de rigueur* as part of "safe sex." Heterosexual couples normally used condoms to prevent conception and not for prophylaxis, but until then homosexual men had not used condoms for prophylactic purposes, even though high school boys knew that every drugstore sold them under that name. Because the popular mind gave the condom a specifically contraceptive role, despite the widespread incidence of venereal disease among male homosexuals, if a gay man had even suggested
using one, most of his partners would have thought he was crazy! Sexually transmitted diseases and parasites were rampant among gay men during the sixties and seventies. Syphilis, herpes, and gonorrhea rates soared and a wide variety of parasites transmitted by fecal matter were found by medical examiners.

The toll was frightful. In the absence of adequate government response, community energy was increasingly allocated to meeting the emergency, from raising money for research to helping the victims. Most backrooms and baths closed (or were closed) in the mid-eighties, at least in the largest and most infected cities, where they had been busiest and most numerous. Cruising became rarer, male prostitution declined, women shunned bisexuals, who had become fashionable in the euphoric years of sexual experimentation and unconventional pleasures.

Recreational drug use also waned. Young males were less inclined to experiment, and countless others scurried back into the closets from which they had barely, and often only half emerged. If they had not come out, they resolutely locked themselves inside and nailed the door shut.

Reagan's ideology turned out to be less deleterious than his budget cuts. The Republican Party, which had never been "progressive," was now in the hands of those who championed a dogmatic free-market orientation. This development proved to be part of a larger world-wide trend away from neo-mercantilist policies--the Welfare State model that largely predominated after 1945--with like-minded regimes taking root in Britain, West
Germany, Canada, Italy, and (for a time) in France. At the end of the decade Marxism effectively collapsed in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and much of the Third World. With his Hollywood background, Reagan himself seems to have been sophisticated in regard to sexual non-conformity, but some of his allies on the religious right were virulently homophobic. The political trend was uniformly unfavorable to socialism but not surprisingly to gay liberation, since the free-market approach stemmed from classical laissez-faire, leaving others alone as long as they did no harm. All forms of government intervention, especially social engineering, became anathema, whereas libertarian ideals received at least lip service. The drastic budget cuts that Reagan ordered in domestic spending, including budgets for health, nevertheless undermined efforts to stem the plague in the first crucial years.

The progress of the previous decade nevertheless continued on other fronts. By the end of the 80s two Democratic Representatives from Massachusetts, Barney Frank and Gerry Studds, had publicly revealed their homosexual identity, and unlike anyone else previously kept their seats and even won reelection. Approximately fifty openly and proudly gay legislators held local and state government posts across the nation, among them a few Republicans. Gay culture in the form of novels, plays, and films flourished as never before. Bookstores, publications, and telephone sex lines proliferated. Gay and lesbian organizations, political and social as well as
charitable, dramatically increased their membership. In spite of and in part because of the crisis, more were out (whether they had come out or been outed) than ever before. We were clearly here to stay as a visible and significant segment of the body politic. To their credit, opinion-makers from the government to the media did their very best to prevent the hysteria that might have resulted in a worse backlash than actually occurred.

While AIDS made inroads into the male half of our community, it left lesbians essentially untouched because of the anatomical differences in the manner of their lovemaking. Many lesbians gave unstintingly in the fight to end the AIDS crisis and to alleviate the victims' suffering. The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation in New York City sponsored events such as the Lesbian Blood Drive. One net effect of the crisis was to differentiate further the situations and interests of gay men and lesbians. Men operated in an atmosphere of defensive retrenchment, a reversion to more conservative social mores, dread of the future, and nostalgia for the unspoiled pleasures of the past. Lesbians rather concentrated on applying feminist thought and practice to their own predicament.

Some who had considered coming out decided that the time was not ripe. In spite of occasional setbacks, gay advocates continued to win legal victories such as the Onofry case that struck down New York State's sodomy statute. In our greatest legal debacle, *Bowers vs. Hardwick* (1986), the Supreme Court, citing religious teachings and Biblical passages, ruled that
states like Georgia could continue to outlaw sodomy, even if committed in private. Georgia had, incidentally, kept life imprisonment for that offense on the books until 1949, as neighboring South Carolina had retained the death penalty until 1870. We advanced, however, on bread-and-butter issues such as child custody, adoption, spousal rights, employment, housing, and protection against hate-mongering. Now these innovations were imitated in other countries such as Norway and Denmark.

In view of the danger that the entire community sensed, most felt reservations about outing their brothers and sisters. But some felt anger at the fact that closeted Republicans, notably Terry Dolan, were aiding and abetting the right. In two articles in New York City’s *Village Voice* in April 1982, investigative reporter Larry Bush, who had interviewed Dolan, called for exposés of gay politicians and officeholders perceived as working against the common interest in order to neutralize them. Though few rallied to his suggestion at the time, Bush anticipated the advocates of outing in the 1990s.

A passage in Taylor Branch’s article “Closets of Power” on Dan Bradley, who in March 1982 became the highest federal official in American history to declare publicly that he was a homosexual and was duly interviewed by the *New York Times*, reads (1982, p. 36): "Some gay public officials in Washington have criticized Bradley for drawing attention to them at a time when closeted politicians are menaced on several fronts. Shortly after the *Times* article on Bradley, an incipient scandal broke
out in Washington over charges that several congressmen had had homosexual relations with young pages. Meanwhile, political groups affiliated with the Moral Majority have stepped up their mass solicitations for a war against the 'homosexual conspiracy' in Washington, and conservative scandal sheets have surfaced, naming the names of liberal gay congressmen".

