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Family, Housing, and the Political Geography of Gay Liberation in Los Angeles County, 1960-1986

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**FAMILY, HOUSING, AND THE POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF
GAY LIBERATION IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, 1960-1986**

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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Abstract

This study examines the gay liberation movement in Los Angeles County through the lens of housing rights. It illustrates how sexual justice activism evolved in tandem with the fates of the welfare state and urban politics. Like racial minorities, queers have been stymied by economic barriers. Beginning in the 1930s, federal housing agencies established “family” requirements to housing subsidies, which the state defined through biology or marriage. In L.A. County, activists worked to overcome this heteronormative barrier at the grassroots and within the political establishment. Binding gay liberation to economic and family justice, queers opened housing shelters and social service programs. This activism relied on public financing from the state. Moreover, like the Moral Majority, activists cast gay liberation in pro-family terms in order to win political support. This strategy encouraged the definition of family to change. By the end of the 1970s, housing policies at local and national levels recognized the pluralism of family life, revealing the covert success of gay liberation in public policy. While this was a remarkable achievement, gay liberation fell victim to urban austerity politics. Beginning with the 1978 California Tax Revolt, this movement encouraged privatization and public disinvestment in cities. Austerity degraded the welfare state and eliminated vital urban programs, worsening the urban crisis. In response to the crisis, the political geography of gay liberation in L.A. shifted to narrower contexts. Activists attempted to solve urban problems by incorporating a new city and relying on the private sector to solve public problems. By 1986, development and business interests had replaced the state as the chief benefactor of queer activism. While often examined in isolation, this project binds the histories of sexuality, the welfare state, and urban politics together to show their interconnectedness.

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List of Abbreviations

AOA: Apartment Owners of America

CETA: Comprehensive Employment and Training Act

CES: Coalition for Economic Survival

CDBG: Community Development Block Grant

CREA: California Real Estate Association

FHA: Federal Housing Administration

GCSC: Gay Community Services Center

GWC: Gay Women's Center

HUD: Department of Housing and Urban Development

LAPD: Los Angeles Police Department

LAGLF: Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front

LRU: Lavender and Red Union

MCC: Metropolitan Community Church

SCALCU: Southern California Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union

SCHMC: Southern California Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club

SDC: Stonewall Democratic Club

USM: United States Mission

WHCC: West Hollywood Concerned Citizens

WHCP: West Hollywood Community Plan

WHIC: West Hollywood Incorporation Committee

Introduction: Gay Liberation and Urban Crisis

In the summer of 1975, organizers from the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC) submitted a grant for \$75,000 to the Los Angeles County Community Development Commission. Lesbians and gays, they argued, suffered from high rates of “hospitalization, imprisonment, and suicide” because they lacked key social services. For example, they revealed that, “almost on a daily basis,” they were “contacted by human service workers searching for housing for gay clients.” Without homes, queers were less likely to attain decent employment or healthcare. Since many lesbians and gays had been abandoned by their biological families, moreover, they lacked emotional “stability.” Such marginalization created “high-risk communities” which cost “the taxpayer large sums of public funds” and exacerbated urban problems. Queer activists offered a way out: if funded by the county, they could develop “warm, supportive, homelike” housing shelters, employment training programs, and free healthcare initiatives. By reaching out to the region’s most marginalized populations, they would make “a direct impact on the general welfare of L.A. County.”¹ Aiding the application was a letter from County Supervisor Edmund D. Edelman. The GCSC, he wrote, “provided badly needed human services” to a “vulnerable population.” Pledging his “full support,” he argued that queer activism was “worthy of County investment.”² Within a month the grant was approved; it began a trend. Over the next few years, the GCSC received on average \$350,000 in annual public funds.³ Harnessing state resources for queer purposes, activists tied gay rights to the welfare state in order to launch their own war on poverty.

This dissertation charts the evolving political geography of gay liberation in L.A. County over three decades. While I expected to write a grassroots narrative, research yielded a more complex story. In search of public financing, queer Angelenos gained access to political power and public funding with surprising speed. In the process, they tied gay liberation to larger movements for economic justice, destabilized

¹ Gay Community Services Center general revenue sharing grant, 14 March 1975, GLCSC, box 11, folder 34.

² Ed Edelman To Whom It May Concern, March 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

³ Gay Community Services Center funding report, 6 October 1983. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

heteronormative understandings of family, and reshaped liberalism in multicultural ways. While they achieved meaningful results, activists won recognition at the exact moment when cities and welfare programs came under sustained attack. Thus, gay liberation was shaped by larger urban political boundaries. Amid urban privatization, the movement in L.A. County noticeably transformed. While activists utilized *public* resources to fund social services in the 1970s, urban austerity led them towards the *private* marketplace by the mid-1980s. In the final analysis, the fates of gay liberation and the American city were remarkably intertwined.

Queer Metropolitan Power in Los Angeles

Unlike other queer urban histories, this study utilizes a metropolitan scale. Rather than focus on *city* advancements, I examine *county* breakthroughs in Los Angeles. In his study of Chicago, Timothy Stewart-Winter argued that “the path of gays and lesbians to political power led through city hall.” Thanks to pragmatic alliances with African Americans, queer Chicagoans gained “clout” with elected leaders and became active players in city politics.⁴ For decades, historians have situated lesbian and gay stories within such city boundaries, but L.A. encourages a different spatial narrative.⁵ Unlike activists in Chicago, New York, or San Francisco, queer Angelenos bypassed city hall for county power. In L.A., gay liberation won political recognition at the metropolitan level first. As a result, activists were provided unusual levels of political and financial power which differentiated queer activism in L.A. from other cities and regions.

In the 1970s, queers found themselves geographically situated in the right place at the right time. Tom Sitton has rightly concluded that power in L.A. has historically resided with the county, not the city. Unlike the City Council, the five-person County Board of Supervisors controlled vast sums of funds and

⁴ Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1.

⁵ Examples include: George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York Basic Books, 1995); Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007); and Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*.

faced fewer bureaucratic entanglements. While major funding decisions required a three-person majority vote, individual supervisors were given enormous discretionary powers within their districts.⁶ Since the county was responsible for the bulk of social services, moreover, it controlled the majority of financial resources. The population of L.A. County (roughly the size of Ohio) insured it a steady stream of federal dollars through urban renewal and War on Poverty initiatives in the 1960s and 1970s. Finally, county supervisors were given near *carte blanche* in neighborhoods lacking municipal governments. These unincorporated areas, it was understood, lacked the means to generate revenue and provide services. Accordingly, they received top priority within discretionary budgets. These contours of county government aided the development of gay liberation.

Beginning in the 1960s, neighborhoods in present-day West Hollywood became identifiably queer. According to historian Martin Meeker, queers migrated to L.A. in search of “imagined communities” of acceptance.⁷ Once arrived, scores of lesbians and gays flocked to West Hollywood to escape the jurisdiction of the hostile Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD).⁸ Many decided to stay, especially low-income renters, since “speculative developers” had constructed “hastily built ‘dingbat’ apartments” which were nonetheless affordable.⁹ Moreover, even for those who lived elsewhere in the metropolis, the Greater Hollywood area became a queer capitol: bars, political clubs, and social service agencies brought queers from throughout the county to this unincorporated area of the Third Supervisorial District. The growing queer presence offered political opportunities. The “sultanic [*sic*] power” of a single county supervisor, one man surmised, included “hundreds of appointments” and “appropriations totaling \$2.6 billion.” Perhaps, he speculated, “gays of vision” could utilize county resources to “combat drug abuse, open halfway houses for

⁶ See Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: The Historical Society of Southern California 2013).

⁷ See Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

⁸ See Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* and Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006),

⁹ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 46.

the homeless, and develop employment programs for the jobless.”¹⁰ Upon the election of Ed Edelman in 1974, this prophecy was fulfilled. For a brief but important moment, activists benefited from impressive levels of public financing from county programs. The future of gay liberation thus rested in the fate of the metropolitan welfare state. By framing gay rights within a metropolitan context, this study complicates existing narratives of gay liberation, American politics, and urban history.

Housing, Liberalism, and the Politics of Family

Housing concerns encouraged activists in Los Angeles to frame gay liberation as both an economic justice and pro-family movement, which facilitated breakthroughs within the liberal establishment. Like black power, “gay liberation” could be a plastic concept.¹¹ Since its meanings shifted from place to place and person to person, providing a singular definition of the movement has proven difficult. Scholars have mainly focused on the cultural impact of gay liberation, which increased queer visibility and discourses in American society. Yet, they have often minimized connections between gay liberation and economic justice. According to Timothy Stewart-Winter, activists “focused in the 1970s on gaining civil liberties and rights based protections grounded in sexual identity” but “rarely raised explicit critiques of economic inequality.”¹² Similarly, Phil Tiemeyer concluded that “gay liberation had divergent priorities, since certain members of the community...were often more concerned with liberating their libidos from homophobia than rectifying economic injustices.”¹³ In their quest for housing, queer Angelenos constantly connected sexuality with economic rights. Moreover, whether at the grassroots or within the political establishment, housing activism lured queers into a necessary confrontation with the state over the meaning of family.

This confrontation was unavoidable. Unlike racial covenants, sexual housing discrimination was surreptitiously tied to family requirements. Beginning in the 1930s, both the Federal Housing

¹⁰ “L.A. Gays Win the EDE,” *The Advocate*, 4 December 1974. EES, folder 2.

¹¹ I am borrowing from Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 218.

¹² Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 186.

¹³ Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2013), 116.

Administration (FHA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) established marital and/or biological requirements which barred queers from housing subsidies. According to historian Gail Radford, “it was taken for granted that applicants live in what was then regarded as an optimal family unit consisting of mother, father, and children-no more and no less.”¹⁴ Housing subsidies, in other words, were reserved for heteronormative nuclear families. They composed but one ingredient to the development of what historian Margot Canaday has called the “straight state.”¹⁵ Amid the postwar suburban development boom, heteronormative housing policies continued to shape metropolitan landscapes. Historian Clay Howard concluded that, in the California Bay Area, developers divided the metropolis into “straight” suburbs and queer urban cores. This increased economic disparities between queer and straight communities.¹⁶ Thus, as they battled for access to housing, queers had no choice but to engage with the volatile politics of American family.

Narratives of postwar family politics have typically focused on conservative perspectives. In reaction to feminism, abortion, and gay rights, conservatives cast themselves as family warriors and helped create the New Right. Business interests, evangelical leaders, and grassroots activists came together to defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, reshape the Republican Party, and advocate a “politics of morality.”¹⁷ For many of these activists, gay liberation was especially alarming. Queers struck many as antithetical to family life. By the end of the 1970s, Miami resident Anita Bryant, a Christian singer from Oklahoma, came to symbolize the pro-family crusade against lesbians and gays. Bryant’s definition of family was based on “strict biblical doctrine” and emphasized biology and marriage.¹⁸ Jerry Falwell, a rising evangelical

¹⁴ Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 166.

¹⁵ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

¹⁶ Clayton Howard, “Building a ‘Family Friendly’ Metropolis: Sexuality, the State, and Postwar Housing Policy,” *Journal of Urban History* (2013), and *The Closet and the Cul de Sac: Sex, Politics, and Suburbanization in Postwar California* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

¹⁷ See Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011); and Robert Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

¹⁸ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 148.

celebrity and political figure, was even more specific: “The family,” he wrote, “is the God-ordained institution of marriage of one man and one woman together for a lifetime with their biological or adopted children.”¹⁹ When they learned that officials in Miami had authorized an ordinance against sexual discrimination, activists like Bryant and Falwell devoted themselves against gay rights. Importantly, they saw their struggle as *pro-family*, not *anti-queer*. By the end of the decade, conservatives coalesced to form the Moral Majority, which lobbied public officials on behalf of biblical family principles. While these actions are well known, historians have paid less attention to the discourse of family among liberals and within gay liberation.

By casting gay liberation as pro-family, queer Angelenos redefined familial definitions at both the grassroots and the within the liberal establishment. Ironically, when it came to family, most liberals agreed with Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell. Hoping to make the “idealized nuclear family attainable for more Americans,” historian Robert Self argued, political leaders and policymakers developed “breadwinner liberalism.”²⁰ As Great Society programs took form, historian Marisa Chappell elaborated, “the antipoverty coalition remained wedded to a particular model of family that was already unrealistic by the 1960s: the male-breadwinner, female-homemaker ideal.”²¹ Scholars have explored queer *community*-building in the 1960s and 1970s, but these efforts also impacted a larger discourse on family.²² In fact, queer family legitimacy was a goal of gay liberation. In *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, Karla Jay and Allen Young suggested that “gayness and gay liberation affects all people, whatever their primary sexual orientation.” As a struggle against homophobia *and* sexism, gay liberation would destabilize existing

¹⁹ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 56.

²⁰ Self, *All in the Family*, 4.

²¹ Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 2-3.

²² See John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Allan Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1990); Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); and Elizabeth Kennedy & Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

notions of sex, gender, and family.²³ To this point, Carl Wittman predicted in his influential “Gay Manifesto” that gay liberation would create “new pluralistic, role-free social structures.” Rather than mimic heteronormative models of family, “liberation for gay people [required] defining for themselves how and with whom they live.”²⁴ While this struck some as a radical idea in 1969, in fact it built upon a decades-long quest for queer legitimacy which has been well-documented by Daniel Rivers and Heather Murray.²⁵

Within queer housing shelters called “liberation houses,” lesbians and gays redefined family. Coming out, especially for young people, risked abandonment and rejection. Housing programs celebrated alternative family structures which, importantly, did not resemble heteronormative models. Families might consist of two partners, but maybe more; childrearing might be a priority in some, but not in others; in some cases, individuals might belong to multiple families simultaneously. Within grant applications to county officials, activists stressed queer family structures. According to one organizer, queers sometimes avoided “the term family” since it could often be “a coercive word.” Yet, houses were “somewhere where we took care of each other and assumed responsibility for each other.” After some reflection, another admitted “we ran [liberation houses] like a family...it was more than a homeless shelter.”²⁶ Here was a grassroots pro-family politics of the left. In claiming the right to organize their families as they saw fit, queers demonstrated that the 1970s did not belong to the Moral Majority. Moreover, in highlighting housing and family, activists secured breakthroughs within the liberal establishment.

