PART TWO
RADICAL GAY PERSPECTIVES

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Refugees from Amerika:
A Gay Manifesto

—Wittman’s persuasive article has been referred to by some as the bible of the Gay Liberation Movement. The author carefully solidifies his argument that the homosexual is a viciously persecuted individual. In effect, this piece constitutes an elementary “bill of rights” for homosexuals—both male and female.

San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled small towns where to be ourselves would endanger our jobs and any hope of a decent life; we have fled from blackmailing cops, from families who disowned or “tolerated” us; we have been drummed out of the armed services, thrown out of schools, fired from jobs, beaten by punks and policemen.

And we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto, rather than a free territory, because it is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators make our laws, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us. And we have pretended everything is OK, because we haven’t been able to see how to change it—we’ve been afraid.

In the past year, there has been an awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy. How it began we don't know; perhaps we were inspired by black people and their liberation movement; we learned how to stop pretending from the hip revolution. Amerika in all its ugliness has surfaced with the war and our national leaders. And we are revulsed by the quality of our ghetto life.

Where once there was frustration, alienation, and cynicism, there are new traits among liberated gays: we are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the initial flourish of a movement.

We want to make ourselves clear; our first job is to liberate ourselves, and that means clearing our heads of the garbage that's been poured into them. This pamphlet is an attempt at raising a number of issues, and present some ideas to replace the old ones. It is primarily for ourselves—a starting point for discussion. If straight people of good will find it useful in understanding what gay liberation is about, so much the better.

It should also be clear that these ideas reflect the perspective of one person, and are determined not only by my homosexuality, but my being white, male, and middle class. It is my individual consciousness. Our group consciousness will evolve as we get ourselves together—we are only at the beginning.

I. ON ORIENTATION

1. WHAT HOMOSEXUALITY IS: Nature leaves undefined the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object has been imposed socially. Humans originally put a taboo on homosexuality because they needed every bit of energy to produce and raise children—survival of the species was a priority. With overpopulation and technological change, that taboo is absurd and continues only to exploit us and enslave us.

As kids, we refused to capitulate to demands that we smother our feeling toward each other. Somewhere we found the strength to resist being indoctrinated, and we should count that among our assets. We have to realize that our loving each other is a good thing, not an unfortunate thing, and that we have a lot to teach straights about sex, love, strength, and resistance.

Homosexuality is NOT a lot of things. It is not a makeshift in
the absence of the opposite sex; it is not hatred or rejection of the opposite sex; it is not genetic; it is not the result of broken homes (except inasmuch as we could see the sham of American marriage). HOMOSEXUALITY IS THE CAPACITY TO LOVE SOMEONE OF THE SAME SEX.

2. BISEXUALITY: Bisexuality is good; it is the capacity to love people of either sex. The reason so few of us are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or nonstraight. Also, many gays got turned off to the ways men are supposed to relate to women and vice-versa, which is pretty fucked up. Gays will begin to get turned onto women when 1) it's something that we do because we want to, and not because we should; 2) when women's liberation has changed the nature of heterosexual relationships.

We continue to call ourselves homosexual, rather than bisexual, even if we do make it with the opposite sex also, because saying "Oh, I'm Bi" is a cop out for a gay. We get told it's ok to sleep with guys as long as we sleep with women, too, and that's still putting homosexuality down. We'll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it's an issue. Then we'll begin to be complete people.

3. HETEROSEXUALITY: Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up; it is a fear of people of the same sex, it is anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustrations. Heterosexual sex is fucked up, too; talk to women's liberation about what straight guys are like in bed. Sex is aggression for the male chauvinist; sex is obligation for the traditional woman. And among the young, the modern, the hip, it's only a subtle version of the same. For us to become heterosexual in the sense that our straight brothers and sisters are is not a cure, it is a disease to cop out.

II. ON WOMEN

1. LESBIANISM: It's been a male dominated society for too long, and that has warped both men and women. So gay women are going to see things differently from gay men; they are going to feel oppression as women, too. Their liberation is tied up with both gay liberation and women's liberation.