These remarks prove that there was an earlier phase of "outage" that preceded the current one, was largely independent of the AIDS issue--which had not yet emerged into public consciousness, and inspired a conservative reaction aimed at discrediting closeted liberal congressmen while it exploited the paranoia of its financial backers on the subject of "sex perverts in government." Moreover, this development was part of the ongoing political struggle between power blocs and interest groups in the nation's capital--just as it had been in Ancient Athens and Rome, and in modern Berlin. The last sentence must refer to such publications as Deep Backgrounder, an exposé magazine that specialized in outing left-leaning politicians, which began its short life in 1982. So all the possibilities of outing were anticipated by the end of 1982--more than six years before Petrelis and Signorile launched their campaigns.

Entertainers

Rumors had, of course, long circulated about celebrities, but the truth about their private lives was and is carefully hidden from the public. Popular articles even resort to relating scenes from their films (or the shooting of their films) in the
guise of "biography." Several television talk show hosts, including Merv Griffin, are suspect. Tiny Tim was apparently wrongly suspected, but perhaps not Mae West. Gossip columnists and tabloids thrive on such rumors, but publicity agents and studios assiduously counterfeit heterosexual affairs and liaisons because they feel this ambience essential to keeping fans and getting new roles. Well into the 1980s no star came out: an actor or actress would sooner have admitted to alcoholism, drug abuse, and even to being molested as a child. Despite the stereotypes about actors' homosexuality, the belief prevails that the prejudices of the public must be respected, not flouted or antagonized, and that a homosexual identity is not a "box office" drawing card. That is why press agents for stars whose orientation is primarily or exclusively homosexual have their work cut out for them implicating their clients in fictional romances. Even when an actor plays a homosexual, the press agent creates a piece of gossip intended to reassure the public that he is heterosexual, that the role is slightly distasteful, and that the star is merely "acting."

Few entertained suspicions about one of Hollywood's most durable sex symbols, Cary Grant (1904-1986). After an early career in vaudeville in London and New York, the debonair English-born leading man, who had at one time worked as a call boy in his native land, successfully made the transition to Hollywood in 1932, at the beginning of the talkies. Shortly after he arrived in tinsel town, tongues wagged when he took up
residence with a another newcomer, the handsome ex-football player Randolph Scott. Both of them played stereotypically masculine roles. Although gossip columnists preferred innuendo to outright assertion, those in the know generally accepted that Grant and Scott were lovers. Encouraged by his studio, Grant covered up his orientation through a series of front marriages. In 1943, however, during a tour of camps to entertain the troops, he was caught with a sailor. Money and influence worked their magic to cover up the incident. At sixty-one Grant managed to sire a child on one of his wives, Dyan Cannon. Although the couple soon divorced, Cary's secret now at last seemed safe. But times were changing. The sixties were drawing to a close, and near the end lay Stonewall, bringing with it a new frankness regarding homosexuality. The bombshell did not arrive until November 1980. When host Tom Snyder on NBC's *Tomorrow* show asked the unpredictable comedian Chevy Chase, his opinion of Cary Grant, his guest replied: "He was really a great physical comic, and I understand he was a homo. What a gal!" To make matters worse, Chase lisped the remark in a high-pitched voice, gesturing with a limp wrist. The horrified Grant immediately instructed his lawyer to file a ten-million-dollar slander suit. Apart from the decloseting, Grant may also have been spooked by the younger comedian's reference to him in the past tense--as an aging has-been. Friends advised the old actor to withdraw the suit because it might prove disastrous. For his part, Chase allowed that he did
regret the slur. The matter was quietly dropped. But the incident did not escape the attention of Charles Higham and Roy Moseley, who included it in their frank account of the actor's troubled life (1989). Like fellow show business personalities Tyrone Power and Howard Hughes, Grant eluded full outing during his life. Once he was dead, however, no restrictions applied. Biographers outing the classical musicians Horowitz and Bernstein, more or less with their consent. In her scandalous 1987 life of Bernstein, Joan Peyser fingered composers David Diamond and Aaron Copeland. So many establishment figures belong here that one can refer to the "gay music mafia": Samuel Barber, Marc Blitzstein, Paul Bowles, John Cage, Henry Cowell, Gian-Carlo Menotti, Ned Rorem, and Virgil Thompson. Among popular musicians, David Bowie has been out and in, as has Elton John.

Andy Warhol and Keith Haring made no secret of their orientation. A pop artist who died of AIDS in 1990, Haring donated many of his works to raise money for ACT UP. His posters representing gay sexuality have been used on buttons, T-shirts, and the special postal cachet commemorating the twentieth anniversary of Stonewall conceived by Warren Johansson in 1989. Neither death brought much new information to light. Robert Mapplethorpe was open about his homosexuality during his life, but became a cause célèbre only with the protests and trial over the posthumous exhibitions of his photographs in Washington and Cincinnati in 1990. Perhaps more renowned modern artists than musicians remain in the closet today, reversing the historical
imbalance of more homoerotic artists than musicians.

As AIDS pursued its ravages, rumors about stars who ostensibly had the disease were flying. Some were false, others uncertain; but two widely publicized cases turned out to be true: Rock Hudson and Liberace. Suspect in the 1950s, their gayness was confirmed for the general public only as a result of their battles with AIDS. When a student in Naples, one of the authors, Percy heard, for example, that Rock Hudson and Peter, the ex-king of Yugoslavia, participated in orgies at a spectacular castle on an island near Naples owned by an Austrian baron, which Oscar Wilde had visited in earlier times. Liberace's swishiness had long occasioned gossip.

Countless fans throughout the world admired Roy Scherer Fitzgerald (1925-1985), better known as Rock Hudson. Achieving stardom in 1954 with the release of *Magnificent Obsession*, he personified unproblematic heterosexual masculinity for his female audiences. Ironically, for most of his life he was in fact predominantly homosexual. Henry Willson, the agent who gave him his screen name, shaped, burnished, and protected his image, while Hudson, who had never received much training as an actor and also lacked flair, cultivated an air of butchness, as his autobiography revealed in 1986. Almost from the beginning, the gay grapevine pegged him as "one of us." When the rumors grazed the ears of gossip magazine editors, Rock's handlers feared that the truth about their property would become public. As a preemptive measure, Willson prodded Hudson into a lightning
courtship of his attractive secretary Phyllis Gates, whom he married in 1955. When the couple divorced three years later, Phyllis was sworn to secrecy by veiled threats and the terms of the settlement, leaving Rock free to enter into affairs with one male after another. His last lover was Marc Christian, who in a palimony dispute sued his estate.