Economic and emotional needs framed gay rights in ways which encouraged liberals to expand their tents. During the 1970s, liberal urban policies offered surprising opportunities which shaped the political geography of gay liberation. The “long War on Poverty,” continued to evolve with the

²³ Karla Jay & Allen Young (eds), *Out of the Closet: Voices of Gay Liberation* (New York: New York University Press, 1972, 1992), viii-ix.

²⁴ Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto” in Jay & Young (eds), *Out of the Closet: Voices of Gay Liberation*, 331.

²⁵ Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); Daniel Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

²⁶ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH); Jon Platania oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Berkeley, California, 3 March 2014 (Hereafter Platania OH).

Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. Both products of the Nixon-Ford era, these empowered communities at the expense of “big government.” Local officials, it was reasoned, could better determine community needs than technocrats in Washington, D.C. In Watts and East L.A., African American and Chicano activists utilized CETA and CDBG programs to improve housing, secure employment, and offer healthcare services.²⁷ Likewise, queers used county funds to operate six housing shelters and the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC). Queer relationships with mainstream Democrats forced liberalism to change. Locally, liberals came to view sexual discrimination alongside racial discrimination. Avoiding moral pitfalls, liberals like Supervisor Edelman and Mayor Tom Bradley spoke a language of economic and pro-family gay rights. This strategy abetted national change in the Presidential Administration of Jimmy Carter. In 1977, HUD changed the definition of family to recognize *any* “stable” relationship and in 1980 Carter’s White House Conference on American Families announced no singular definition of family was possible. Far from “splintering” liberalism, gay liberation helped make the welfare state more responsive to the multicultural needs of its citizens.²⁸ As activists adopted liberal tactics, liberalism adopted elements of gay liberation.

The political nature of queer activism in L.A. County complicates current historiography on gay liberation. Scholars have characterized gay politics in the 1970s in phases: by 1972 “gay liberation” was eclipsed by “gay liberalism,” they insist.²⁹ Yet, in L.A., that transition was not so apparent. “We were anti-establishment,” activist Don Kilhefner explained to me. “But, strategically, if we were going to make this revolution work, we were going to have to shift gears. The question became, how do we *finance* this radical movement?” In his mind, he never stopped promoting gay liberation.³⁰ Much like other radicals and leftists,

²⁷ See Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008) and See Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

²⁸ This supports Jonathan Bell’s notion of “mosaic liberalism” in Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 9.

²⁹ On “gay liberalism,” Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012) and Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 84.

³⁰ Kilhefner OH.

queers utilized liberal tools pragmatically.³¹ Moreover, focusing on the thread of family reworks the temporal boundaries of the movement. In her examination of AIDS and politics, historian Jennifer Brier claimed that “gay liberation remained central to gay and lesbian life into the 1980s.”³² This study supports that conclusion. Long after the demise of gay liberation fronts, the project of queer family legitimization remained central to gay politics in L.A.

Queers, Urban Policy, and Austerity

When queers tied themselves to county programs in Los Angeles, they intertwined gay liberation with metropolitan urban policy. Like activists in Chicago, lesbians and gays “claimed the right to the city.”³³ As long as those urban initiatives were publically funded, queers could count on stability. Yet, they gained access to programs which were soon to come under sustained attack. Urban historians have shown how industrial disinvestment and the privatization of social services contributed to an “urban crisis” in the 1940s and 1950s. The crisis disproportionately impacted racial minorities, whose fates relied on urban growth and services.³⁴ A similar fate befell queer activists in the 1970s and 1980s. Like a tsunami, the urban crisis hit cities in multiple waves. Beginning with the 1978 Tax Revolt, a new and devastating wave of austerity

³¹ In fact, there has been a long history of “left-liberal” cooperation. See Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) and Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³² Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 5.

³³ Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout*, 72.

³⁴ See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2003); Kevin Kruse, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); Andrew J. Diamond, *Mean Streets: Chicago Youths and the Everyday Struggle for Empowerment in the Multiracial City, 1908-1969* (Berkeley: The University of Chicago Press, 2009); and N.D.B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

derailed the trajectory of gay liberation in L.A. County. In response, queers inadvertently embraced the same privatization impulses which threatened them.

Beginning with Proposition 13, the “Tax Revolt” fundamentally altered municipal power in cities and counties in America. Seemingly a battle over property taxes, the Tax Revolt actually structurally thwarted municipal revenue generation in California. Soon other states, including Massachusetts, launched their own tax revolts modeled after Proposition 13.³⁵ In L.A., the county entered a permanent budget crisis. Public disinvestment and the privatization of services led to increased unemployment and homelessness. Vital programs, such as CETA, were eliminated while others, like CDBG, were curtailed so drastically they became largely symbolic gestures.³⁶ Despite claims to the contrary, the private marketplace proved ill-equipped for metropolitan planning. For social justice activists, the austerity experiment caused a political crisis. In Oakland, black power advocates confronted a bittersweet paradox. They had entered the halls of power, Robert Self concluded, just as urban programs collapsed. As a result, “black power had no real chance of instantiation.”³⁷ Gay liberation found itself equally altered by new fiscal and urban realities.

In the face of austerity, queers turned towards the marketplace in search of private solutions to public problems. This shift altered the political geography of gay liberation in L.A., a transformation evidenced by the incorporation of West Hollywood in 1984. Whether labeled “suburban secession,” “metropolitan divergence,” or “sprawl,” municipal fragmentation hampered attempts to solve large urban crises. Metropolitan problems, Matthew Lassiter wisely pointed out, require metropolitan solutions.³⁸ By retreating to the municipal boundaries of a new city, queers strengthened conservative assaults on county power. Moreover, they made gay rights compatible with the new urban marketplace. Scholars have shown how gentrification has arisen in politically surprising ways. In New York, Jane Jacobs and other “slow

³⁵ See Lily Geismer, *Don't Blame Us: Suburban Liberals and the Transformation of the Democratic Party* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

³⁶ See David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³⁷ Self, *American Babylon*, 326-327.

³⁸ See Kruse, *White Flight*; Lassiter, *The Silent Majority*, 322-323; and Robert Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

growth activists” deployed New Left arguments against liberal urban programs, while queers in San Francisco and Washington, D.C. “reinforced the race and class stratification of postwar urban space” by “promoting and protecting gay neighborhoods.”³⁹ Instead of blaming gentrification on insidious development interests, these scholars suggest it lay at the heart of modern liberation movements. West Hollywood strengthens these narratives.

Without vital CETA and CDBG resources, activists sought private investment from development and corporate entities. In short order, business interests came to replace the state as the chief benefactor of queer activism. On the one hand, activists highlighted the sexual character of the new city: surely establishing a gay-friendly city spoke the pride elements within gay liberation. On the other, however, gentrified development eradicated the attention to economic justice within the movement. Boosters marketed the city as the capital of high-end retail, dining, and housing while progressive urban policies, namely rent control, slowly eroded. Reliant on private resources, queer activism evolved into a bipartisan attempt to make gay rights compatible with the marketplace. According to historian Lily Geismer, liberals relied upon “business interests to stimulate economic growth and shape tax policy” in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴⁰ The direction of West Hollywood mimicked and strengthened this trend. In the end, the city proved that queers could not run away from larger metropolitan problems. In connecting gay liberation to larger urban transformations, this study suggests that sexual and urban history be studied together in greater detail.

Outline of the Dissertation

This dissertation relies on archival sources, oral histories, and theoretical tools from scholars of nationalism. I located queer voices in traditional and mainstream archival collections, which allowed me to present an outsider, and insider, narrative of L.A. politics. I utilized oral histories to present collective

³⁹ Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstown Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14-16; Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9; Kwame Holmes, “Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialects of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

⁴⁰ Geismer, *Don't Blame Us*, 252.

points-of-view and fill in critical archival gaps. Classical and recent nationalism studies provided theoretical frameworks for my research. In seeking place and politics, queers were not building nations. Still, they encountered similar dilemmas. Was gay liberation part of a larger movement? Was it exceptional, and thus incompatible with existing political structures? Like nationalists, queers answered these questions differently over time. “Traditions,” E.J. Hobsbawm reminded, might “appear to be old” but are in fact “quite recent...and often invented.” The most important aspect of creating a nation, Benedict Anderson elaborated, lay in the imagination. Groups of people first must *believe* that they are bound together before it can be so. Moreover, these processes were rarely static. Instead they constantly shifted.⁴¹ As the political geography of gay liberation shifted, spatial maps changed, and the notion of a “gay community” remained contested.

Women and people of color influenced the direction of queer activism in L.A. County. However, within the establishment, political leaders were disproportionately white and male. While others have emphasized queer racial diversity at the grassroots, my research did not produce multicultural narratives.⁴² Queer leaders supported racial justice and feminist movements, to be sure, but they sometimes struggled to adequately represent the marginalized. As much as they identified as radicals, gay leaders guarded keys to political power. Accordingly, my narrators are mostly white and male. I have attempted to balance this their perspectives by using archival records which offer more diverse voices. Letters to social service and political organizations, for instance, indicate that queer activism impacted men and women of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds. Wherever possible, I emphasize these voices. Moreover, while gay liberation was not always welcoming to women, I highlight important exceptions. Lesbians like Jeanne Córdova (who shared Irish and Mexican heritage) and Valerie Terrigno (the first lesbian mayor in the nation) overcame considerable barriers to become political leaders in their own right.

⁴¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Inventing Tradition” in Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983); for a recent study of “shifting” nationalism, see Paul Quigley, *Shifting Grounds: Nationalism and the American South, 1848-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴² See for example, Hobson, “Imagining Alliance”; Kwame Holmes, “Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialects of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011); and Kevin Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Chapters explore the evolution of gay liberation thematically alongside urban change. While the first four chapters focus on queer breakthroughs within the liberal welfare state, the final three offer a declensionist narrative. In chapter one, I chart homophile alliances with liberal allies in the 1960s. Moreover, through grassroots initiatives, lesbians and gays emphasized economic forms of sexual discrimination which cast queers alongside racial minorities. Both strategies enabled breakthroughs in the era of gay liberation. Chapter two focuses on housing activism in the early 1970s. In liberation houses queers emphasized poverty and constructed family environments which celebrated queerness. For lesbians and gays who had been abandoned by their biological families, these shelters provided much more than physical shelter. Housing activism blossomed into a larger social service strategy at the GCSC, the subject of chapter three. Organizers launched employment, healthcare, counseling, and prisoner/parolee programs which provided “womb to tomb” services. How were activists able to achieve so much? The answer is the subject of chapter four. Beginning at the local level, activists established political and financial relationships which extended the welfare state to lesbians and gays. Through public grants, gay liberation was publically funded and supported by mainstream liberals. Yet, beginning with the Tax Revolt, activists struggled to maintain social services amid budget freefalls, the subject of chapter five. By the early 1980s, austerity politics encouraged the political geography of gay liberation to change. Chapter six examines the 1984 incorporation of West Hollywood, which fractured liberal metropolitan strategies and remade gay politics in market-friendly ways. Despite progressive promises, the final chapter shows how the city cultivated pro-development policies which encouraged gentrification.

Note on Naming

In the process of researching and writing this dissertation, I learned a valuable lesson in anonymity. Unless names appeared in publication, or I gained explicit consent of use, all names have been removed or altered to protect privacy.

Chapter One: “Like Any Other Family, We Need Many Friends”: Movement

Building in Great Society Los Angeles

“The Southern California Chapter [of the ACLU], with the largest membership in the country, has adopted an official policy on sex and civil liberties...It is a gain for Civil Rights.”

-ONE, 1966

“Racial revolutions continue within our midst. Another minority, this time sexual, is standing up to assert its dignity and to demand full equality.”

-Gay Religious Liberals, 1970

In 1967 *New York Times* writer Webster Schott wrote of an issue that had “no place on the Great Society’s list of priorities.” Indeed, it was “a subject most Americans [didn’t] want to think about, much less discuss.” The subject was “some 4-million homosexuals...demanding rights.” Schott believed homosexuality was “deviant,” yet he criticized sexual discrimination. Because they could not get married, he pointed out, queers “do not share household expenses, file joint income tax returns, or enjoy joint ownership of property.” These “public policies discriminate against and virtually disenfranchise them economically.” As with African Americans, he urged the nation to “make life more humane for our 4-million confirmed male homosexuals.” Schott did not acknowledge the existence of lesbians. Connecting discrimination with urban crisis, he reasoned: “If Americans want integration instead of burning cities, Negroes must live next door. If we want heterosexuals instead of deviants, we must make life easier for them.” In Los Angeles, he reported, “the homosexual is moving above ground and organizing.” The homosexual magazine *One* [sic] claims a national circulation of 5,000” while “the Los Angeles Free Press [sic], an anti-establishment weekly edited by affluent hippies, carries homosexual advertising.” The city was also home to queer organizations, clubs, bars, and even religious institutions.¹ A sexual movement could no longer be ignored.

¹ Webster Schott, “Civil Rights and the Homosexual,” *New York Times*, 12 November, 1967, 271.

By the 1960s, in fact, California was a very queer state. Scholars have focused mostly on San Francisco, where queers fought everyday struggles for space, established political and religious organizations, and developed networks of communication.² Los Angeles has been included in homophile narratives, but to a lesser extent. Beginning in the 1950s, Angelenos established queer organizations which built upon the city's leftist bohemian traditions.³ Throughout the 1960s, however, the city witnessed spatial and political developments which have not been fully appreciated. Often with the assistance of oppositional forces, Angelenos claimed space and forged political alliances which lasted decades. While others have revealed that queer ties with the left, this chapter highlights inroads within Great Society liberalism.⁴ These proved important to gay liberation in the 1970s. The diverse mosaic of L.A. proved an ideal setting for queer coalitional politics. According to Shana Bernstein, "Los Angeles's cultural and political history made it a fertile place for civil rights activism" which was pragmatic.⁵ By the 1960s, Robert Bauman argued, "local neighborhoods and communities in Los Angeles implemented their own versions of the War on Poverty" which addressed specific local needs.⁶ While queers did not join the War on Poverty to the same degree, they did follow a similar trajectory which laid the groundwork for the expansion of the War on Poverty in the 1970s.