This paper speaks from the gay male point of view. Although some of the ideas in it may be equally relevant to gay women, it
would be arrogant to presume this to be a manifesto for lesbians. We look forward to the emergence of a lesbian liberation voice. The existence of a lesbian caucus within the New York Gay Liberation Front has been very helpful in challenging male chauvinism among gay guys and anti-gay feelings among women's lib.

2. MALE CHAUVINISM: All men are infected with male chauvinism—we were brought up that way. It means we assume that women play subordinate roles and are less human than ourselves. (At an early gay liberation meeting, one guy said, "Why don't we invite women's liberation, and they can bring sandwiches and coffee.") It is no wonder that so few gay women have become active in our groups.

Male chauvinism, however, is not central to us. We can junk it much more easily than straight men can. For we understand oppression. We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily—our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world, we have become used to playing different roles and doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays.

But we need to purge male chauvinist behavior and thought among us. Chick equals nigger equals queer. Think about it.

3. WOMEN'S LIBERATION: They are assuming their equality and dignity, and in doing so are challenging the same things we are: the insufferable roles, the exploitation of minorities by capitalism, the arrogance of straight white male middle class Amerika. They are our sisters in struggle.

Problems and differences will become clearer when we begin to work together. One major problem is our own male chauvinism. Another is the uptightness and hostility to homosexuality that many women have—that is the straight in them. A third problem is differing views on sex: sex for them has meant oppression, while it has been the symbol of our freedom. We must come to understand each other's style, jargon and humor.

We want to begin more intensive discussions with women’s liberation. And in any case we must support their demands and understand their viewpoint.
III. ON ROLES

1. MIMICRY OF STRAIGHT SOCIETY: We are children of a straight society. We will think straight, and that is part of our oppression. One of the most fucked up of straight concepts is inequality. Straight (also white, English, male, capitalist) thinking sees things always in terms of order and comparison. A is before B, B is after A; 1st is higher than second is higher than 3rd; there is no room for equality. This idea gets extended to male/female, on top/on bottom, spouse/nonspouse, heterosexual/homosexual; boss/worker, rich/poor, white/black. Our social institutions cause and reflect this verbal hierarchy. This is Amerika.

We have lived in these institutions all our lives, so naturally we mimic the roles. For a long time we mimicked these roles to protect ourselves—a survival mechanism. Now we are becoming free enough to shed these roles which we’ve picked up from the institutions which have imprisoned us.

Stop mimicking straights, stop censoring ourselves.

2. MARRIAGE: Marriage is a prime example of a straight institution fraught with role playing. Traditional marriage is a rotten, oppressive institution. Those of us who have been in heterosexual marriages too often have blamed our gayness on the breakup of the marriages. No. They broke up because marriage is a contract which smothers both people, denies needs, and places impossible demands on both people. And we had the strength, again, to refuse to capitulate to the roles which were demanded of us.

Gay people must stop measuring their self respect by how well they mimic straight marriages. Gay marriages will have the same problems as straight ones, except in burlesque. For the usual legitimacy and pressures which keep straight marriages together are absent—kids, what will parents think, what will neighbors think.

To accept the idea that happiness comes through finding a nice spouse and settling down, showing the world that “We’re just the same as you” is avoiding the real issues, and is an expression of self hatred.

3. ALTERNATIVES TO MARRIAGE: People want to get married for lots of good reasons, although marriage doesn’t meet those
needs. We're all looking for security, a flow of love, a feeling of belonging and being needed.

These needs can be met through any number of social relationships and living situations. The things we want to get away from are: 1. exclusiveness, proprietied attitudes toward each other, a mutual pact against the rest of the world; 2. promises about the future, which we have no right to make and which prevent us from, or make us feel guilty about, growing; 3. inflexible roles, roles which do not reflect us at the moment but are inherited through mimicry and inability to define equalitarian relationships.

We have to define for ourselves a new pluralistic, role-free social structure for ourselves. It must contain both the physical space and spiritual freedom for people to live alone, live together for a while, live together for a long time, either as couples or in larger numbers; and the ability to flow easily from one of these states to another as our needs change.