In 1984 Hudson tried to keep his diagnosis of AIDS secret. His unwitting co-stars and sex partners were later horrified to learn of it. As his health deteriorated, however, he could no longer hide the truth. Before his death on October 2, 1985, the media had extensively publicized both his illness and his sexual orientation. The Hollywood great Liz Taylor, who loyally supported him, has since played a noble role in fund raising and in helping quell popular hysteria and homophobia.

The pianist Liberace, born Wladziu Valentino (1919-1987), performed abbreviated versions of piano classics at restaurants in his native Wisconsin. After appearances on the vaudeville circuit, the schmaltzy performer found his niche in the new television medium. As he flourished during the 1950s, his flamboyant costumes and other props fired the public's adulation. He became one of the highest paid entertainers yet seen. In spite of his mincing gait and lisp, many of his most loyal fans were middle-aged women, who seem to have accepted at face value his public denial of his abnormal tendencies. Already in his West Milwaukee high school he revealed a fondness for drag. However, he seemingly remained indifferent to sex until the
1940s. Then he began to explore his homosexual feelings. "Cassandra" (William Connor), an acerbic reporter for the London Daily Mirror, reviewed a concert in 1956, describing Liberace as "the summit of sex--the pinnacle of masculine, feminine and neuter. Everything that he, she, and it can ever want." Then the American tabloid Confidential entitled a cover story "Why Liberace's Theme Song Should Be 'Mad About the Boy'." Undaunted, Liberace successfully sued both publications.

Rumors continued to make the rounds. Although he professed to be dedicated only to his canine pets, a series of attractive young men visited Liberace's opulent homes. In 1982 an ex-lover, Scott Thorson, brought a palimony suit. Diagnosed with AIDS five months before his death, Liberace continually denied the illness. His persona remained artificial to the bitter end, when a mandatory coroner's autopsy finally outed the star (Thorson, 1988). The pressures in Hollywood are such that unlike Rock Hudson, he did not even come out until it was a matter of "out of the closet and into the morgue."

Only a handful of directors have admitted a gay identity, apparently feeling less threatened than the stars, many of whom cognoscenti knew as early as the 1920s to have renounced conventional sexuality. Paul Bartel, director of Eating Raoul and Scenes from the Class Struggle in Beverly Hills, said that he "never encountered much homophobia in Hollywood". The problem "was within myself." In a recent interview on National Public Radio, Bartel, when asked if he was traveling with his wife, Mary
Woronov, replied unruffled: "We're not married. I'm gay, and Mary's a painter." In an article for *Libération*, a French periodical, he had already recounted an early homosexual experience. The American monthly *Christopher Street* had reprinted it in English. Bartel therefore considered himself already out, but perhaps was glad that the NPR interviewer was unclear about his homosexuality. Luchino Visconti, the Italian director of a film about homosexual cliques among the early Nazis, *The Damned*, was himself gay.

**Authors**

Many American authors have been gay or bisexual: Halleck, Cooper, Melville, Crane, Taylor, Santayana, Hawthorne, Dickinson, Vidal, Ginsberg, Hughes, Baldwin, and others of nearly equal stature, such as one model of Southern chivalry, William Alexander Percy. Perhaps Henry James, T. S. Eliot, and Norman Mailer, whose writings were certainly homoerotic, could be included. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries writers here as in Europe came out only to initiates, by means of code words or innuendos (Martin, 1979). In his old age Whitman, who had earlier cruised for partners from 12 to 24 on the waterfront and on trams, revealing his love cryptically in the *Calamus* poems, even slunk back into the closet out of which the politically conscious Symonds was vainly trying to drag him (Shively, 1989 and forthcoming). From the 1940s onward, some writers gradually let their homosexuality become transparent. Duncan boldly came out in 1944, Duberman in 1971. But no one had
been fooled by Tennessee Williams, Truman Capote, or Carson McCuller. Even before the Mattachine Society was formed, homosexuality had become a recognized theme in American literature (Austen, 1977; Levin, 1991).

Authors could always retreat, however, by disowning identity with their fictional characters. The personae of a work of fiction are in a sense masks worn by their creator. Thus the gay writer has three levels of identity: his real, closeted self; the mask of conventional sexuality; and the freely unconventional personalities of the characters in his plays or novels. All three can interface and intertwine with an ambiguity that challenges the analytic insight of the literary critic or biographer. In the 1960s, however, the poets of the "beat generation," led by Allen Ginsberg, proudly announced their outlawed sexuality to their admirers.

The most influential writer on food in the postwar era, Craig Claiborne, celebrated his sixtieth birthday by revealing on the air that he is homosexual and that those like him should come out. If any of his admirers missed that broadcast, his Feast Made for Laughter (1982), published soon afterward, removed any lingering ambiguity regarding his orientation. The food editor for the New York Times traced the surprising roots of his homosexuality to his first erotic experience in bed with his father. Their household was so poor that most of the beds had to be rented to paying guests. His first taste of what he unashamedly calls "ecstasy" in his father's arms, he wrote,
"altered my approach and outlook on life, particularly where sex is concerned."

On the other hand the late Jane Chambers, now best known for her plays on lesbian themes, had a secure job, grinding out tragic serials for television soap operas. Then her *Last Summer at Bluefish Cove* premiered on June 3, 1980 at New York City's First American Gay Arts Festival. Her employers decided that they no longer required the services of a lesbian playwright.