Making Connections: Civil Rights and the Homophile Movement

California was an important state to the developing homophile movement. Pioneering lesbian and gay organizations were founded in both Los Angeles and San Francisco which shaped the national

² See Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide-Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Marcia M. Gallo, *Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement* (Emeryville: Seal Press, 2007); and Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

³ Two influential works on queer L.A. are Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006) and Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007).

⁴ See Emily Hobson, "Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990" (PhD Dissertation: University of Southern California, 2009).

⁵ Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6-7.

⁶ Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 5.

movement. Cities like Philadelphia, Chicago, and New York were important, but Golden State activists formed the vanguard. The overrepresentation of California activists led one lesbian observer to ask, “What is it in the air out there... which inspires such battle?”⁷ Southern California was especially important. “By the beginning of 1953,” John D’Emilio described, a “network of [homophile] groups stretched... from San Diego to the beach communities north of Santa Monica and inland to San Bernardino.”⁸ The heart of this network was Los Angeles. For gay men, the founding of the Mattachine Society and ONE, Incorporated expanded opportunities for communications and community-building. Lesbian women also benefited from ONE, as well as from the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB), a San Francisco organization which established a branch in L.A. So too, racial minorities could be found within each organization. Amid the backdrop of the civil rights, homophiles connected sexuality to a broad movement for social justice.⁹

Harry Hay proved most instrumental to the 1950 founding of Mattachine. After migrating with his parents from England to the U.S., he settled in L.A. as World War II erupted. By that time, he was married to Anita Platky and a devoted member of the American Communist Party (CPUSA). Daniel Hurewitz suggested that Hay’s spatial location contributed to his worldview. A “child of Edendale,” Hay “experienced the same conjunction of artistry and leftist politics that defined the neighborhood” of Silver Lake for decades.¹⁰ From radical artists to communists, Silver Lake proved to be a favorable environment for boundary-pushing. Hay’s politics have led historians to associate Mattachine with a radical political tradition. CPUSA exposure provided a “secret, cell-like structure that protected members from exposure.” At the same time, the CPUSA was often unhelpful. Sexual oppression, some communists reasoned, was inconsequential to larger economic revolution.¹¹ This logic, combined with a dose of leadership

⁷ On homophile Philadelphia, see Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004); Lorraine Hansberry Nemerov as quoted in Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 23.

⁸ John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 71.

⁹ See Gallo, *Different Daughters*; Craig Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012); Meeker, *Contacts Desired*; and Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves*.

¹⁰ Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, 237.

¹¹ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 58-59.

homophobia, led Hay to suppress his sexuality. But his move to Silver Lake was an opportunity to explore, and by 1950 he associated with a cadre of male friends and lovers, including Chuck Rowland, Dale Jennings, and Rudi Gernreich. These men comprised the core of Mattachine.

From the outset, organizers associated the group with other social movements. At the inaugural meeting, Hay expressed his belief that the organization was “historic in importance and magnitude,” but also noted a growing progressive atmosphere in Southern California. “Through forums and group discussions on social problems,” he explained, “the rehabilitation of social ethics have been increasing in quantity, in scope, and thus naturally in quality in the community in recent years.” Like other groups, Mattachine would “guarantee the basic and protected right to enter the front ranks of self-respecting citizenship” for sexual minorities.¹² Hay spoke of both liberation and inclusion, strategies that could conflict. Mattachine was forged alongside other progressive groups which fused leftist and liberal political traditions. Shana Bernstein found pragmatic cooperation between Mexican, African, Jewish, and Japanese Americans of varying political persuasions. By the 1950s, these groups remained devoted to “earlier civil rights commitments despite their adoption of anticommunism.” While the language of the left had been muted, she suggested, a good portion of the Popular Front agenda from the 1930s and 1940s remained intact.¹³ Similarly, Doug Rossinow documented how “liberalism and the left...sprang from the same Enlightenment sources.” While historians have paid attention to divisions, “left-liberal” cooperation was commonplace.¹⁴ Queers fit within this tradition and emphasized layers discrimination, such as police harassment.

While police brutality existed nationwide, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) excelled in the practice. By the 1950s, the LAPD earned a reputation for harsh crackdowns on minorities, leftists, and queers. Routine attacks on labor organizers, African and Mexican Americans, and gay bars exposed the

¹² Harry Hay, opening remarks to the Mattachine Society. HHP, box 1, folder 4.

¹³ Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13.

¹⁴ Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 10.

overzealous nature of the LAPD Vice Squad, which often made national news. The Sleepy Lagoon murder and the Zoot Suit Riots which followed in 1943 showcased the troubled relationship between law enforcement and Latinos, complicating wartime relations between the United States and Latin America. It also revealed coalitional activism in the city, as Latinos were supported by black, Filipino, and white activists.¹⁵ Whitney Strub argued that postwar obscenity ordinances were introduced in L.A. with the explicit purpose of limiting queer visibility and communications. While they hid under the guise of decency, these ordinances drove queers further underground and contributed to an “antigay moral panic.”¹⁶

The “most pernicious method” of hunting gay men was entrapment. A small army of undercover officers patrolled gay bars in hopes of catching or inciting same-sex affections. These tactics became so common that “some undercover Vice Squad officers became known among gay men, who would caution one another about familiar faces.”¹⁷ Mattachine member Dale Jennings was entrapped in 1952, but fought the charges, claiming his rights had been violated. Harry Hay “saw the Jennings defense as another important opportunity to tie Mattachine to ‘fellow minorities’” and “even hired George Shibley, the lead attorney who had defended the youths in the Sleepy Lagoon case, to defend Jennings.”¹⁸ The surprising victory was a significant achievement for the two-year old Mattachine Society; membership in the organization grew quickly and leaders began lobbying local politicians. The pressures of Cold War anticommunism, however, prompted what some have called a “retreat to respectability.”¹⁹ Amid red and queer witch-hunts, Harry Hay was pressured out of Mattachine and new groups such as ONE, Incorporated and the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) espoused liberal anticommunist politics. Yet, as Martin Meeker and Marcia Gallo argued, these organizations continued the important project of queer communications-building. DOB’s *The Ladder* was “a means of sharing otherwise private thoughts and feelings, connecting

¹⁵ Bernstien, *Bridges of Reform*, 66; Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

¹⁶ See Whitney Strub, “The Clearly Obscene and the Queerly Obscene: Heteronormativity and Obscenity in Cold War Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2008).

¹⁷ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 78-79.

¹⁸ Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, 161.

¹⁹ See D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities* and David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004).

across miles, and breaking through isolation and fear” for scores of women.²⁰ Such efforts reflected a strategy of “using respectability as a mask to hide a much more daring and creative approach.” Along with immigrant and racial groups, homophiles “sought to change American culture as much as they expected that the culture would change them.”²¹ “Wearing masks, Craig Loftin elaborated, signaled queer “adaptation and resilience” not “capitulation to the whims of a hostile society.”²² This strategy mirrored other activists who cloaked leftist politics in liberal language. In response to House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) red-baiting and LAPD crackdowns, homophiles adhered to the anticommunist landscape.

An offshoot of *Mattachine*, *ONE* was organized in 1952 and published a monthly newsletter of the same name. Politically, the organization was moderate. Founders included liberal Democrats like Jim Kepner as well as “avid Republicans” such as Don Slater, W. Dorr Legg, and Dale Jennings (of *Mattachine* fame).²³ In other ways, however, *ONE* proved progressive. Unlike *Mattachine*, women played an active role within the organization. Lesbians such as Joan Corbin, Stella Rush, Helen Sandoz, and Betty Perdue helped shape the organization and wrote for the newsletter. A leader within the organization, Rush was a regular contributor to *ONE* for over seven years and proved “instrumental in the expansion southward of the DOB.” In the L.A. DOB chapter, Rush cosponsored “local homophile forums and meetings” which pushed the homophile movement to address sexism in addition to homophobia.²⁴ Within *ONE*, a liberal civil rights discourse was presented to readers. The magazine promoted two objectives: exposure and social integration. It was crucial to “publish and disseminate a magazine dealing primarily with homosexuality” while also fostering “aid in the social integration and rehabilitation of the sexual variant.” The magazine was meant to be a first step, while a social services division would provide legal, employment, and housing

²⁰ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 41.

²¹ Meeker, *Contacts Desired*, 33.

²² Craig Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012), 11.

²³ C. Todd White, *Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), 91.

²⁴ Marcia M. Gallo, “Dancing with Stella, Los Angeles Daughters of Bilitis Pioneer,” in Nan Alamilla Boyd & Horacio N. Roque Ramírez (eds.), *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 213; Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 44.

counseling. To assist in this task, ONE worked with the Southern California Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (SCACLU). Since “people ask ONE for legal advice repeatedly,” one article explained, the SCACLU would “refer fine and friendly attorneys” who could offer assistance. *ONE* editors explained that it was crucial to establish relationships with liberal allies. “Like any other family,” they reasoned, “we need many friends.”²⁵ Friendships with liberal groups grew in importance throughout the 1960s, often with the unintended assistance of anti-queer activists.

The “Homosexual Blot”: Backlash and Space-Claiming in 1960s Hollywood

Queer efforts to join a progressive mosaic were assisted by an unlikely source in the early 1960s. Throughout the decade conservatives mounted attacks on identifiably queer spaces in Los Angeles, including Pershing Square and Hollywood. The latter became a battle of morality and urban space. In their efforts to rid L.A. of “sexual deviates,” however, conservatives unintentionally drew liberals and homophiles closer together. Designating Hollywood as a “homosexual blot,” conservatives created a cognitive sexual map of L.A. that only partially represented reality. By the mid-1960s, Hollywood and its western unincorporated area *were* growing in queer population. In fact, it was the homophobic practices of the LAPD which encouraged many to move west outside of LAPD jurisdiction. But queers, like most Angelenos, lived in multiple neighborhoods. Downtown remained an important site for queers despite harsh policing. The growing presence of lesbians and gay men in Long Beach provided ample evidence of queer penetrations within suburban neighborhoods. In beach communities such as Venice and Santa Monica (and, further south, Laguna Beach), queer men and women could be located without much difficulty. Imagined communities and maps were nonetheless important. As Moira Rachel Kenney suggested, “place-claiming—the appropriation of physical, social, and mental places by marginalized groups—...is the central strategic

²⁵ *ONE*, August 1956. SCACLU, box 17, folder 14.

mechanism of social movements.”²⁶ The sexual map of L.A. was drawn by queers and homophobic opponents who imaginatively confined queers to the Hollywood area.

Conservative activists found a powerful ally in a newspaper named *Citizen-News*. Beginning in 1962, the paper alerted readers to the growing presence of “sex deviates” in the Hollywood area. *Citizen-News* was one of many papers owned by Beverly Hills businessman and Republican Party patron David B. Heyler. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Heyler amassed a small media empire in L.A. worth approximately \$4.5 million and with a circulation of approximately 450,000. In addition to promoting Richard Nixon (who more than once invited Heyler to private fundraisers), his papers also supported the local chapter of the John Birch Society.²⁷ Unabashedly right-wing, *Citizen-News* “supported what it believed to be right, and opposed what it believed to be wrong, regardless of politics or pressure.”²⁸ Writers dealt flippantly with journalistic standards, leading one historian to characterize its reports as “muckraking.”²⁹ Still, it addressed genuine anxieties. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, conservative and religious leaders stoked fears of sexual perversion and child endangerment. The John Birch Society found Southern California to be fertile ground for a new and more “paranoid” conservative discourse.³⁰ By the end of the 1950s, Michelle Nickerson found “a vast [conservative] subculture with its own literature, radio broadcasts, workshops, home-based study groups, speaking circuits, and, by 1961, bookstores” in Greater Los Angeles.³¹ A powerful evangelical movement led in part by Billy Graham supported this network.³² Alongside communism, gender and sexual change motivated conservatives to action. Convinced that secular humanism was taking hold of public education, parents were encouraged to connect issues of homosexuality, violent crime, and child molestation. Public service shorts such as *Boys Beware* (a Southern

²⁶ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 3-6; 38-39; 18.

²⁷ “Hollywood Newspaper Purchased by Heyler,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1961, 26.

²⁸ *Citizen-News* mission statement, 1960. HCN.

²⁹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 145.

³⁰ I am alluding to Richard Hofstadter’s prescient essay, “The Paranoid Style in American Politics,” *Harper’s Magazine*, November 1964.

³¹ Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 37.

³² See Darren Dochuk, *From Bible-Belt to Sun-Belt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: Norton, 2011).

California production) warned parents against predatory gay men while local obscenity statutes and city ordinances conflated queers with child pornography.³³ *Citizen-News* entered the fight early.

In January of 1960, an editorial urged parents to support a resolution adopted by the National Religious Publicity Council, which decried gratuitous sex and violence in popular culture. “Sordid” film content relied “upon filth for sales,” one writer warned, and sought “to cater to those who like to wallow in filth for their own diversion.” This was dangerous for vulnerable youngsters.³⁴ Two months later the paper called for a “parents’ crusade to combat repulsive indecency” in the “den of filth” that was Hollywood.³⁵ Although “most young people have enough sense to be bored by [pornography] after the first few exposures,” the “explosion of open pornography” was dangerous.³⁶ Solutions to the problem began with strict moral discipline and the moral public policies.³⁷ It also required an appreciation for traditional gender roles. Despite feminist rumbles, *Citizen-News* assured that a “Woman’s place [was] still in the home.” Efforts to make the “gals really believe that they can hang onto all the sugar-and-spice and usurp the gentlemen,” one writer crowed, were “kind of pathetic.” Americans needed to embrace sex differences, not run away from them.³⁸ Tucked neatly between stories of “How the Reds are Behind Anti-Semitism” and proclamations that the “Birchers are not Extremists,” readers were being prepped for a cultural war over the family.³⁹ The campaign against queers was but one front.