Liberation for gay people is to define for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationships by straight values.

4. GAY “STEREOTYPE” ROLES. The straight's image of the gay community is defined largely by those of us who have violated straight roles. There is a tendency among "homophile" groups to deplore gays who play visible roles—the queens and the nellies. As liberated gays, we must take a clear stand: 1) gays who stand out have been the most courageous among us; they came out and withstood straight disapproval before the rest of us. They are our first martyrs; 2) if they have suffered from being open, it is straight society whom we blame for that suffering.

5. CLOSET QUEENS: This phrase is becoming the equivalent to "uncle Tom." To pretend to be straight sexually, or to pretend to be straight socially, is probably the most damaging pattern of behavior in the ghetto. It has many forms—the married guy who makes it on the side secretly; the guy who will go to bed once but who won't develop any gay relationships; the pretender at work or school or home who changes the gender of the friend he’s talking about; the guy who'll suck cock in the bushes but who won't come home with you.

Closet queenery must end. If we are liberated, we are open with our sexuality. Come out. Come out. Come out.
BUT: in saying come out, we have to have our heads together about a few things: 1) closet queens are our brothers; they are to be defended against attacks by straight people. 2) Our fear of coming out is not totally paranoid: the stakes are high—loss of family ties, loss of job, loss of straight friends—these are all real risks. Each of us has to make the steps toward openness at our own speed and on our own impulses. Being open is the foundation of liberation, and it has to be built solidly. 3) Closet queen is a blanket term covering a multitude of patterns of defense, self-hatred, lack of strength, and habit. We are all closet queens in one way or another, and all of us had to come out—very few of us were "flagrant" at the age of seven! We must afford our brothers and sisters the same patience we afforded ourselves. And while their closetness is part of our oppression, it's more a part of their oppression; they alone can decide WHEN and HOW.

IV. ON OPPRESSION

It is important to catalog and understand the different facets of our oppression. There is no future in arguing about degrees of oppression. A lot of "movement" types come on with a line of shit about homosexuals not being oppressed as much as blacks or Vietnamese or workers or women. We don't happen to fit into their ideas of class (or caste). Bull—when people feel oppressed, they act on that feeling. And we feel oppressed. Talk about the priority of black liberation or ending imperialism over our "problem" is just antigay propaganda.

1. PHYSICAL ATTACKS: We are attacked, beaten, castrated and left dead over and over again. There are half a dozen known unsolved slayings in San Francisco parks in the last few years. Punks, often minority group members who look around for someone under them socially, feel encouraged to beat up on queers, and cops look the other way. If we recall, that used to be called lynching.

Cops in most cities have harassed our meeting places—bars, baths, parks. They set up entrapment squads. A Berkeley brother was murdered by a cop this spring when he tried to split after finding out that the trick who was making advances to him was a cop. Cities set up "pervert" registration, which if nothing else scares our brothers into the closet.

One of the most vicious slurs on us is to blame us for prison
“gang rapes.” These rapes are invariably done by people who consider themselves straight, and the objects of these rapes are us and other straights who can’t defend themselves. The press campaign to link prison rapes with homosexuality is an attempt to make straights fear and despise us, so they can oppress us more. And it is typical of the fucked-up straight mind to think that homosexual sex means tying a guy down and fucking him. That’s aggression, not sex—and if that’s what sex is for a lot of straight people, that’s their problem, not ours.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL WARFARE: Right from the beginning we have been subjected to a barrage of straight propaganda. Since our parents don’t know any homosexuals, we grow up thinking that we’re all alone and different and perverted. Our school friends identify “queer” with any nonconformist or bad behavior. Our elementary school teachers tell us not to talk to strangers or accept rides in cars. The television, billboards and magazines pour forth an unreal idealization of male/female relationships, and make us wish we were different, we were “in.” In family living classes we’re taught how we’re supposed to turn out. And all along, the best we hear, if anything, about homosexuality is that it’s an unfortunate problem.