Michael Kearns, who won fame briefly by playing John-Boy's older brother on *The Waltons*, imprudently "loaned" his picture--a single color photograph--to be used for the cover of *The Happy Hustler* in 1975. Thus exposed as a bisexual prostitute, he took on the persona of the hustler in the book. He toured the country in character to promote the book and titillate audiences. Kearns later said: "I had come out on a personal level. That book brought me out on a professional level." Chambers created several superior lesbian dramas; Kearns has worked on new pieces like his recent theatrical success, *Intimacies*. Nevertheless, the leading stars were ousted only by AIDS or by scandal.

**Athletes**

Stereotypes would have homosexuality as common among entertainers and fashion designers as it is rare or unknown among athletes. In 1981 the media sensationally exploited an outing. Marilyn Barnett brought a "palimony" suit against tennis star Billie Jean King (b. 1943). Barnett based her case against her ex-lover upon more than one hundred love letters from Billie
Jean, which King and her husband had desperately tried to buy back for $125,000. Thus the suit bordered on blackmail. Barnett insisted that their seven-year affair entitled her both to the $550,000 Malibu house, where the Kings had allowed her to live, and to half of the star's earnings. In mid-December 1981 a Los Angeles superior court dismissed her financial demands and ordered her to vacate the beach house in January. The judge characterized her use of the letters, for which she had received $25,000 from the Kings before the suit, as "certainly close to extortion."

The attendant publicity humiliated the Kings, however gratified they were by the decision. Beyond the $100,000 in legal fees, their financial losses were huge. The star retained her association with Nike shoes, Yonex rackets, and NBC, but lost endorsements with six others--including a $1 million contract with Murjani Clothing. Major corporations also quit sponsoring her husband's Atlanta and Chicago tennis tournaments and abandoned his revived Team Tennis circuit. The winner of twenty Wimbledon championships, Billie Jean was heckled during the summer of 1981. She limited herself to three major tournaments, where she played only doubles and kept her public appearances to a minimum. Although her associates stood by her, King suffered intensely, an ordeal described by her in 1982.

Ironically, King's suffering paved the way for the coming out of Czech-born Martina Navratilova (b.1956), whose lesbianism is now widely known and accepted. From a family of tennis
champions, Martina had already displayed extraordinary talent in tennis by the age of 17, when the Czechoslovak Communists permitted her to compete in international tournaments. Often at odds with the Czechoslovak Tennis Federation, she decided in 1975 to defect to the United States, where her career blossomed. Before long it became known that she was sharing a three-bedroom ranch house in Dallas with Sandra Haynie, a golf pro. On the eve of her departure to the Wimbledon Tournament in 1991, she learned that Judy Nelson, her former "live-in-companion" of six years, was suing her, allegedly for breach of a non-marital cohabitation and partnership agreement which they had not only signed but videotaped, giving Nelson half ownership of the property that Navratilova acquired while they were together. Nelson's lawyer, who earlier had worked for the tennis star, characterized the case as a "partnermony" suit, a variant of "palimony" suits. Calling the allegations "malicious" and "bewildering," Navratilova declared that "there is a great deal more than what the press is being told" by Nelson's attorney. Eventually Navratilova settled by giving the plaintiff a house in Aspen, Colorado and over $1,000,000 in cash.

In an interview, "The Magic of Martina" (Advocate, December 31, 1991), she said: "I would love to see more gay athletes speak out. Yes, I have lost endorsements, and I'm not going to get any endorsements... so it has cost me money, but I can still do my job; I can still play tennis... I can't be blackballed out of the game. Whereas it would happen for most other professional
athletes, and it probably would happen for a lot of entertainers, singers, and actors. They wouldn't be able to get a job, and that's pretty sad." The media taste for blood had seemingly been slaked by the spectacular affair. Of course, lesbians are more inclined to enter traditionally male fields, such as sports and the armed forces, than is the general female population.

On February 16, 1992 at the Virginia Slims of Chicago tournament, Navratilova won her 158th victory, breaking a record that she had previously shared with Chris Evert. In the entire history of tennis no other player, male or female, has gained so many championships. The most prolific winner in the history of her sport, Martina also had the strength of character to defy first the totalitarian regime in her homeland and then the prejudices of a still intolerant sporting world.

Her name deserves to be celebrated in the annals of Queer Nation until the end of time.


Most of the sports world remained rigidly homophobic, as umpire Dave Pallone described in his 1990 autobiography. Working his way up to the National League, he learned early on that extreme discretion was required. Pallone had a three-year affair
with an undergraduate, who died in an automobile accident. Despite his precautions, rumors began to circulate about him. Some people whom he had offended in the union wanted to "get" him. In 1988 he had a celebrated shoving incident with owner Pete Rose. The *New York Post* linked him to a sex scandal with teenage boys, although in fact he was not involved. But he was nevertheless asked to go on a leave of absence. "I remember that day so vividly," he recalled. "I felt like the whole world had just crumbled down upon me." Still, he sensed relief that the awful truth was at long last coming out. But worse yet was to befall him. "It didn't really hit me until I finally got back home, and I realized that my family [knew] that I'm gay." Pallone realized that his days in baseball were over. The approximately twelve major league gay players that he knew form "a sort of small club," but their situation is indeed precarious, most of all because of the media's ruthlessness.

With their macho image and teammates, male athletes still face certain ruin when outed. Even among lesbian athletes, who are much more commonly suspected than their male counterparts, none has come out. Those outed, however, have not suffered as decisively as the males. Politicians, who play to their electorate rather than to their fans, have been equally reluctant and not one major leader has yet voluntarily come out (if we do not count Barney Frank) although a new, younger generation has been elected, making a wholly different impact on the political scene.
According to the Kinsey calculations of 10%, one might expect some fifty-three Congressmen to be queer. At a conference in Providence, Rhode Island in the spring of 1977, a lobbyist from Washington--speaking from his own personal experience--remarked that 10% of the members of the Senate are gay and 25% of their aides. If so, most have hidden the matter fairly successfully, at least from outsiders. Barney Frank has threatened to out many Republican Representatives who he claims are gay, and he should know. The intrepid Michael Petrelis, who began with ACT UP/New York and is now based in Washington, publicized a list of gay congressmen (discussed below).