The paper was direct and to the point: “Now is the time for Greater Hollywood to do something about [the] very ugly problem [concerning] the large concentration of homosexuals,” editors explained. These “sex deviates” had grown in population and caused neighborhood deterioration. Residents and tourists could no longer avoid “the nauseating sights.” Pornography, prostitution, crime, and the loss of

³³ Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 40.

³⁴ “Sordid Film Fare,” *Citizen-News*, 9 January 1960. HCN.

³⁵ “Urges Parental Crusade,” *Citizen-News*, 22 March 1960. HCN.

³⁶ “Degrees of Pornography,” *Citizen-News*, 4 May 1962. HCN.

³⁷ “Drop Outs,” *Citizen-News*, 24 January 1962. HCN.

³⁸ “Woman’s Place Still in Home,” *Citizen-News*, 25 April 1962. HCN.

³⁹ “Reds Behind Anti-Semitism,” *Citizen-News*, 1 January 1960; “Birchers not Extremists,” *Citizen-News*, 22 May 1962. HCN.

property values plagued the area because it had become “a mecca for queers.” Writers acknowledged the work of LAPD Chief William Parker, whose “Hollywood Division’s vice squad steadily works to enforce the laws that curb homosexuals.”⁴⁰ Indeed, it would have been difficult to overlook Parker’s escalating crackdown. At his urging, the city passed a harsh resolution giving the LAPD draconian discretion. “For Los Angeles’ gay men and lesbians,” Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons concluded, “life became much harder with the advent of Chief Parker.”⁴¹ One loyal reader celebrated Parker’s antics, concluding that Angelenos had “a police chief who is the tops!”⁴² Still, police repression was insufficient. The editorial staff reasoned that homosexuality was “a problem that citizens, schools, churches, the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, [and] other groups and governmental officials *other than police* must assist in solving.” To safeguard the “interests of normal men, women and children,” the “*entire* community” needed to get involved. Editors promised that “several members of the staff” would work “in cooperation with community leaders, police and other governmental officials, [to] bring out the facts in a series of articles.” They would not rest “until Hollywood is freed of its homosexual blot.”⁴³

Readers responded in a variety of ways. One identified as “DISGUSTED” lamented that Hollywood had been turned into a “gangland.” Queers had converted young people into “cursing, screaming, obnoxious teen-agers” who flouted sexual morality. DISGUSTED recommended that the LAPD enforce a permanent curfew, which would eliminate the street scene altogether.⁴⁴ Mrs. Gloria Nelson enthusiastically endorsed the “fearless” campaign. She was overcome with “a burning desire to help make Hollywood clean again.” Although the police were on her side, the trouble came in legitimizing arrests. Several police officers had informed her that they were “not allowed to arrest sexual deviates unless they accost someone indecently, dress in female clothing, or are intoxicated and therefore disturbing the peace.” Since “deviates [were] reasonably careful not to break any of these laws,” she pointed out, “they [were] free

⁴⁰ “Now is the Time,” *Citizen-News*, 23 January 1962. HCN.

⁴¹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 75; Strub, *Perversion for Profit*, 34.

⁴² Florence Allen, “Praise for the Chief,” *Citizen-News*, 21 March 1962. HCN.

⁴³ “Now is the Time,” *Citizen-News*, 23 January 1962. HCN.

⁴⁴ “Hollywood Gangland,” *Citizen-News*, 9 February 1962. HCN.

to pollute our neighborhoods.” This strategy could be broken by systematic discrimination. “If the merchants of Hollywood, the entertainment industry, business, and the owners of income units,” she opined, “would cease selling [queers] products, serving them drinks or food, cease hiring them, *in short, making it impossible for them to exist here,*” the “cancer which grows in our midst” will be destroyed. If “other large cities in America” could solve their queer problems, she asked, “why not Los Angeles?”⁴⁵

Not all readers agreed. J. Sutton believed Hollywood had become a cesspool, but offered a different reason. “An intelligent and thoughtful approach to what you call an ‘ugly problem,’” he suggested, “is not to assign more vice officers to ‘treat’ deviates...The ‘accosting and molesting’ you speak of is not done by the deviates, but by those red-blooded ‘normal’ teenagers whose parents fear will be harmed by perverts.” The problem was not queers, it was rambunctious teenagers. Editors maintained that the Hollywood “community will be served by first removing the concentration of sex deviates, young and old.”⁴⁶ They also published a critique of Sutton from another reader. The wild teens in the area, he argued, “are obviously not the children of the good people.” Instead, they hailed “from many areas besides our own” in search of an “abundance of free entertainment supplied by the more extroverted homosexuals.” The root cause of Hollywood’s ugly problem remained the abundance of queers. “When ‘tolerance’ results in endangering our children,” he warned, “public examination and action is [*sic*] necessary.”⁴⁷ The campaign in Hollywood dovetailed with simultaneous efforts to straighten Downtown.

Pershing Square was a central location for queer men since at least the 1930s. “Sailors and soldiers flocked” to the square, “known to be a pick-up area, and many more poured into the bar of the Biltmore, the elegant hotel facing the square.”⁴⁸ Movement leaders Jim Kepner, Morris Kight, Don Slater, and Harry Hay all made contacts there. Kepner suggested the square “was known worldwide as a place where the gays went, the very center of what outlanders liked to call ‘the land of fruits and nuts.’”⁴⁹ Much like Hollywood,

⁴⁵ Gloria Nelson, “Now is the Time!” *Citizen-News*, 30 January 1962. HCN.

⁴⁶ J. Sutton, “Teen-Age Molesters?” *Citizen-News*, 5 February 1962. HCN.

⁴⁷ C. Miller, “Tolerance Breeds Trouble,” *Citizen-News*, 16 February 1962. HCN.

⁴⁸ Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, 233.

⁴⁹ Jim Kepner, “Goodbye to Pershing Square,” 1963. JKP, box 24, folder 37.

Pershing Square came under assault in the 1960s as a “beautification” campaign transformed public space. The *Los Angeles Times* boosted the effort. “No amount of sentimentalizing can change the fact that at present [Pershing Square] serves as a magnet for a criminal element, mostly homosexuals,” an article proclaimed. By “changing the planting, improving the lighting, and revising the sidewalks,” the space could be made open and “far easier to police.”⁵⁰ Eradicating much of the vegetation in the area, Pershing Square was transformed into a panoptic space devoid of privacy. “The park is still there,” Kepner later bemoaned, “but it’s hardly Pershing Square anymore.” The transformation encouraged him, “along with most of the gay community, to move west.”⁵¹ Downtown success no doubt buoyed hopes for Hollywood. To the disappointment of anti-queer activists, however, the Hollywood campaign did not succeed. Instead, it strengthened relationships between queers and liberals.

According to Judy Kutulas, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) branches were trailblazers for the national organization. Beginning in the 1930s, the Southern California branch (SCACLU) earned a reputation as “the most stable local branch” in the nation, and also as one of the most progressive. Founded with the help of socialist Upton Sinclair, the SCACLU was the “most radical of all the locals, and brought in the largest share of new members” in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵² ONE established a relationship with the branch in the 1950s and strengthened it amid the backdrop of the Hollywood harassment. The SCACLU was aware of *Citizen-News*, which routinely bashed the ACLU. One column suggested that “A.C.L.U. more appropriately stands for ‘All Communists Love Us’” and suggested giving the organization “so many Communists to defend that it gets sick of them.” Patriotic citizens ought to “make citizens arrests of Communists” and overwhelm the organization. Editors liked this plan, but warned that “citizen’s arrests are dangerous things to fool with.”⁵³ The SCACLU monitored inflammatory rhetoric from the paper and gained an insider’s perspective when a *Citizen-News* employee contacted the local office.

⁵⁰ “The Squabble Over Pershing Square,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1963, A4.

⁵¹ Jim Kepner, “Goodbye to Pershing Square,” 1963. JKP, box 24, folder 37.

⁵² Judy Kutulas, *The American Civil Liberties Union and the Making of Modern Liberalism, 1930-1960* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 43, 161.

⁵³ Lee Galvani, “A.C.L.U. Proposal,” *Citizen-News*, 15 March 1962. HCN.

“It seems to be the intention of my employer,” he reported, “to initiate a vicious and slanderous witch-hunt against the homosexual element of this community by using the language and semantic techniques of the John Birch Society.” He believed that owner David Heyler had “no motive for ‘queer-hunting’” except “ruthless and coldblooded circulation-building.” The campaign was certain to bring deleterious effects. “I feel certain that the articles will be vicious, slanted, and directed toward a predetermined conclusion,” he concluded. In bringing the matter to the SCACLU, he suggested that homosexuals were in need of civil rights protection. “When an allegedly responsible newspaper misuses its freedom of the press to bring legal, social, and economic pressure against members of a minority group,” he underlined, “it abridges their civil rights as effectively as an act of unjust legislation. I need hardly point out the serious repercussions this could have in the form of police harassment and brutality, of which there has already been far too much.” He hoped the SCACLU could “bring this nonsense to a halt.”⁵⁴ Noted columnist, Hollywood resident, and political chameleon Paul Coates also chastised anti-queer rhetoric as well. Coates disapproved of homosexuality, but the actions of *Citizen-News* were deplorable. “We’re all grownups,” he opined. Queers were “hardly a situation about which we should get hysterical.” He went further: “There is something very callous or, I would prefer to think, very ignorant, about putting a group label on these people as potential criminals and killers.”⁵⁵ Coates had been one of the first to acknowledge the queers in Los Angeles.⁵⁶ According to Whitney Strub, he utilized his columns and television program, *Confidential File*, to “repeatedly denounce homosexuality.”⁵⁷ This makes his 1963 reprimanding of *Citizen-News* significant. Queers, he argued, “are no more potential criminals and killers than any other sociological groups.” Echoing Webster Schott, he could not morally endorse queer behavior but did support civil rights protection.⁵⁸ So did the SCACLU.

⁵⁴ Letter, 1 February 1962. SCACLU, box 17, folder 14.

⁵⁵ Paul Coates, “The Sick, Sick, Sick Young Men,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 1963, L7.

⁵⁶ Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles*, 263-264.

⁵⁷ Strub, *Perversion for Profit*, 35.

⁵⁸ Paul Coates, “The Sick, Sick, Sick Young Men,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 1963, L7.

In the late 1950s, the organization drafted an open letter to congressional representatives in Washington, D.C. “More maligned in our society than even the Communist,” it read, “homosexuals stand alone as outcasts” and faced discrimination in housing, employment, and law enforcement. In “the American tradition,” the SCACLU urged protective legislation (this prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964).⁵⁹ The arrival of Vern and Bonnie Bullough pushed the organization further. An historian and sexologist, Vern held deep social justice convictions while Bonnie’s family confronted homophobic oppression and assisted lesbians in the 1940s.⁶⁰ Both were active players in the SCACLU and Vern was elected its chairman. In 1964 and 1965, as the nation’s attention focused on civil rights, SCACLU organizers wrote a policy statement concerning queers. Those “suspected, accused, or arrested on charges of sexual mis-conduct [sic],” Bullough charged, “find it difficult to gain employment and housing.”⁶¹ He concluded that “the right to privacy in sexual relations” was “a basic constitutional right.”⁶² While a branch proclamation, Bullough worked closely with national organizers, who adopted the SCACLU policy one year later.⁶³ The *Los Angeles Times* reported that L.A. was the first to devise a “policy to protect the homosexual.”⁶⁴ Amid civil rights advancements, *ONE* celebrated. “The largest ACLU branch in the country,” an article reported, has “adopted an official policy on Sex and Civil Liberties. It is a gain for Civil Rights.”⁶⁵ The conservative assault on Hollywood aided this development. As late as 1984, writer and activist John Rechy recalled how “witch-hunts,” “police raids,” and the “inflammatory rhetoric of the Hollywood Citizen News [sic]” forced a “center of gay existence” to emerge in Hollywood.⁶⁶ In imaginatively condemning Hollywood as a homosexual paradise, conservatives helped to make the area identifiably queer.

⁵⁹ “Do Constitutional Guarantees Cover Homosexuals?” undated. SCACLU, box 17, folder 14.

⁶⁰ White, *Pre-Gay L.A.*, 182.

⁶¹ Southern California American Civil Liberties Union Board of Directors Report, “Committee on Civil Liberties and Unusual Sex or Gender Behaviors,” 18 May 1965. SCACLU, box 124, folder: Sex and Civil Liberties.

⁶² Southern California American Civil Liberties Proposed Statement Regarding Sexual Behavior, 1 October 1965. SCACLU, box 124, folder: Sex and Civil Liberties.

⁶³ White, *Pre-Gay L.A.*, 182; Leigh Ann Wheeler, *How Sex Became a Civil Liberty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 113.

⁶⁴ “ACLU Adopts Policy on Sexual Behavior,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 December 1965, A8.

⁶⁵ “A Gain for Civil Rights,” *ONE Magazine*, January 1966. SCACLU, box 124, folder: Sex and Civil Liberties.

⁶⁶ John Rechy, “West Hollywood’s Identity: A Good City, Not a Gay City,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1985.

The ordeal also brought Homophiles into a larger discourse of civil liberties and human rights, which complicates existing legal narratives of sexuality in the 1960s. In examining the U.S. Supreme Court, Marc Stein concluded that “liberal and leftist advocates attempted to secure victories by appealing to conservative values,” resulting in “victories for marital and reproductive rights, but defeats of sexual freedom, equality, and citizenship.”⁶⁷ That may have been the national case, but the SCACLU breakthrough was still important. It helped foster a liberal argument for change, of which California Assemblyman Willie Brown’s 1969 Consenting Adult Sex Bill was part. In other ways, queers were incorporated within the Great Society during the 1960s.

Searching for the Great Society: Liberal and Religious Organizing

Los Angeles was a key city in the deployment of the War on Poverty. Social minorities bent liberal programs to serve their needs. Working alongside and within racial and gender movements, queers attempted to shape programs further. While San Franciscans led the way, Angelenos founded the United States Mission (USM) to house the homeless and connect queers with the War on Poverty. So too, the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) linked homophiles with liberalism and progressive Christianity. In the years preceding gay liberation, a new generation of activists worked towards inclusion.