3. SELF OPPRESSION: As gay liberation grows, we will find our up tight brothers and sisters, particularly those who are making a buck off our ghetto, coming on strong to defend the status quo. This is self-oppression: “don’t rock the boat”; “things in SF are ok”; “gay people just aren’t together”; “I’m not oppressed.” These lines are right out of the mouths of the straight establishment. A large part of our oppression would end if we would stop putting ourselves and our pride down.

4. INSTITUTIONAL: Discrimination against gays is blatant, if we open our eyes. Homosexual relationships are illegal, and even if these laws are not regularly enforced, they play the role of encouraging closet queerness. The vast bulk of the social work/psychiatric field looks upon homosexuality as a problem, and treats us as sick. Employers, particularly big business and (with some exceptions) government, let it be known that our skills are acceptable only as long as our sexuality is hidden.

The discrimination in the draft and armed services is a major
pillar of the general attitude toward gays. If we are willing to label ourselves publicly not only as homosexual, but as sick, we can qualify for deferment; and if we're not "discreet" (read dishonest) we get drummed out of the service. Hell no, we won't go—of course—but we can't continue to stand back and let the army fuck us over this way, either.

V. ON SEX

1. WHAT SEX IS: Sex is both creative expression and communication: good when it is either, and better when it is both. Sex can also be aggression—and usually is when those involved do not see each other as equals; and it can also be perfunctory, when we are distracted or preoccupied. These uses of sex spoil what is good about it.

I like to think of good sex in terms of playing the violin—(on one level) with both people seeing the other's body as an object of producing beauty as long as they play it well; and on another level the players communicating through their mutual production and appreciation of a thing of beauty. As in good music, you get totally into it—and coming back out of that state of consciousness is like finishing a work of art, or coming back from an episode of an acid or mescaline trip. And to press the analogy further: the variety of music is infinite and varied, depending on the capabilities of the players, both as subjects and as objects. Solos, duets, quartets (symphonies, even, if you happen to dig Romantic music!) are possible. And the variations in gender, response, and bodies are like different instruments. And perhaps what we have called sexual "orientation" probably just means that we have learned to play certain kinds of music well, and have not yet turned on to other music.

2. OBJECTIFICATION: In this scheme of things, people are sexual objectives, but they are also subjects, and are human beings who appreciate themselves as object and subject. This use of human bodies as objects is legitimate (not harmful) only as long as it is reciprocal. If one person is always the object and the other the subject, it stifles the human being in both of them. Objectification must also be open and frank. By silence we often assume or let the other person assume that sex means commitments: if it does, ok, but if it doesn't, say so. (Of course, it's not all that simple: our capabilities for manipulation are unfathomed—all we can do is try.)
Gay liberation people must understand that women have been treated EXCLUSIVELY and DISHONESTLY as sexual objects. It is a major part of their liberation to play down sexual objectification and begin to develop other aspects of themselves which have been stifled so long. We respect this. We also understand that many liberated women will, for a while, be appalled or disgusted at the open and prominent place that we put sex in our lives—and while this is a natural response from their experience, they must learn what it means for us.

For us, sexual objectification is a focal point of our liberation. Sex is precisely that which we are not supposed to have with each other. And to learn how to be open and good with each other sexually is part of our liberation. And one major distinction is obvious: objectification of sex for us is something we choose to do among us, while for women it is imposed by their oppressors.

3. ON POSITIONS AND ROLES: Much of our sexuality has been perverted through mimicry of straights, and through warping from self-hatred. These sexual perversions are basically anti-gay:

"I like to make it with straight guys"
"I'm not gay, but I like to be 'done'
"I like to fuck, but don't want to be fucked"
"I don't like to be touched above the neck"

This is role playing at its worst; we must transcend these roles—we strive for democratic, mutual, reciprocal sex. This doesn't mean that we are all mirror images of each other in bed, but that we break away from roles which enslave us. We already do better in bed than straights do, and we can do even better.