The outing of conservative Representative Robert E. Bauman (R., Maryland), first elected in 1972, was the result of intrigue in high places. According to his own account, he had alienated Democratic leaders by his parliamentary adroitness in thwarting their measures. Because he was relatively unfamiliar with the gay world and tended to go with hustlers only when drunk, he proved a fairly easy target. The eight-year Congressional veteran had a wife and four children. Bauman had already been in counseling for four months, trying desperately to cope with his sexual problems. He did not know that investigators from the FBI had been observing his "indiscretions" for about a year.

Bauman claimed that he was the victim of a deliberate campaign by the FBI to expose and discredit him, and that in particular Special Agent M. Glenn Tuttle pursued him
relentlessly. He was in effect entrapped by a blond hustler using the name "Michael" at Chesapeake House. The hustler's seventeen-year old lover "Steve," "through his own brand of moral indignation, jealousy and a dose of machismo," according to Bauman, informed him that he intended to tell the police what he had done and that he knew that he was a congressman. The lover was not seventeen but twenty-four and a seasoned hustler and drug user--and a paid informant for the FBI. On September 3, 1980 FBI agents confronted Bauman with evidence of his homosexual offenses and charged with violation of section 22-2701 of the District's Code, accusing him of visiting gay bars in order to solicit sexual favors from various young men (obviously hustlers), and transporting some of them within the District of Columbia for sexual purposes--a federal felony. As a result of being outed, he was one of only three Republicans to lose their House seats in November. Despite his defeat, he then entered the Republican primary in Maryland's First District in 1982, but was forced to withdraw after a well-orchestrated campaign of defamation by his opponent. Because of his conservatism and politically "incorrect" line, the gay community refused to support him while other Republicans shied away from him whatever their own sexual proclivities.

The Bauman case may be regarded as an application of the principle of punishing our "enemies" who happen to be closeted. According to Christopher Hitchens (1987), Bauman was hypocritical enough to work actively against gay interests:
No individual in politics had fought against homosexuality--his own and other people's--as strenuously as he did. . . . Once he was caught, no conservative would take his phone calls. . . . But Terry Dolan belonged, as Channell does, to that special group of closet homosexuals who delight in joining the gay-bashing pack. Their friends and relatives often help to keep up this unpleasing pretense. . . . Bauman tells of sabotaging a Maryland fair-housing bill because it prohibited discrimination against homosexuals. . . . Bigotry and denial are apparently opposing sides of an identical coin. The fear of being exposed is what spurs the witchhunter.

Hitchens concluded, almost prophetically, just five months after the founding of ACT UP, that "the way through this morass is clear. It is marked by a simple signpost reading 'Out'."

Also married and with children, Representative Fred Richmond (D., New York), first elected to the House in 1974, had a series of scrapes, one involving a black teenager, that alienated voters from his largely African-American district in Brooklyn. However, when a hustler from Boston whom he had befriended committed suicide in his high-rise Manhattan condominium, tragedy ensued. He resigned his seat on August 25, 1982. Convicted on a financial matter, Richmond served time. Wealthy from business, he apparently has no plans to seek further elective office and
has set up a charitable foundation that awards grants, some to gay organizations.

In 1976 Jon Clifton Hinson was arrested, as *Newsweek* of October 20, 1980 stated, at the Iwo Jima Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, a well-known cruising spot outside Washington. A year later he nearly lost his life in a fire at a gay movie theatre in Washington. Yet in 1978 he won a congressional seat as a Republican from Mississippi. At first fundamentalist voters did not seem to care about his peccadillos, even when a local paper wrote them up. He managed to be reelected in 1980. However, barely into his second term Hinson was forced to resign on April 13, 1981 after two toilet arrests. One took place in the men's room of the Longworth House Office Building, where he was caught behaving indecently with a Library of Congress employee.

In the 1980s a series of sex scandals in the House began with obscure charges. In 1983 Gerry Studds (D., Massachusetts), first elected in 1972, was subjected to a reprimand for sexual intimacy with a seventeen-year-old Congressional page ten years previously. Refusing to capitulate, he proudly affirmed his orientation. Reelected several times since, he has lent significant support to gay causes in the House, more perhaps than he could or would have if he had remained closeted as in his earlier years and is now a leading opponent of the Pentagon's ban on homosexuals.

Studds' colleague Barney Frank (D., Massachusetts), who won
his seat in 1980, has undergone a longer siege. Unruly, bisexual hustler Steve Gobie, named as a user of narcotics, publicly alleged not only to have served the congressman sexually, but to have operated as a male prostitute from Frank's own apartment. Gobie has also sold stories to the tabloids. Many gay activists feared that with what we may dub this secondary "outing," because Frank came out only shortly before the scandal broke, perhaps to be in a better position to withstand its effects, his political usefulness had come to an end, but events proved them wrong. In July 1990 the House committee on ethics found that he merited "personal censure" but not expulsion, and since then the Congressman has recouped his position as one of the most articulate Representatives. Like Studds working to end discrimination in the military, he has successfully combatted homophobic policies of the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Rumors that have circulated about Democratic Speaker Thomas Foley (who is not gay, according to Frank) and Republican ex-Representative Jack Kemp are unsubstantiated and may reflect innuendos by their opponents. Senator Mark Hatfield and Representative Steven Gunderson seem more likely. Thus far no senators (except for the ambiguous case of David Walsh in 1942) and no lesbians in Congress have been successfully outing, though rumors abound, even if the "respectable" movement press hesitates to print them. Few attempts by activists to out political figures have been successful. This point is illustrated by the
1982 primary campaign for the Democratic nomination for governor of New York State. Some supporters of Mario Cuomo, apparently without the candidate's knowledge, spread the rumor that his opponent, then mayor of New York City, was gay. They did this through such tactics as word-of-mouth slogans "Vote for Cuomo, not the homo" and "Don't be a Koch-sucker." Even the usually reticent New York Times maliciously alluded to the innuendos. In the event, Cuomo won the nomination by an upset and then the governorship. Most observers doubt that the smear campaign, such as it was, much affected the outcome of the election. And Edward Koch, the target of the slogans, went on to be reelected in 1985 and to sign the city's gay rights bill into law the following spring--the crowning accomplishment of New York's Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights.