In January of 1964, President Lyndon Baines Johnson declared an “unconditional war on poverty.” By August, he lobbied Congress to pass the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA), “which poured millions into job training” and provided “much-needed services to impoverished communities.” Coming some thirty years after the first New Deal reform initiatives, the War on Poverty was the heart of Johnson’s Great Society. Historians have since analyzed its impact, shortcomings, and legacy. Observers from both the right and left have not been kind. While “progressives argued that the proposed antipoverty programs were too stingy...conservatives countered that these efforts were subversive and costly.”⁶⁸ Both overlooked local

⁶⁷ Marc Stein, *Sexual Injustice: Supreme Court Decisions from Griswold to Roe* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 20-21.

⁶⁸ Annelise Orleck in Orleck & Lisa Gayle Hazirjian (eds), *The War on Poverty: A New Grassroots History, 1964-1980* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 7-9.

success stories, where communities took control of federal initiatives and made them work. Although conservative critics such as Ronald Reagan ridiculed “big government,” the War on Poverty sparked *local* movements. A central component of the EOA was the creation of a Community Action Program (CAP), which funded community organizations to educate and train unemployed and homeless Americans. The War on Poverty was especially relevant to black activists. In the heart of Jim Crow, southerners took advantage of CAP resources to provide employment training, housing, and healthcare.⁶⁹ In Las Vegas, black women developed programs for low-income mothers.⁷⁰ Building upon legacies of cooperation, interracial efforts emerged in L.A. throughout 1960s and 1970s. This activism, Robert Bauman concluded, fostered alliances (and sometimes frustrations) between blacks and Latinos in Watts and East L.A.⁷¹ Within this larger narrative, queers pushed boundaries.

In both Los Angeles and San Francisco, activists took notice of the CAP program. Martin Meeker, Christina Hanhardt, and Jonathan Bell revealed how Bay Area organizers molded the War on Poverty in queer ways. As liberals moved to address poverty in the Tenderloin District of San Francisco, they extended arguments about poverty. “Although not disadvantaged because of the color of their skin,” they argued, “these social outcasts were nevertheless sequestered in urban slums where a lack of jobs, substandard housing, poor health indices, and isolation from family support and succor made them *queerly disadvantaged*.”⁷² Activists encouraged a queering of “poverty knowledge.”⁷³ These efforts proved effective: in a 1965 policy report on the “Tenderloin Ghetto,” poverty experts espoused language towards

⁶⁹ See Laurie B. Green, “Saving Babies in Memphis: The Politics of Race, Health, and Hunger during the War on Poverty” in Orleck & Hazirjian, *The War on Poverty*, William S. Clayson, *Freedom is Not Enough: The War on Poverty and Civil Rights Movement in Texas* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2010), and Kent B. Germany, *New Orleans After the Promises: Poverty, Citizenship, and the Search for the Great Society* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2007).

⁷⁰ See Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Women Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005).

⁷¹ See Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*.

⁷² Martin Meeker, “The Queerly Disadvantaged and the Making of San Francisco’s War on Poverty,” *Pacific Historical Review* 81, no. 1 (2012), 27.

⁷³ The term “poverty knowledge” comes from Alice O’Connor, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

homosexuals that was closely “associated with the populations of other low-income” groups.⁷⁴ This helped “shift the focus of debate away from questions of sex and relationships and onto the terrain of economic and civil rights.”⁷⁵ This strengthens revisionist narratives of the homophile movement. Far from retreating, activists made impressive gains in the 1960s. Yet, scholars have suggested this was an aberration. “The fact that homophile advocates named their solidarity with the poor is significant,” one scholar argued. But “this approach would not last long in dominant gay politics.”⁷⁶ L.A. tells a very different story. Activists worked long-term to expand the War on Poverty, which would only be realized in the 1970s. Seeds were also planted by the USM.

Sometimes referred to simply as the L.A. Mission, the USM was the brainchild of religious activist Robert Humphries. An Angeleno since the 1950s, he was alarmed by rising levels of unemployment and homelessness, and organized a crisis shelter. Although the USM would later be advertised as a gay organization, no mention of sexuality appeared at the outset. That changed as Humphries began to explore queer worlds. By the mid-1960s, he was a frequent traveler to Pershing Square and was deeply affected by law enforcement crackdowns. Around 1964, he met Morris Kight and started a conversation with him about police harassment and the USM. An energetic activist, Kight played a formidable role in the development of gay liberation in L.A. After he saw “Humphries rallying people in Pershing Square,” the two men “became working associates on the work of civil liberties and civil rights.” Kight guided Humphries to homophiles and both focused on social service activism. “I supported the Mission,” Kight explained, “because I believed in securing an income and housing for people at a disadvantage. That’s what the Mission did.”⁷⁷ By 1965 the USM took on a queer focus. “The specific and primary purposes” would be “to maintain and enlarge the spirit of religious freedom for all people” by promoting “a greater area of understanding between non-conformist minorities, particularly those of homophile or homosexual

⁷⁴ Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 44.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 197.

⁷⁶ Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 58.

⁷⁷ Morris Kight prepared remarks, 15 May 1998. USM, box 1, folder 1.

orientation, and the more conservative societies of Mankind.”⁷⁸ Language tied the organization to the Great Society language, which led to a controversial revenue-generating strategy. Lyndon Johnson emphasized that the Great Society would offer a “hands up, not a hand out.” Likewise, the USM created a “self-help work program” that provided no free rides.⁷⁹ Men and women were expected to work, often as door-to-door fundraisers. At the end of each week, funds were used to pay rent, food, and clothing bills. While this was certainly not a racket, it could be a trap. Years later, the strategy continued to bedevil organizers; some went so far as to characterize the organization as a “network of professional beggars.”⁸⁰ Criticism rightly identified a central flaw: without stable funding, social service activism was vulnerable. Still, as one of the first social service organizations to champion low-income queers, the USM was significant. It appropriated liberal attention about poverty and applied it to queers, a strategy that was furthered in the years to come.

The USM also strengthened progressive religious activism in L.A. Humphries argued that the USM was supported by Christian principles. For example, fliers quoted verses from the Bible to justify the organization’s existence. A favorite was Matthew 25, which read: “For I was hungry and ye gave me food; I was thirsty and ye gave me drink; I was a stranger and ye took me in.” According to organizers this was “what the U.S. Mission [was] all about.”⁸¹ In practice the USM was non-sectarian and did not mandate religious participation. Morris Kight characterized it as “somewhat Christian, a bit Buddhist, and a lot humanist.”⁸² Religious tolerance did not imply activists were spiritually disingenuous, however. Many fit well into the national evangelical movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and utilized faith to support social change. Histories of evangelicalism have often focused exclusively on the right.⁸³ Yet, as Stephen Miller

⁷⁸ United States Mission articles of incorporation, undated. USM, box 1, folder 5.

⁷⁹ United States Mission flier, undated. USM, box 1, folder 3.

⁸⁰ “Begging for a Living,” *Denver Westwood News*, 1 July 1999, 2.

⁸¹ United States Mission flier, undated. USM, box 1, folder 3.

⁸² Morris Kight prepared remarks, 15 May 1998. USM, box 1, folder 1.

⁸³ Examples include Daniel K. Williams, *God’s Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) and Dochuk, *From Bible-Belt to Sun-Belt*. See also Axel R. Schäfer (ed.), *American Evangelicals and the 1960s* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2013).

suggested, evangelicalism was “an age, not a subculture.” Evangelicals of varying ideological stripes composed the movement, including queers.⁸⁴

Alongside Humphries, Troy Perry was influential. Born in Tallahassee, Florida, he developed a passion for evangelicalism and became a licensed Baptist preacher at the age of fifteen. Four years later he married the daughter of a fellow preacher, but found himself attracted to men. He consumed new books and articles on homosexuality and kept a copy of Donald Webster Cory’s (Edward Sagarin) *The Homosexual in America* hidden underneath his mattress.⁸⁵ When the USM was founded, Perry was facing professional and personal crises. Church officials uncovered his sexuality and expelled him, prompting a move to Los Angeles. Upon arrival, his marriage disintegrated after a second church dismissal. Confused, Perry was prescribed “seclusion and prayer.” He found work in a department store before being drafted into military service in 1965. Upon his return, he fell in love with another man, whose rebuke left him suicidal and spiritually despondent. When police raided The Patch, a local gay bar, he realized he was not alone. The abuse convinced many that “God didn’t care about a bunch of dirty queers.”⁸⁶ Hoping to overcome the spiritual depression, he founded the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC).

In 1969 this “church for homosexuals” was established in Hollywood (just blocks from the headquarters of *Citizen-News*). “It is the first church in the nation,” the *Los Angeles Times* reported, “to be unabashedly *for* homosexuals.” According to Perry, the MCC would “give the homosexual a sense of belonging, a home.” It was also designed to make inroads with liberals. Some have claimed that Perry was “conservative in his politics,” seen especially in his resistance to antiwar activists during the Vietnam quagmire. More accurately, Perry tailored his message within a moderate framework in order to reach policymakers. He used his pulpit to combat harmful stereotypes, many of which had been repeated by *Citizen-News*. “The Church does not stand for adults having sexual affairs minors, in public, or forcing

⁸⁴ See Steven P. Miller, *The Age of Evangelicalism: America’s Born-Again Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014) and David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁸⁵ Perry’s life story is recounted in Troy Perry, *The Lord is My Shepherd and He Knows I’m Gay* (Mesquite: Nash Publications, 1972).

⁸⁶ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 163.

themselves on others,” he reassured. He promoted pair-bonding among his flock and began performing non-binding marriage ceremonies for queer couples in 1969. He also molded himself into a homophile religious activist, and served as president of the Western Homophile Conference, chairman of the Los Angeles Committee for Homosexual Law Reform, and became a board member of the San Francisco-based Council on Religion and the Homosexual (CRH).⁸⁷ The latter proved a “center for urban activism, racial and social justice organizing, and progressive politics” for decades.”⁸⁸

Within the church Perry worked against racial and gender divisions. He was “especially receptive to women and people of color” and “welcomed as ushers women in formal dress suits.” The MCC also hosted De Colores, a lesbian Latina group, and Perry encouraged the ordination of women. One fondly recalled how Perry once “chewed the guys out” when they suggested MCC women handle cooking and cleaning.⁸⁹ He was active in both male and female homophile groups, especially the L.A. DOB. In 1970 he joined DOB president Carole Shepherd and other lesbians in an “indefinite fast in protest against restrictive laws” targeting queers.⁹⁰ Like the USM, the MCC offered social services in addition to spiritual guidance. These included support and treatment for alcoholics, the deaf, those in emotional crisis, the unemployed, and the homeless. One community bulletin board posted advertisements from gay bars, magazines, and social clubs alongside job announcements.⁹¹ Sexual and economic interests were often packaged together. By 1969, the MCC worked alongside the USM and was branching outside of L.A. Churches opened in San Francisco, New York, and Minneapolis. Just as some were espousing a more radical form of “gay power,” Perry classified the MCC as liberal. The murder of Howard Efland, a queer male nurse, at the hands of the LAPD prompted a response which strongly resembled the tactics of Martin Luther King, Jr., not Malcolm X. Organizing a “Religious Freedom Memorial Service,” Humphries encouraged “a massive attendance to show the solidarity of the homophile community in our search for the religious freedom to follow an

⁸⁷ “A Church for Homosexuals,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1969, C1; Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 163-165.

⁸⁸ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 109.

⁸⁹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 164-165.

⁹⁰ Troy Perry flier, July 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 26.

⁹¹ “A Church for Homosexuals,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 December 1969, C1.

alternative morality, and in our unrelenting protest against unjustifiable brutality by law enforcement officers.”⁹² Perry encouraged angry queers to resist violence. “The whole world has tried violence to solve its problems,” he counseled. “They only worsen. We are totally dedicated to non-violent techniques [which] have hardly been given a chance.”⁹³ This dedication tied queers to mainstream civil rights struggles. So did the landmark Gay Religious Liberals Conference.

Organized by the USM, MCC, and other Unitarian Church leaders, the 1970 conference invited “liberal religionists,” lesbians, and gays to a day of discussion, prayer, and strategizing. Organizers argued that the “time [was] ripe for people to come together” in order to advocate for a more “liberal church position” on homosexuality. Progressive Christians needed to “get their thing together” and “make their voices heard.”⁹⁴ It was also important to recognize racial diversity and connect homophiles to civil rights activists. “Theological and racial revolutions continue within our midst,” a conference brochure read. “Another one is also developing. Another minority, this time sexual, is standing up to assert its dignity and to demand full equality.”⁹⁵ Through panel sessions and workshops, participants sought common ground. This important alliance survived into the 1970s, when the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC) was covertly aided by members of the Christian Midnight Mission, who donated food, clothing, and other supplies in a “*sub rosa*” manner.⁹⁶ While religion was often deployed against them, activists created places for themselves within progressive religious traditions.

The impact of Great Society liberalism shaped queer leaders in important ways. Don Kilhefner and Jon Platania were two powerful examples. Born in 1938 to a working-class family in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, Kilhefner grew up in a community that stressed a “conservative biblical culture.” The New Deal policies of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, however, encouraged economic politicization. “There was a high regard for FDR and the New Deal,” Kilhefner explained, “because his politics included poor people.” Kilhefner’s

⁹² Robert Humphries to United States Mission, 28 February 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

⁹³ Troy Perry flier, July 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 26.

⁹⁴ Gay Religious Liberals Conference flier, December 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 26.

⁹⁵ Gay Religious Liberals Conference invitation, 29 October 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 26.