4. ON CHICKENS AND STUDS: Face it, nice bodies, and young bodies, are attributes, they're groovy. They are inspiration for art, for spiritual elevation, for good sex. The problem arises only in the inability to relate to people of the same age, or people who do not fit the plastic stereotypes of the good body. At that point, objectification eclipses people, and is an expression of self-hatred: "I don't like gay people, and I don't like my own sexuality, but if a stud (or chicken) will go to bed with me, I can pretend I'm not me."

A footnote on exploitation of children: kids can take care of themselves, and are sexual beings way earlier than we'd like to admit. Those of us who began cruising in our early teens know this, and we were doing cruising, not being debauched by our elders.
Scandals such as that in Boise, Idaho about homosexuals perverting the youth are dirty lies: the high school kids were exploiting gay people who were too scared to express the fullness of their homosexuality. And as for child molesting, the overwhelming amount is done by straight guys to little girls: it is not particularly a gay problem, and is a function of an antiasex puritanism and its resulting frustrations.

5. PERVERSION: We’ve been called perverts enough to be automatically suspicious of this word. Still many of us shrink from the idea of certain kinds of sex: with animals, sado/masochism, “dirty” sex (involving piss and shit). Right off, even before we take the time to learn any more, there are some things to get straight: a) we shouldn’t be apologetic to straights about gay people whose sex lives we don’t understand or share; b) it’s not particularly a gay issue, except that gays probably are less hung up about sexual experimentation; c) let’s get some perspective—even if we were to get into the game of deciding what’s good for someone else, the harm done to people in these “perversions” is undoubtedly less dangerous or unhealthy than is tobacco or alcohol. d) While they can be reflections of neurotic or self-hating patterns, they may also be enactments of spiritual or important things: e.g. sex with animals may be the beginning of interspecies communication; some dolphin-human breakthroughs have been made on the sexual level; e.g. one guy who says he digs eating shit during sex occasionally says it’s not the taste or texture or role, but just a symbol that he’s so far into the sex that those things no longer bother him; e.g. s/m, when consensual, can be described as highly developed artful endeavor, a ballet the constraints of which are thresholds of pain and pleasure.

VI. ON OUR GHETTO

We are refugees from Amerika. So we came to the ghetto—and as other ghettos, it has its negative and positive aspects. Refugee camps are better than what preceded them, or people never would have come. But they are still enslaving, inasmuch as we are limited to being ourselves there and only there.

Ghettos breed self-hatred. We stagnate here, accepting the status quo. And the status quo is rotten. We are all warped by our oppression, and in the helplessness of the ghetto we blame ourselves rather than our oppressors.
Ghettos breed exploitation: Landlords realize they can charge exorbitant rents and get away with it, because there is a limited area which is safe to live in. The Mafia control of bars and baths in New York is only an extreme example of outside money controlling our institutions for their profit. In San Francisco, the Tavern Guild is in favor of maintaining the ghetto, because it is through the ghetto culture that they make a buck. We crowd their bars not because of their merit, but because of the absence of any other social institutions. And the Guild has refused to let us collect defense funds or pass out literature in their bars—need we ask why?

Police or con men who shake down the straight gays in return for not revealing them; the bookstores and movie makers who get away with outrageous prices because they are the only outlet for pornography; the heads of “modeling” agencies, and other pimps, who exploit both the hustlers and the customers—these are the parasites who flourish in the ghetto.

SAN FRANCISCO—GHETTO OR FREE TERRITORY: Our ghetto certainly is more beautiful, larger, and more diverse and freer than most ghettos, and certainly more than Amerika—that's why we're here. But it is not ours—capitalists make money off us, police patrol us, the government tolerates us as long as we shut up, and daily we work for and pay taxes to those who oppress us.

To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our own energies to improve our lives. The emergence of gay liberation communes and our own paper is a good start. The talk about a gay liberation coffeehouse-dance hall, should be followed through. Rural retreats, political offices, food retail cooperatives, free school, unalienated gay bars and afterhours places—they must be developed if we are to have even the shadow of a free territory.

VII. ON COALITION

Right now the bulk of our work has to be among ourselves—selfeducating, fending off attacks, and building our free territory. Thus basically we have to have a gay/straight vision of the world, until the oppression of gays is ended.