In 1987 a gay reporter at National Public Radio, Frank Browning, broke the story that the network of right-wing Americans raising funds for the contras in Nicaragua was largely homosexual and that Carl "Spitz" Channell's lover was on the payroll of a tax-exempt foundation as a "consultant." When certain parties objected to the exposé, Browning retorted that there would have been no qualms if the beneficiary had been his wife. Since the Reagan Administration had been unsympathetic to the gay cause, this action was interpreted as another instance of hypocrisy (Gup, 1988).

**Professors and Preachers**

Homosexuality has been said to be the disease of professors
and homosexuals have traditionally been drawn to teaching youths. We can reasonably surmise that some at least may have made their career choice primarily for this reason, just as some were drawn into the Roman Catholic clergy precisely because of its celibacy. When Princeton was an all-male school and the chairman of the English Department was criticized at a cocktail party for retaining gay instructors, he rejoined that they make the finest teachers because they are more interested in their students. In any case, college administrators and professors, like priests and pastors, not infrequently use their positions of authority, trust, and respect to initiate affairs with their charges, whom (if they are of the opposite sex) they even sometimes marry.

So far no college chief administrators and surprisingly few professors have come out. Today Princeton, which seems to be lagging, as usual, in this area, has not a single openly homosexual tenured male full professor. Nor have many religious officials at any level come out, not one bishop or cardinal in the Roman Catholic Church, not a single Episcopal, Methodist, or Orthodox bishop. Few clerics at the lower levels have come out and no Orthodox or Conservative rabbis. Numbers have been outed precisely because those institutions are a magnet for them.

In the fall of 1991 Harvard University witnessed a conflict provoked by an issue of a right-wing student magazine, *Peninsula*, whose pages were wholly devoted to attacking the homosexual rights movement. At a rally protesting the publication, Peter J. Gomes, Plummer professor of Christian morals and minister of
Memorial Church, publicly announced "I have all the authority in the world [to speak on the religious case against gay people] as the Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and because I am a Christian who happens as well to be gay." In February 1992 five undergraduates formed the organization Concerned Christians at Harvard to demand that Gomes resign as minister because he preached that homosexuality is not a sin. Its chair, Sumner E. Anderson, said that he expected between 80 and 100 members to join the new group. The President of Harvard, Neil L. Rudenstine, defended Gomes on the grounds that it is not the University's task to dictate theological doctrine. Meanwhile Harvard's Puritan founders must have been spinning in their graves. [Harvard Gay & Lesbian Newsletter, Winter 1992, p. 4; Harvard Crimson, February 20, 1992, p. 1; February 21, 1992, p. 1]

A church that imposes celibacy upon its clergy faces a considerable problem: almost of necessity a major fraction of its ministerial candidates will for whatever reasons feel unattracted to marital bliss, but may not choose to abstain when their own abnormal proclivities can be discretely gratified. The Latin maxim *si non castē, tamen cautē* (if not chastely, then cautiously) perfectly epitomized such clerics' policy. Such scandals are not limited to the Roman Catholic clergy. To be sure they are less common among Protestant ministers and Jewish rabbis who are encouraged to marry, hence less likely to be fond of their own sex. Appearances, however, can be deceiving.
During the 1980s the Dominican Bruce Ritter won many admirers for providing shelter and counseling for runaway teenagers in New York City's West Forty-second Street area. Many of these adolescents were "throwaways," driven out by their families because they were gay. The girls had often engaged in prostitution, the only way they and some of the boys knew to earn a few dollars to sustain themselves. Ritter's Covenant House accepted them in ever increasing numbers, while social workers volunteered for a cause where need was so obvious. Supported by donations and some assistance from the city, the service acquired new premises in New York and spread to other cities as well. Father Ritter himself maintained the customary façade of asexuality. A priest, he conformed to Catholic doctrine in denying his charges access to information on birth control and what came to be known as "safe sex." On the other hand, within Covenant House he did not discriminate against gay staff members or inmates. He even preached a sermon in which he said that they should be treated with respect. The real peril to the gay youth who took refuge behind its walls was the violent and homophobic subculture of the lower-class, Third World "street people." They abused and victimized middle-class or other residents who were not tough or "street-wise" whenever staff members were not in control. In 1989 a distraught young man appeared with a sensational story. This former resident charged that Ritter had kept him in an apartment in return for sexual favors. At first the priest
strongly denied the account, plausibly since his accuser was known to be unstable, as his own father testified. However, it transpired that another youth had made similar charges earlier, but they had been ignored at the time because of the almost universal esteem for Ritter and his ministry. Purportedly an investigative reporter for the New York Post broke the story in retribution for the homophobic tone of Ritter's Sometimes God Has a Kid's Face (1988), which hypocritically excoriated homosexuals, claiming that we prey upon and destroy teenagers forced into prostitution after running away from home or being thrown out by their own parents. To reproach heterosexuals for irresponsibly having children and then neglecting or sadistically mistreating them seldom enters the minds of clerical authors.