⁹⁶ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

father proudly displayed a picture of FDR in his bedroom. When his son inquired, he explained that “he was a good man.” As he came of age, Kilhefner realized that “Democrats were people who helped common people. Republicans tended not to help people, they tended to help businesses. I got the message that *Democrats were different* from Republicans.” In 1960 he cast his first ballot for John F. Kennedy and was particularly moved by the Peace Corps. “I really wanted to live in a foreign country,” he explained, “so I applied as one of the first groups to go abroad.” Prepping for a humanitarian mission to Ethiopia, Kilhefner received four months of training at Georgetown University, where his instructors included Margaret Mead. During his final week of training, Kilhefner and his colleagues were invited to the White House Rose Garden by the President. “He came out and talked to us for about an hour on why we were going,” he recalled. The mission would advance “the promise of America. You’re going there to *be of service to people*.” The words of the Democratic President deeply impacted Kilhefner, who departed for Ethiopia in September of 1962. When he arrived, he was startled by the severity of African poverty. Ethiopians were “poor beyond the imagination of what poor means.” He wanted to study the roots of what he had seen, and planned for a career in academia, which brought him to graduate school at UCLA.⁹⁷

He found L.A. to be “one of the strangest places [he’d] ever been.” The city’s architecture, spatial layout, and cultural diversity fascinated him. So did its politics and he “quickly became involved with the radical community of Venice,” where he experienced the last days of the 1960s, enjoying “sunny days and Janis Joplin.” He also became involved with the Free Venice Committee, “which was trying to incorporate Venice as a separate city, much like West Hollywood did years later.” The motivation, as it would be in 1984, was affordable housing. Venice was home to the local Peace and Freedom Party, and Kilhefner became a member. He was thrilled when Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver became the party’s official presidential candidate in 1968. Around the same time, Kilhefner embraced his queer identity. “I was aware of Mattachine and Los Angeles’ place in gay history,” he recalled, “but I could never find them.” As his sexuality merged with his politics, Kilhefner fused past with his present. He remained a Kennedy admirer,

⁹⁷ Kilhefner OH.

and even expressed respect for Democrats Lyndon Johnson and Hubert Humphrey, despite his own abhorrence to the Vietnam War, support of the Black Panthers, and attraction to the New Left. While he labeled himself a “political radical,” 1960s liberalism remained close to his heart.⁹⁸ This political worldview impacted his understanding of gay liberation.

Jon Platania was also a child of the Great Society. After a stint in seminary school, he explored the benefits of secular education at the University of Nevada, Reno and Sacramento State University. The tumultuous events of the 1960s brought him into the Peace Movement, but he identified as a liberal. Transferring to San Francisco State University, he joined the urban studies program “on the way to a solid city planning career.” President Johnson’s initiatives appealed to him. “When the War on Poverty came and they started doing community organizing as a part of urban renewal,” he remembered, “I was ideally suited for that.” His interpretation of urban renewal was an exciting one of community participation, which he emphasized as the Personnel Director of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency. He soon “came to the attention of the regional director of [HUD], who happened to become the director of the Community Development Agency in Los Angeles.” He was invited to “come to Los Angeles and head their organizational development program,” an offer that made him feel like “a hot item.” At 28-years-old, the job offer also reinforced his political development. “I felt like my liberal, Leftist, progressive way I wanted to be in the world was being rewarded,” he recalled. Indeed, he dreamed that he “was on the way to being the cabinet minister for Housing Development in the president’s cabinet.” Excited about the opportunity, and also stuck in a rather unhappy relationship, Platania moved to L.A. in early 1969.⁹⁹ By the time of the Stonewall Uprising, both Platania and Kilhefner were self-described leftists, yet they remained Great Society admirers. Years later, both fondly remembered their breakthroughs within the liberal establishment. Their narratives testify to the ways in which queers gained ground within the Great Society.

⁹⁸ Kilhefner OH.

⁹⁹ Jon Platania oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Berkeley, California, 3 March 2014 (Hereafter Platania OH).

As the homophile movement was eclipsed by louder calls for gay liberation, much would change, but much would remain the same. A new emphasis on coming out and sexual expression impacted the nature of activism, but the foundations that were constructed in the 1960s were not fully transformed. The impact of Great Society liberalism proved powerful, as activists continued to focus on economic issues in a new political framework. For some, gay liberation was a bridge between liberalism and the New Left.

From Homophiles to Liberationists

“Gay liberation” meant different things to different people. Across the political spectrum in L.A., groups claimed the movement, including the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front (LAGLF), the Lavender and Red Union (LRU), older homophile organizations like ONE, and a range of women’s liberation organizations. Marc Stein argued that queer politics were marked by “three distinct orientations-gay liberation, lesbian feminism, and gay and lesbian liberalism,” yet activists in L.A. were more likely to use terms fluidly.¹⁰⁰ In this way gay liberation had much in common with movements like Black Power, which Robert Self characterized as a “plastic concept.”¹⁰¹ There were other connections. According to Donna Murch, the Black Panther Party came to prioritize social service activism in the 1970s. While the media fixated on “men with guns,” attention shifted to free breakfast programs, education, and community outreach.¹⁰² This emphasis emerged within queer organizers as well.

Historians and activists have often described the 1969 Stonewall Uprising in New York City as the opening salvo of the gay liberation era. In fact, the impetus for the uprising-police brutality-had long been a queer concern.¹⁰³ Los Angeles had certainly seen its fair share. From his appointment, LAPD Chief William Parker proved antagonistic to social minorities of all stripes, a practice tolerated by Mayor Sam

¹⁰⁰ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 79.

¹⁰¹ Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 218.

¹⁰² Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

¹⁰³ See Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 93.

Yorty.¹⁰⁴ By the late 1960s, violent confrontations between the LAPD and queers intensified. When he traveled to Sacramento to advocate against queers, Parker made news. The bombastic chief launched into a tirade, insisting that L.A. had been “flooded with homosexuals” who were a “menace to public safety.” When one lawmaker suggested his language was “rather rash,” Parker pulled out pornographic magazines which he claimed to have obtained in Hollywood. His theatrics proved too much for Democratic State Assemblyman Gordon Winton Jr., who angrily shouted him down. “You engage in histrionics!” he interjected. “One more remark from you and I’m going to ask the sergeant-at-arms to remove you from the room.”¹⁰⁵ The spectacle revealed a tense relationship between queers and law enforcement. Shortly after Watts erupted, one man feared that “Poor Los Angeles” would witness more violence. “This past summer saw racial riots,” he warned. “Now there seems to be a rising tide of rebellious acts which will go down in history as the ‘Homosexual Riots of Los Angeles.’ The most recent rash of harassments and closings of gay bars and arrests will not help the situation.”¹⁰⁶ Crackdowns at gay bars such as The Patch and the Black Cat Inn encouraged resistance and received coverage in leftist presses.

Indeed, New Left reporters sympathetically monitored social movements in L.A. While the *Los Angeles Times* often proved indifferent or hostile, activists sustained an alternative source for news. Angelenos had a long history of doing so. Civil rights leaders Charlotta Bass and Loren Miller utilized the *California Eagle* to draw attention towards racial inequities in the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁷ By the 1960s and early 1970s, new outlets were established which strengthened leftist points of view. These included the *L.A. Free Press*, *The Advocate*, and *The Lesbian Tide*. Founded in 1964 by Marxist journalist Art Kunkin, the *L.A. Free Press* was a reliable booster. According to lesbian contributor Jeanne Córdova, the paper covered “every civil rights-oriented” movement “trying to build a counterculture based on peace, love, and brown rice.” During her hiring interview, she was impressed with the paper’s transparent willingness to “break all

¹⁰⁴ Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*, 32-34.

¹⁰⁵ “Parker Threatened with Removal from Hearing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 May 1963.

¹⁰⁶ *ONE*, January 1966. SCACLU, box 124, folder: Sex and Civil Liberties.

¹⁰⁷ Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform*, 41.

the rules and fight the establishment.”¹⁰⁸ Before he had “joined the revolution,” Kilhefner regularly combed the *L.A. Free Press* for information. “It was key,” he recalled. “We all read it every week; indeed sometimes we would wait at the newsstands on Thursday when it was delivered to get it. We were anxious to read.” He later credited the paper for introducing him to the ideas of gay liberation, after it released an “all-gay issue in honor of the Stonewall Rebellion.”¹⁰⁹

In addition to her work at the *L.A. Free Press*, Córdova was a regular contributor to *The Advocate* and *The Lesbian Tide*. Her diverse Latina and Irish roots encouraged her reporting to recognize multicultural points of view. This was sorely needed in *The Advocate*, a paper established in 1967 by a white gay couple hoping to move away from “gentlemanly and stuffy” magazines like *ONE*. The inaugural issue celebrated “gay power” and proved popular with readers in and beyond L.A. By 1974, *The Advocate* reached a circulation of 44,000, making it the largest queer publication of the era.¹¹⁰ *The Lesbian Tide* emerged out of the Los Angeles DOB in 1971, of which Córdova had been president. As the branch fell into decline in the late 1960s, Córdova and “other younger lesbian-feminist activists provided a new infusion of energy” which revitalized it. In 1971, the DOB newsletter was renamed *The Lesbian Tide* and converted into a “national lesbian feminist magazine.” According to Marcia Gallo, it became “known for its news and analysis, high production values, and not least, for its always sensual, sometimes sexually suggestive photographs of lesbians.”¹¹¹ These outlets spread messages of gay liberation which shaped grassroots activism.

Police harassment was a constant topic of concern. The murder of Howard Efland in 1969 galvanized activists and sympathetic presses. Running into Efland near the Downton Dover Hotel, an undercover officer encouraged him to book a room at the hotel for the purpose of sex. He did so and, according to the officer, groped his new acquaintance. At this time, an additional officer emerged and

¹⁰⁸ Jeanne Córdova, *When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love and Revolution* (Midway: Spinsters Inc., 2011), 6-8.

¹⁰⁹ Kilhefner OH.

¹¹⁰ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 159-161.

¹¹¹ Gallo, *Different Daughters*, 171, 180.

announced that Efland was under arrest. According to witnesses, Efland was unarmed but resisted. He was physically dragged out of the Dover lobby, taken into the street, and beaten for several minutes until he lost consciousness. He later died from the injuries. Although the beating had been witnessed by onlookers, the LAPD ruled the incident an excusable homicide and the *Los Angeles Times* neglected to inquire. Activists refused to let the matter drop. *The Advocate* accused the LAPD of an “outright lie” and demanded that a formal investigation be launched by the City Attorney.¹¹² Bob Humphries and Troy Perry organized vigils and demonstrations, which leftist presses advertised. In one, they endorsed “unrelenting protest against unjustifiable brutality.”¹¹³ The *L.A. Free Press* covered these issues unremittingly. By May of 1970, writers warned of a coming queer Watts. By then another gay man had been killed by the LAPD. The death represented an “accelerated pace of arrests in Gay bars and private clubs” which could only be described as a “pogrom against homosexuals.” The editorial warned activists, law enforcement, and the general public about potential violence. There was “a super-militant minority who [wanted] vengeance...With half a million homosexuals concentrated in one vast ghetto, L.A. is sitting on a bomb,” they warned. Moreover, veteran activists seemed unable to control radical elements. One man accused Morris Kight and Troy Perry of being “Auntie Toms,” insisting that he was “sick of those old ladies and their Martin Luther King methods.” “We freed ourselves in New York with fire,” another argued, “and if they try to oppress us again, it will be the fire next time...Let me warn the straight community right now. If you step on my people anymore, it won’t be safe to step into the streets.”¹¹⁴ As Christina Hanhardt documented, police brutality motivated gays and lesbians to organize their own whistle brigades and community patrols, much like the Black Panthers.¹¹⁵ But like the Panthers, the image of militant queers rarely matched reality.

Founded in 1970, the Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front (LAGLF) was one of numerous GLFs to emerge following Stonewall. John D’Emilio described these groups as “self-proclaimed revolutionary organizations in the style of the New Left.” Organized amidst the ongoing quagmire in Vietnam and

¹¹² Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 161.

¹¹³ United States Mission flier, reprinted in *The Advocate*, 28 February 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹¹⁴ “L.A. Gay Riots Threatened,” *L.A. Free Press*, 15 May 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹¹⁵ See Hanhardt, *Safe Space*.

emerging freedom struggles in colonial Africa, activists “talked of liberation from oppression, resisting genocide, and making a revolution against ‘imperialist Amerika [sic].’”¹¹⁶ Many gained a reputation for radicalism, especially regarding religion and the state. Much as Homophiles had in the 1960s, LAGLF members prioritized multicultural alliances. The LAGLF manifesto, for instance, proclaimed “unity with and support for all oppressed minorities.”¹¹⁷ A female member saw the group as “just one of the many battles against the existing power structure. We were in solidarity under the greater umbrella of ‘revolution’ against the system.”¹¹⁸ Kilhefner recalled that queers were “anxious to *join a revolution*. The ruling culture didn’t define it as that, but we had the sense that something very important was happening, with the Civil Rights movement, with the anti-war movement, with feminism, with you name it. And now there was a possibility that the gay revolution could be a *part of that*. Just the fact that we were mentioned in the same context was important.”¹¹⁹ Philosophically, the group set out to destroy “societal antisexualism.” Activists labored for a new “free and loving Gay culture,” but also aimed “to bring all sexual beings into total acceptance of their sexuality.” In this way the movement established firm roots with the sexual counterculture of the 1960s. “All forms of oppression whether sexual, racial, economic, or cultural” were to be opposed.¹²⁰ Just how the LAGLF aimed to effect change was unclear. “Gay-ins” proved a clever way to claim space. Inspired by civil rights sit-ins, same-sex public displays of affection were put on exhibition. In the summer of 1970, fliers for a Griffith Park gay-in encouraged people to “bring your boyfriend, girlfriend or both and have a good time. We want lots and lots of people having fun in *their* park. Whether you’re gay or straight, the cruising’s really great.”¹²¹ These efforts aided the goals of sexual openness and visibility, important components of gay liberation. Activists also targeted private businesses which discriminated against queers. When the Farm, a bar and dance hall, prohibited same-sex affection, activists

¹¹⁶ D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities*, 233-234.

¹¹⁷ Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front statement of purpose, 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹¹⁸ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 171.

¹¹⁹ Kilhefner OH.