But two problems exist with that as a total vision: 1) we can’t change Amerika alone, we need coalition with other oppressed groups at some point; 2) many of us have “mixed” identities—we
are gay, and also we are part of another group trying to free itself—women, blacks, other minority groups; we may also have taken on identities which are vital to us: dopers, ecologists, radicals.

Whom do we look to for coalition?

1. WOMEN'S LIBERATION: Without repeating earlier statements, 1) they are our closest ally—we have to try hard to get together with them; 2) a lesbian caucus is probably the easiest way to deal with gay guys' male chauvinism, and challenge the straightness of women's liberation; 3) we as males must be sensitive to their developing identities as women, and respect that; if we know what our liberation consists of, they certainly know what's best for them.

2. BLACK LIBERATION: This is tenuous right now, because of the uptightness and supermasculinity of many black males (which is understandable). Notwithstanding, we must support their movement and demands; we must show that we mean business; and we must figure out which our common enemies are: police, city hall, capitalism.

And they need us too: In New York, where blacks and whites are in a stalemate about community control of schools and police, a solid support from the very large gay population can make the difference between justice or continuing racism.

3. CHICANOS: Basically the same problem as with blacks: trying to overcome mutual animosity and fear, and finding ways to support their movement. The extra problem of superuptightness and machismo among Latin cultures, and the traditional pattern of Mexican " punks" beating on homosexuals, can be overcome: we're both oppressed, and by the same people at the top.

4. WHITE RADICALS AND IDEOLOGUES: We're not, as a group, Marxist or communist—we haven't figured out what kind of economic-political structure is good for us as gays. Nobody—capitalist or communist—has treated us as anything other than shit so far.

But we know we are radical, in the same sense that we know the system we're living under is the direct source of oppression, and it's not just a question of sharing the pie. The pie is rotten.

We can look forward to coalition and mutual inspiration with white radical groups if they are able to transcend their antigay and
male chauvinist patterns. We must support radical and militant demands as they come up, e.g. Moratorium, People's Park; but only as a group; we can't compromise our gay identity.

Problems: because radicals are mostly doing somebody else's thing, they are likely to want to avoid issues which affect them directly, and may see us as jeopardizing their "work" with workers, blacks. Some years ago, a dignitary of SDS at the onset of a community organization project announced at an initial staff meeting that there would be no homosexuality (or dope) on the project. And recently in NYC, a movement group which had a coffeehouse get together after a political rally, told the gays to leave when they started dancing together.

Perhaps it would be useful to approach them by helping them free the homosexual within them.

5. HIP AND STREET PEOPLE: Perhaps the major dynamic of recent gay lib sentiment is the hip revolution within the gay community. Emphasis on love, drop out, be honest, stop dressing drably, hair, smoke dope. Those who are the least vulnerable to attack by the establishment are the freest to express themselves.

We can make a direct appeal to young people, who are increasingly not so uptight about homosexuality. One kid, after having his first sex with a man, said "I don't know what all the fuss is all about, it's not that different from making it with a girl!"

The hip/street culture has led people into a lot of other things: encounter/sensitivity, the quest for reality, liberating territory for the people, ecological consciousness, communes. These are real points of agreement.

6. HOMOPHILE GROUPS: 1) Reformist and pokey as they might sometimes be, they are our brothers. They will grow just as we have grown and will grow. Don't attack them, particularly in straight or mixed company. 2) Ignore their attacks on us. 3) Cooperate where cooperation is possible without essential compromise of our identity.

CONCLUSION: AN OUTLINE OF IMPERATIVES FOR GAY LIBERATION

1. Free ourselves: come out, everywhere; initiate self-defense and political activity; initiate community institutions; think
2. Turn other gay people on: talk all the time; understand, accept, forgive.

3. Free the homosexual in everyone: we'll be getting a lot of shit from threatened latents: be gentle and keep talking and acting free.

4. We've been playing an act for a long time: we're consummate actors. Now we can begin TO BE, and it'll be a good show!