Ritter's ultimate doom, however, was the discovery of financial irregularities at Covenant House traced to his doorstep. As a rule, charitable institutions, like colleges and hospitals, are at risk for such malfeasance because they are not, strictly speaking, subject to any cost/benefit analysis. They have no product that must be sold at a profit in excess of the cost of manufacture, but tend to rely upon sentimental appeals, in this case to a public concerned about "child welfare." The mounting scandal made headlines in New York newspapers day after day. After an inquiry by Catholic authorities Ritter had to step down. With its reputation doubly tarnished, the institution entered on a rocky path. When the friar was later obliged to resign from the Franciscan order, he spent only a few months in a
new career as a priest in India, where he presumed few would either know or care about his abnormal proclivities. According to the *New York Post* (December 3 and 4, 1991), the media relentlessly outed him "even in this most remote corner of the world," the Diocese of Allapuzha in Kerala. He found life impossible, frustrated in his hope that he could leave his past behind. So he returned to the United States to begin a new fundraising campaign. This case shows how in an age of electronic communication, the echoes of an outing can follow even a minor celebrity to the end of the earth.

Particularly embarrassing was a series of scandals involving priests who had abused young children. They exploited the power which the parish clergy hold over the laity in a highly authoritarian institution. Since 1911, in fact, the decree *Quantavis diligentia* had forbidden lay Catholics to bring charges against their clergy in secular courts. The glee with which the anti-clerical press of that day pilloried the church as a redoubt of the depraved and the abnormal militated for secrecy. It is only fair to state, however, that such individuals, if their conduct came to the attention of superiors within the church, would often be tried in ecclesiastical tribunals but *in camera* so that nothing would reach the outside world.

A case that achieved wide publicity occurred among the Cajuns of southern Louisiana. The culprit, Father Gilbert Gauthe, received a twenty-year prison sentence in October 1985 for molesting at least 37 altar boys plus one girl. By 1987
Lafayette diocese of had been obliged to pay parents $12 million in 16 cases. Subsequently insurance companies refused to cover the church for suits of this character. In 1990 the Mount Cashel orphanage for boys in St. Johns, Newfoundland, had to close under pressure. Ten Christian Brothers, laymen of the order that ran the orphanage, allegedly abused the boys repeatedly. Moreover, a church inquiry led by a former lieutenant governor found that several other priests guilty of similar offenses. The report argued that for several years Catholic leaders ignored, rejected, or failed to deal effectively with the problem. The continuing scandal, and allegations of a coverup, brought about the resignation of Archbishop Alphonsus L. Penney. Among the most successful of the "televangelists" of the 1980s, the flamboyant team of Jim and Tammy Bakker, ran the PTL (interpreted as the acronym for "Praise the Lord" or "People that Love") Ministries, with an elaborate headquarters and condominium complexes. After a young woman claimed that Bakker and his associates had turned her into a sexual utensil, a male subordinate revealed that Bakker had seduced him with promises of "heaven now." As the effect of these revelations sunk in, contributions to Ministries fell off drastically. The PTL properties became bankrupt, amidst disclosures of the lavish lifestyle led by the Bakkers--at the expense of small contributors, many of them pensioners on a limited income. Eventually Bakker was sent to prison for financial irregularities. There he was assigned to clean toilets. Since
he could not pay the $500,000 assessed by the court, his creditors moved in July 1990 to attach the 11 cents hourly wages he was receiving.

The Making of an AIDS Activist: Larry Kramer

Out of the frustration with indifference and homophobia that the AIDS crisis highlighted, Larry Kramer, writing for the *New York Native*, laid the intellectual groundwork for ACT UP. Of Jewish ancestry, Kramer was raised by, as he relates, "two intelligent parents, both professionals (my father a lawyer and my mother a social worker)." The Yale graduate authored two plays, *The Normal Heart*, about the first phase of the AIDS epidemic, and *Just Say No*, as well as a highly acclaimed screenplay for *Women in Love*. His novel *Faggots* portrayed the uninhibited lifestyle of the euphoric post-Stonewall decade.

Kramer spoke and wrote untiringly to alert people of the plague. Gradually despairing of rational argument, he called for protests. In his article of March 14, 1983, "1,112 and Counting," he referred to the number of AIDS victims until that time with rage:

If this article doesn't scare the shit out of you,

   we're in real trouble. If this article doesn't rouse
   you to anger, fury, rage, and action, gay men may
   have no future on this earth. Our continued existence
   depends on just how angry you can get. . . . I repeat:
   Our continued existence as gay men upon the face of this
   earth is at stake. Unless we fight for our lives, we
shall die. In all the history of homosexuality we have never before been so close to death and extinction.

Kramer helped inspire the Lavender Hill Mob, a small, close-knit group of New York activists who zapped the uncaring establishment in 1986-87. In its tactics it is often considered the predecessor of ACT UP. In New York City a small band of activists formed the first chapter of AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) a few days after one of Kramer's more dramatic speeches, which he published as "The Beginning of ACTing UP":

So what are we going to do? Time and time again I have said --no one is going to do it for us but ourselves. . . . Did you notice what got the most attention at the recent CDC conference in Atlanta? It was a bunch called the Lavender Hill Mob. They got more attention than anything else at that meeting. They protested. They yelled and screamed and demanded and were blissfully rude to all those arrogant epidemiologists who are ruining our lives.

Kramer particularly deplored the inaction of New York politicians: "Cuomo, D'Amato, Moynihan, Koch. Every single one of them treated me as if I was ungrateful" for all the money that had been allocated for AIDS research. Kramer's howls finally got some result. The dramatic demonstrations and confrontations in New York inspired the formation of smaller, but equally committed and daring ACT UP chapters across the country. Many believe that Kramer is vulgar and bombastic as well as self-promoting, that he overestimates his role and influence and that to boot he is
unnecessarily and perhaps pathologically rude and abrasive. His style, which often reproaches the gay community for its earlier and current inaction in the face of AIDS, provokes laughter as much as admiration. Nevertheless, the course of the epidemic, much less the gay response to it, could not be discussed without analyzing his role as one of the founders not only of GMHC, but of ACT UP.