¹²⁰ Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front statement of purpose, 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹²¹ Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front flier, 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

pounced. Picketing resulted in lost revenue and compelled the owner to change policy. Outside, activists nailed a broadside celebrating the “groovy freedom brought to you by the GAY LIBERATION FRONT.”¹²²

They also organized “funky dances” to raise funds and grow the LAGLF. Fliers often depicted religious and political figures as supportive of the LAGLF, creating a campy political discourse. One pictured Pope Paul VI, who confided that “between you and me, Gay is Good!”¹²³ While they excelled at producing fliers, activists failed at community outreach. The very first LAGLF meeting Kilhefner attended was chaotic. “Every week there would be a different location for the meeting,” he remembered. “If you weren’t part of the chain, you didn’t know where the meetings were, or even if there was a meeting.” Venues varied considerably. One week the LAGLF borrowed space at the local War Resisters League; the following Sunday afternoon the group met at a “Satan bar” in Silver Lake. To Kilhefner, “this was death to any kind of organizing.”¹²⁴ Stability arrived in late 1970 when the LAGLF was offered office space by the Peace and Freedom Party. Antiwar activism was an important part of LAGLF identity, and the very term “gay liberation front” was partially inspired by the North Vietnamese National Liberation Front. Antiwar marches and “Gay draft counseling” gave the LAGLF an antiwar identity.¹²⁵ The new office gave the organization “a phone, a bank account, a mailbox, [and] all of the accoutrements which were necessary to foment a revolution.” Kilhefner’s energy earned him the role of office manager, and he took an indefinite leave of absence from UCLA to focus full-time on gay liberation.¹²⁶ Within a few months, the LAGLF stabilized and even produced calling cards. Services, including “legal advice, draft counselling, V.D. screening, drug counseling, and a Job Co-op” were promised.¹²⁷

While the LAGLF was a main source of activism, other groups comprised gay liberation as well. Founded in 1971, a gay fellowship met sporadically near the University of Southern California to discuss

¹²² Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 176; Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front fliers, September 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹²³ Los Angeles Gay Liberation front flier, 1971. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹²⁴ Kilhefner OH.

¹²⁵ Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front fliers and pamphlets, 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

¹²⁶ Kilhefner OH.

¹²⁷ Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front business card, 1970. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

strategies of “achieving full human rights for gay people.” Meetings focused on emotional topics, such as coming out and relationship advice.¹²⁸ Minutes from one reveal a variety of interests and needs amongst members. A representative from the Homophile Effort for Legal Protection spoke about police entrapment, and advised members “what to do, and not to do, if you are arrested.” After this presentation, members held a discussion on how to “develop a stronger feeling of gay community consciousness.” Like the LAGLF, the fellowship sponsored dances and mixers.¹²⁹ The group does not appear to have survived past 1971, likely because it too-closely resembled the LAGLF. Queer socialists and communists could be found in both the fellowship and the LAGLF, but gravitated to the Lavender and Red Union (LRU), an organization formed in 1974. The LRU argued that “Gay Liberation [was] Impossible without Socialist Revolution” and that “Socialist Revolution [was] Incomplete without Gay Liberation.”¹³⁰ An offshoot of the Revolutionary Union in Los Angeles, the LRU separated itself due to the “anti-Gay stand” within mainline socialism. Activists often moved back and forth between the LRU and the LAGLF.

Lesbians were part of the LAGLF and proved influential in its early phase. Many more, however, found the organization male-focused and created alternative spaces and organizations. Descriptive was one female LAGLF member, who wrote in the *L.A. Free Press* that women needed to “find our own identity and our own causes as gay women.”¹³¹ Scholars have debated the meaning and feasibility of lesbian feminism and lesbian separatism. Certainly, many women sought distinctly female spaces apart from men. But, as Marc Stein found in his study of queer Philadelphia, even “Radicalesbians not only worked with gay men but saw their identities bound up with gay men’s.”¹³² That was true for many Angelenos also. The most assertive lesbian feminists, such as Jeanne Córdova, supported separate female activism while also maintaining connections with the male-centered LAGLF and later with the GCSC. The emergence of a vibrant lesbian feminist movement strengthened developing discourses of both gay and women’s liberation,

¹²⁸ Gay Fellowship announcement, February 1971, TCOF, box 16, folder 24.

¹²⁹ Gay Fellowship meeting minutes, 8 March 1971; Gay Fellowship flier, 1971. TCOF, box 16, folder 24.

¹³⁰ Lavender and Red Union flier, 1974. FMGL, box 1.

¹³¹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 182.

¹³² Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 367.

even though appearances suggested divisions. Similar to women in other locales, lesbians accessed the movement through dances, coffee clubs, and “herstory” reading groups. Women also embarked on parallel strategies with gay men and began to focus on social services.

In his study of the “Califia community” in Southern California, Clark Pomerleau found that Califia women created their own discourses and institutions in order to build alliances between women of varying genders, sexualities, races, and class backgrounds.¹³³ For lesbians hoping to dismantle racism or sexism as much as heteronormativity, such outlets were particularly needed. Throughout the metropolitan region, queer women established spaces and institutions. In 1973, three women founded the Los Angeles Woman’s Building near MacArthur Park where artists and educators created a “venue for women artists from all over the world who would work there to create a new women’s culture.”¹³⁴ Until its closing in 1991, it remained an important location on queer and feminist maps of L.A. Lesbian feminist music also flourished in the region, and in 1973 the lesbian collective Olivia Records migrated to L.A. from Washington, D.C.¹³⁵ In these ways, women “found the movement” along cultural avenues, supporting A. Finn Enke’s contention that lesbian feminism blossomed at the everyday level.¹³⁶ But women achieved more than that in L.A. Beginning at the Los Angeles Women’s Center (LAWC), they influenced existing community centers and made lesbian concerns priorities.

Located on Crenshaw Boulevard in Mid-City, the LAWC operated a social services division and published a monthly newsletter focused on political and economic issues. Women from across the Southern California region were encouraged to “use the Women’s Center as a springboard from which to explore various women’s liberation groups.” While L.A. served as the central hub, leaders were “anxious to help women organize new women’s liberation groups in their own geographical area” and the newsletter extended south to Orange County and east to Riverside and San Bernardino. In 1970 several lesbians joined

¹³³ Clark A. Pomerleau, *Califia Women: Feminist Education against Sexism, Classism, and Racism* (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 2013).

¹³⁴ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 186.

¹³⁵ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 189.

¹³⁶ See Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

the LAWC. Del Whan, who had recently left the LAGLF, convinced LAWC organizers to open a “Gay Women’s Liberation office” in order to establish “a coalition [with] Women’s Liberation in Los Angeles.” Soon a regular column entitled “Notes from the Gay Women’s Liberation” appeared. In one, women were urged to organize a labor strike and reach out to “non-gay” feminists for support. Lesbians needed to “actively engage the public” and “bridge the gap of communication between the homosexual and the world.” They also needed to facilitate greater relationship-building amongst diverse women. “We *certainly* don’t have any sense of a Women’s Liberation MOVEMENT being built in L.A.,” one woman complained. Instead, “many feel a sense of isolation and frustration.” She regretted that leaders had not done a better job of “reaching out to black, brown, and oriental communities.” To help, the LAWC instituted a weekly “sexual politics workshop” devoted to sexuality and diversity. This had “nothing to do with [Kate] Millet’s book *but everything to do with a dialogue between gay and straight women.*” Workshops were well-received, averaging between 100-150 attendees.¹³⁷ The impact of lesbian activism queered the trajectory of women’s liberation. Even after many lesbians broke away from the LAWC, for instance, the sexual workshops continued.

By the end of 1970, queers had clearly entered a new phase of activism. Yet, the political work of the 1960s remained important. In the new decade, activists would build upon, not erase, the political gains they had made. Despite some successes, many leaders of gay liberation became frustrated. Street activism proved difficult to sustain and consumed time and energy. Leaders yearned for organizational structure and substantial results. Access to gay bars and rap groups, after all, did not impact every aspect of an individual’s life. How could those services benefit the homeless or unemployed? Emphasizing economic opportunity, some returned to the priorities of the War on Poverty. The most basic need was housing.

¹³⁷ Los Angeles Women’s Liberation Newsletter, September 1970-February 1972. JAWP, box 1, folder 2.

Chapter Two: Housing the Liberation: Providing Shelter and Building Families

“At some deep and central level, we all carry a sense of dread that we will someday be abandoned. The existence of a *home*, an address, a place where someone we know can be found, where we belong, is the only solace for that universal fear.”

-United States Mission flier, 1960s

“These weren’t homeless shelters... These were *liberation houses*-something that we could be *proud* of. They were really run like families.”

-Jon Platania, 2013

In 1972, a young man from upstate New York wrote an “emergency communication” to a friend in Los Angeles. He had recently come out as gay, which led to “unsolvable problems with [his] parents.” Rejected, he searched for a new place to start over. Southern California appealed to him and he hoped to join the “gay movement” there. “I would like to be out to L.A. within the month,” he wrote. “If I come to California it will be with the intent to stay.” There was one major impediment, however: he lacked financial resources and feared he would be homeless upon his arrival. “I’ll need a place to live,” he confessed, “and I’d appreciate it if you could help me. If Gay Youths don’t help each other, no one will.”¹ His situation was a familiar one. For many queers, coming out might result in familial abandonment. Alongside other marginalized Americans, queers required economic assistance in order to stabilize their lives. Securing housing was the first, and most basic, challenge. If this young man did indeed head west in 1972, he might have found emotional and physical shelter in one of six liberation houses in L.A. These housed homeless queers in family environments for over a decade and nurtured a new generation of activists.

Urban historians have painted bleak portraits of the 1970s. The era of urban renewal came to a tragic end, public housing construction all but ceased, and gentrification began to erode the affordability of cities.² These assessments are not wrong, but overlook grassroots efforts to expand affordable housing

¹ Letter, 1972. GLCSC, box 16, folder 1.

² Examples include Thomas J. Sugrue, “Carter’s Urban Policy Crisis,” in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham (eds.), *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era* (Lawrence, KS: The University of Kansas Press, 1998); D. Bradford Hunt, *Blueprint for Disaster: The Unraveling of Chicago Public Housing* (Chicago: The

throughout the decade. Los Angeles witnessed many. In Watts, black activists pressured county agencies to reinvest in the neighborhood's dilapidated housing stock, which many argued had been the root cause of the 1965 uprising. Organizers in East L.A. were even bolder. In 1971, they utilized grants to open Walter Reuther Villa, a multi-unit, low-rent housing complex named in honor of the legendary labor leader. "Designed, developed, constructed, and managed by Chicanos," it was "public housing that worked."³ Likewise, queers created housing arrangements that were safe, affordable, and accepting. Beginning in 1970, liberation houses addressed universal needs of shelter and family. Recognizing that many suffered from dual forms of poverty, activists developed spaces that provided economic refuge and emotional stability. Liberation houses were designed to be *homes*, not places to crash. They complicated declensionist narratives of housing activism in the postwar period. Far from wallowing in ruins, many sought neighborhood reinvestment at the grassroots.

Dual Exclusion: Public and Private Housing Discrimination

Housing was a constant, pressing need. Like other Angelenos, low-income queers struggled amid housing shortages and rising costs, but they also faced additional burdens due to their sexualities. Discrimination was a two-armed beast that found queers in public and private markets. State-sanctioned family requirements prevented individuals from accessing public subsidies, while harassment and evictions awaited many in the rental market.

Racial justice advocates and sympathetic policymakers emphasized that the lack of employment, housing, and educational opportunities created poverty and spatially confined people of color.⁴ Social

University of Chicago Press, 2009); and Edward G. Goetz, *New Deal Ruins: Race, Economic Justice, and Public Housing Policy* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2013).

³ Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 99; Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁴ See Arnold Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto: Race and Housing in Chicago, 1940-1960* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983); Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Timothy N. Thurber, *The Politics of Equality: Huber H. Humphrey and the African American Freedom Struggle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Nancy MacLean, *Freedom is Not Enough: The Opening of the American Workplace*

mobility required, among other things, access to good housing. Queers confronted more surreptitious forms of exclusion. Since the New Deal, the American welfare state was heteronormatively shaped in order to subsidize a patriarchal, male-breadwinner family ideal which rarely matched reality.⁵ During the Great Depression, millions of Americans lost homes and farms through bank foreclosures and evictions, prompting housing reform. The National Housing Act of 1934, the Wagner Act of 1936, and the Housing Act of 1937 established a long-term housing policy. Both the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) were designed to subsidize heterosexual family models. As Gail Radford explained, “It was taken for granted that applicants should live in what was then regarded as an optimal family unit consisting of mother, father, and children-no more and no less.” Housing policies thus prioritized and “actively shaped” heterosexual family constructions.⁶ During the postwar housing boom, the trend accelerated. Suburban development in California’s Bay Area, Clayton Howard argued, encouraged married couples to migrate to the South Bay while “large numbers of unmarried people, including many gay men and lesbians, [became] concentrated in places like San Francisco.”⁷ Restrictive family requirements extended to a range of New Deal and Great Society welfare programs, including the G.I. Bill, immigration, and health care subsidies. By mid-century, public policies actively boosted the “straight state.”⁸ The City of Angels was an especially unforgiving place. Boosters laid groundwork for suburban expansion in the 1920s and 1930s, promoting growth that resisted core-periphery distinction and was attractive to industry.⁹ By the mid-1950s, these policies contributed to a growing housing crisis that disproportionately affected working-class and poor Angelenos. Ambitious developers

(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); and William P. Jones, *The March on Washington: Jobs, Freedom, and the Forgotten History of Civil Rights* (New York: Norton, 2013).

⁵ See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009) and Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

⁶ Gail Radford, *Modern Housing for America: Policy Struggles in the New Deal Era* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 166.

⁷ Clayton Howard, “Building a ‘Family Friendly’ Metropolis: Sexuality, the State, and Postwar Housing Policy,” *Journal of Urban History* (2013), and *The Closet and the Cul de Sac: Sex, Politics, and Suburbanization in Postwar California* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming).

⁸ Canaday, *The Straight State*, 141.