**ACT UP**

AIDS revived the radical style that had lapsed after the end of American involvement in Vietnam. The official statistics of the Centers for Disease Control in Atlanta showed that by December 31, 1986 23,252 adults had died of AIDS in the United States. ACT UP formed—at Kramer's instigation—in New York City on March 12, 1987 to combat the state and society's inadequate response to the crisis that was striking at the very life of the gay community. The original New York nucleus found imitators as far away as Des Moines, Iowa and Florence, Italy. By December 1991 ACT UP boasted more than a hundred chapters, mostly in the United States. A few have died, while others have split over ideological differences. ACT UP does not have a hierarchy. Members have an equal say, but in most chapters a core of long-term activists who preponderate. "Facilitators," periodically elected, chair the weekly meetings, where Treatment Working Group members report. A spirited and informed discussion regularly follows. Activists, for example, may try to induce
pharmaceutical companies to permit compassionate use of new drugs, meaning that those who give informed consent are allowed to try untested but potentially efficacious (or toxic) medicines. Members claim that expertise about AIDS and treatments for its sequelaes has become their principal weapon. They hope to halt or retard the epidemic by teaching how the plague spreads and by propaganda for "safe sex." Some routinely peruse the scientific and medical press to discover techniques or drugs that might retard the symptoms of AIDS or alleviate the pain and disability that it brings. Others urge pharmaceutical firms to hasten to make new treatments available, while a third group pursues unorthodox and holistic therapies scorned by the medical establishment.

The weekly meeting of ACT UP's founding chapter, in the early days usually on Monday evening at the Community Services Center at 208 West 13th Street in Manhattan, attracted ever larger numbers of handsome young men. Some 60% of them were rumored to be HIV-positive. Others, including some women, were moved simply by the sorrow and tragedy that AIDS had already brought to those near and dear to them.

But facing gruesome death daily, ACT UP effortlessly surpassed the agitprop of the late 1960s by its use of guerilla theatre and the richness and imaginativeness of the visual symbolism that demonstrated to the media--and through them to the American public--the gravity of AIDS. The truly unique New York chapter has appealing and colorful leaders like the handsome ex
stockbroker Peter Staley, who was diagnosed with ARC in 1985. Depressed at first by the finding and feeling that his life was over, he regained his courage to become ACT UP's pin-up boy and one of its most tireless activists. The comedian Ron Goldberg has performed with true dramatic flair at ACT UP rallies and facilitated adroitly at meetings. ACT UP excelled in street theater, die-ins, and the hanging of banners on public buildings. Believing in radical and even illegal tactics, they often attack Cardinals Law and O'Connor, and have demonstrated in front of New York's St. Patrick's Cathedral and Boston's Holy Cross, dispersing condoms and sometimes disrupting Masses.

Even its critics--and many there were--could not deny that ACT UP is a small but sharp gadfly prodding the medical establishment and the government to take swifter and more effective steps to save lives and alerting the public to measures needed to combat the plague. It became the cutting edge of the gay movement in the late 1980s even though in principle it remained focused on a single issue.

ACT UP's membership is not clearly defined because it issues no cards and keeps no registration lists. A typical meeting attracts an average of 250 to 300 in New York, 40 to 60 in Boston, and approximately 30 in Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles. The San Francisco chapter split into two over differences in ideology and tactics. Many drift in and out: every chapter has a leaders and a hard core who volunteer for current projects. Really committed, almost full-time ACT UP
activists may not number more than 1,500-2,000, although the mailing lists just of the New York chapter are much larger.

Out of an obscure chapter in Portland, Oregon the first outing of the new type say the light of day. On February 25, 1989 its members outed Senator Mark Hatfield, who had supported various homophobic initiatives and in October 1987 had even voted for the Helms Amendment. Thereafter ACT UP acquired an intimate connection with outing. To boot it spawned Queer Nation which, as we shall see, split off from it in 1990. It parallels and supplements rather than rivals its parent body. Endorsing the ideals behind outing, Queer Nation crystallized the principles and justifications for the practice.

**Conclusion**

The 1980s saw the gay movement marking time and on the defensive because of the conservative political climate and of AIDS. An assortment of figures of the second rank in various walks of life nevertheless came out, or were brought out in the old-fashioned way by arrests and legal charges--and not always to their detriment. So did many ordinary people from every walk of life. AIDS, however, seized the role of principal outer. For the first time, average Americans became aware that a Congressman or movie star, just as much as their next-door neighbor or the woman who worked beside them at the office, could be homosexual. Most still actively hated and shunned queers. Only a minority truly accepted us. Few now, however, could still imagine that we were some rare species hardly found outside of
Bohemian Greenwich Village or San Francisco's Castro. The stereotype of a sleazy or effeminate character haunting parks and rest rooms faded with the outing of political leaders and movie stars. Managing one's gay identity could be a problem, as it was sometimes impolitic to offend the mores of a particular subculture even if one could be totally overt in another social setting. Middle America lagged behind the two coasts and the Bible Belt retained its fundamentalist intolerance, Baptists gloating along with Roman Catholic moralists that AIDS was God's vengeance for immorality.

In addition to inciting a backlash, AIDS inflicted suffering and death on our community and left gaping holes in the ranks of our male leaders. It also inspired a new wave of organizing and even evoked sympathy from heterosexuals who shared gay friends' and neighbors' grief and loss. AIDS brought some out posthumously, obliquely revealing that figures long in the public eye had private lives that defied convention. The public became more sophisticated if not always more sympathetic. The events of the 1980s, unforeseen though they were, set the stage for the political struggles of the nineties—in which outing may be cast in an unexpected and even astonishing role.


Deep Backgrounder.