⁹ See Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

utilized federal resources to make Southern California a mecca for home-ownership, often at the expense of public housing development. A powerful development lobby emerged, led primarily by the California Real Estate Association (CREA) and the Apartment Owners Association (AOA), which stymied public housing construction. Relying upon red-baiting, CREA and AOA condemned such plans as “socialistic” and un-American. Don Parson and Dana Cuff revealed how such narratives derailed affordable housing in L.A.¹⁰ The result was a dramatic increase in housing costs across the region. For queers the housing crisis was acute, since the private market offered little solace.

No law existed to protect queer tenants from discriminatory evictions in Los Angeles. As a result, few complaints made their way to housing authorities. Within letters to public officials, however, queers reported routine harassment. A woman living near MacArthur Park, reported that she was “being evicted from her apartment for no reason except that she was a lesbian.”¹¹ Similarly, a man reported to his county supervisor that his landlord was “evicting him because he [was] GAY.” His elected representative suggested he “call the Housing Authority,” an unhelpful suggestion, since queers were not legally protected.¹² As they moved to the Hollywood area, queers were often attacked by landlords who feared property depreciation.

An owner of one complex wrote to her political representative seeking advice on the best way to evict queers. She despised the “public nuisance created by gay persons in the area” and sought confirmation of her legal right to evict.¹³ Others promised to evict in retribution for the “gay takeover” of their neighborhoods. The owner of one complex on Sunset Boulevard insisted that “gay porno newsracks” had made it “hard to fill vacancies.” In retribution, he promised to “evict all trash” from his complex and make it “respectable again.”¹⁴ When “two gay night clubs” opened near his building, another landlord barred all queers.¹⁵ One man lamented his neighborhood’s “special favoritism towards gays.” The presence of

¹⁰ Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2002) and Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

¹¹ Letter to David Glascock and Ed Edelman, 19 August 1977. EDE, box 910, folder 1.

¹² Letter to Ed Edelman, 13 January 1975. EDE, box 823.

¹³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 8 September 1976. EDE, box 822.

¹⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 29 September 1976. EDE, box 821.

¹⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 9 April 1981. EDE, box 821.

“cruisers” had driven away “good tenants” in exchange for “moral *perverts*.”¹⁶ A self-avowed “anti-gay” man was livid when queers rented a house near his complex. “Isn’t there a law against this?” he asked. If not, he urged legislation “banning gays from renting” in Hollywood.¹⁷ Harassment could often be vindictive, as one gay man learned. Throughout the 1970s, he became involved with gay liberation and helped organize a Hollywood gay pride parade. Unbeknownst to him, his landlord was watching. Since he was manager, and not owner, of the complex, he lacked authority to evict. Instead, he unscrupulously harassed the gay tenant, who discovered that he was being monitored. His landlord littered mailboxes with religious pamphlets, many of which claimed queers would “burn in Hell.” At one point, he called him a “faggot” and informed tenants that “anybody who is not a Christian will be evicted, because his was a solely Christian building.” The gay tenant reported the incident to housing authorities. When his landlord found out, he went berserk and turned off water and electricity to queer units. A second complaint was signed by thirty tenants, all of whom reported similar abuse.¹⁸ Some landlords may have been influenced by the anti-gay campaigns of the 1960s. Whether they read *Citizen-News* or not, they responded in ways that supported its efforts. For queers, the private market was precarious.

Combating discrimination was extremely difficult, especially when some argued that *heterosexuals* were the ones facing obstacles. One editorial satirically told the story of “Osbert Wilde” (a reference to Oscar Wilde), who had “graduated from college and didn’t know what to be...so he decided to be gay.” Wilde determined that “being gay would enhance [his] opportunities and lifestyle.” Sure enough, he was offered a good job and a “fancy apartment” from frightened heterosexuals who went out of their way to “prove they [were] tolerant, anti-sexist, and equal-opportunity.” If anyone tried to discriminate against Osbert, he bragged, “they’ll have the whole Gay Lib movement at their throats.”¹⁹ One renter echoed this thinking, reporting that she and her boyfriend had “applied for an apartment only to be turned down by a

¹⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 4 June 1976. EDE, box 826.

¹⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 25 March, 1981. EDE, box 825.

¹⁸ Tenant complaint form, May 1981. MMP, folder 1.

¹⁹ A. Hoppe, “Choice of Lifestyle Doesn’t Always Work Out,” *Orange Coast Daily Pilot*, 12 January 1979. OCLGBT, box 5, folder 1.

gay landlord.” According to her, “It was a clear case of reverse discrimination.” For queers, these arguments were infuriating. “How does it feel?” one queer replied. “We gays have known that feeling for not years, not decades, but perhaps centuries. Maybe next time you refer to gays as queers or faggots with so much hate, you’ll know why you weren’t accepted in the building.”²⁰ Despite cries of “reverse discrimination,” queers were the vulnerable ones. One LAGLF flier pointed out that “In the overwhelmingly majority of communities (including, for example, Los Angeles) a homosexual can be evicted from his home simply because his or her landlord doesn’t like gays. *The homosexual tenant has no legal protection.*”²¹ It was a simple and true assessment.

The dire situation led many Homophiles to focus on housing. The Cloistered Order of Conclaved Knights of Sophisticracy [*sic*], or Knights of the Clock, emerged alongside Mattachine and ONE in the 1960s. Established by W. Dorr Legg and his partner, Merton Bird, the group was a “social club” “known for sex parties.”²² They were also housing advocates. Both Legg and Bird moved to L.A. from Michigan in 1949, where they encountered a bleak housing market. The two were unable to own a house together, because they were queer, and were unable to live in many parts of the city because Bird was black. Racially restrictive housing covenants remained successful methods of segregating the city.²³ The Knights of the Clock sought to address these twin forms of discrimination and offered housing referrals to newly-arrived mixed-race couples. While records are few, the Knights assisted same-sex interracial couples through housing referrals.²⁴ ONE also attempted to assist with housing through its “social service division.” While never fully developed, this wing of ONE offered housing referrals and counseling.²⁵ The inspiration

²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 19 December 1979. HOSF, folder 1.

²¹ Unknown flier, 1980. BBP, box 1, folder 2.

²² Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 112; C. Todd White, *Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), 30.

²³ On the development and use of racially restrictive housing covenants, see Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto* and Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Josh Sides and Douglas Flamming detail the pervasive use of covenants in L.A.: Sides, *City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2006) and Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2006).

²⁴ Knights of the Clock journal, undated. W. Dorr Legg Papers, box 6, folder 26.

²⁵ *ONE*, August 1956. SCACLU, box 17, folder 14.

emerged from readers, who wrote of their troubles finding housing. One woman wrote of “numerous cases” she had observed “from those who have had difficulty [securing] housing and employment.” She advised that organizations like ONE focus on providing these to queers “like any other minority group.”²⁶ While the Knights of the Clock and ONE catered to middle-class queers, the USM focused on the low-income.

“At some deep and central level of our emotional lives,” USM organizers explained, “we all carry a sense of dread that we will someday be abandoned in the world. The existence of a ‘home,’ an address, a place where someone we know can be found, where we belong, is the only solace for that universal fear.”²⁷ Located on Western Avenue in eastern Hollywood, the USM was situated in the area of L.A. most closely identified with low-income queers. Homemade fliers were distributed at gay bars, social functions, and social service agencies and the organization printed fliers in Spanish for distribution in nearby Los Feliz and Central L.A.²⁸ Fliers were simple and to the point: “Gay? Homeless?” asked one. “The United States Mission can offer you shelter, meals, clothes, and jobs.” By the mid-1970s, Humphries was touting the USM as the “second oldest gay organization in the United States” and “the largest shelter program for homeless gay men and lesbians in the world.” Records indicate that thousands of men and women made use of the USM shelter in L.A. over the years.²⁹ While housing was important, activists achieved only limited success. Homelessness remained a chronic problem for many. Indeed, many LAGLF organizers faced homelessness themselves, encouraging them to place heavy emphasis on housing. Their first experiment took place on Hoover Street.

Movement Incubators: The Hoover Street Commune and the Gay Women’s Center

Located between Silver Lake and Los Feliz at the corner of Sunset and North Hoover, the Hoover Street commune shaped queer politics in significant ways. Collective living was an important aspect of the LAGLF, especially since many activists came from low-income backgrounds. While the LAGLF

²⁶ ONE, December 1956. SCACLU, box 18, folder 1.

²⁷ United States Mission flier, undated. USM, box 1, folder 3.

²⁸ United States Missions fliers in Spanish, undated. USM, box 1, folder 3.

²⁹ United States Mission fliers, 1966, 1974. USM, box 1, folder 4.

maintained an office, the commune became its de facto headquarters. In addition to Don Kilhefner, residents included Jon Platania, Rand Schrader, and Stanley Williams. Others such as Lee Heflin and Dexter Price lived nearby in an apartment complex and were often present at commune functions. So was Morris Kight, who was “in and out on a daily basis.”³⁰ While lesbians did attend commune events, it was largely a male domain. Nevertheless, it was here that activists thought anew about the trajectory of gay liberation. Lesbians were doing the same in organizations such as the Gay Women’s Center. Collectively, queer men and women began to place greater emphasis on social service activism.

Drugs were an important part of commune life. Residents engaged in ideological debate best after “Lucy came down from the sky with her diamonds.”³¹ We were “smoking a lot of dope, having a lot of sex, discovering the side of other consciousness with psychedelic drugs. It was a lot of fun,” Platania remembered. Communal highs helped him develop a deep love for yoga and meditation.³² At 4 p.m. each day “high tea” was served as activists gathered for discussions. Like clockwork, the commune transcended into “a hothouse of emerging gay-centered consciousness.” Traveling guests were welcomed, as L.A. was a favorite destination for traveling queer activists, intellectuals, and artists. “Virtually every evening there would be fifteen or more people sitting around our table for supper. Visiting gay liberationists, soon-to-be-famous filmmakers, writers and poets, lovers *de jour*, mystics, [and] future judges [were] engaged in animated and liberating discussions,” one resident described. The Gay Law Students Association held parties at the commune, and participated in discussions. Although the primary residents were male, they prohibited aggressive expressions of masculinity and encouraged gender experimentation. Kilhefner enjoyed putting his “long hippie hair up into an elegant beehive” when he went shopping.³³ Roommate Stanley Williams was “a delightfully creative gay man” who had a fondness for gender-bending. Prior to his arrival, he had been an ice-skater and performed with the traveling Ice Capades alongside famed Norwegian skater and Liberace-beard Sonja Henie. In 1971, an image of Williams, Lee Helfin, and Platania

³⁰ Don Kilhefner, “Creating a Gay Community: The Hoover Street Commune,” *Frontiers*, 1 November 2009, 38.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Platania OH.

³³ Don Kilhefner, “Creating a Gay Community: The Hoover Street Commune,” *Frontiers*, 1 November 2009, 38.

was captured in Hollywood and submitted to *Life Magazine*. It appeared in the next issue, and showcased the men's gender ambiguity, seemingly to showcase their radicalism.³⁴ Over the course of several months, residents vented frustrations with the course of the LAGLF and began to move in a new direction.

Many grew tired of the disorganization. Privately, Kight and Kilhefner were disillusioned with street activism which seemed devoid of a larger agenda. "As the summer went on, with all kinds of protest activities," Kilhefner explained, "we saw that there was a limit to the work that the Gay Liberation Front could do. You could only keep up that level of protest for so long, and then it became yesterday's news. We got tired; we burned people out." As an organization, the LAGLF had "become much more unfocused."³⁵ Around the same time, Kilhefner found himself in charge of a new phone line at the LAGLF. The number was widely circulated in queer newsletters, and he began to get calls. "For me it came into focus because of that hotline," he explained. "I was there at night after the bars closed and a wave of telephone calls would come in from gay people. All of the issues of oppression you would expect to find were there. Losing apartments, losing jobs, alcohol, drugs, I mean you name it. They needed help." He was deeply impacted by these multiple forms of oppression and organized the Gay Survival Committee within the LAGLF. "In addition to our overt political activity," he described, "we had to start thinking about gay people themselves." The committee was soon relocated to Hoover Street, where it expanded to ten or twelve members. "As far as we were concerned," Kilhefner concluded, "the [LAGLF] phase was over. We needed to do something new."³⁶ Lesbians were of like mind.

Operating within the Los Angeles Women's Center (LAWC), lesbians worked alongside non-gay women to establish feminist housing services. By the end of 1970, the LAWC announced an emergency housing service for women in L.A. and Orange counties. No address was given, but interested women were advised to contact the LAWC for information. Bulletin boards posted listings for safe and friendly living situations and employment opportunities. One alerted women to openings for air traffic controllers, a

³⁴ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 168.

³⁵ Kilhefner OH.

³⁶ Kilhefner OH.

position ideal for women who were “unemployed, good at written tests, and willing to take a test for emotional stability.”³⁷ Within the LAWC, lesbians embraced the focus on social services. Former LAGLF member Del Whan was motivated to do more, and decided to strike out on her own in the summer of 1971. Alongside likeminded women, she founded the Gay Women’s Center (GWC) that May in Echo Park.³⁸

Like the LAGLF, lesbians organized “Funky Dances” to raise funds for the GWC. They too mocked religious figures. One flier featured the Virgin Mary confiding that she “would come [to a Funky Dance] if [she] didn’t have to babysit.” Most events were held at the GWC office in Echo Park, although sometimes they moved to other venues such as Larchmont and Trouper’s Hall.³⁹ Activists emphasized the need of housing and social services. The GWC would be “a community of gay women united in love and concern for each other’s mutual welfare.” In order to provide the latter, lesbians needed to offer “employment [and] housing referrals.” Housing opportunities were desperately sought-after; “we need listings!” activists confessed. The GWC was cast as a link in a chain of lesbian and feminist activism, which included the DOB in Downtown and an organization called “The Lesbian Feminists” in Mid-City.⁴⁰ Many queer men and women agreed that social services were important: “If we were going to succeed,” explained one, “we could not just continue with radical political work *per se*. We needed, as Chairman Mao taught, to transform gay revolutionary consciousness into service to the people.”⁴¹ This proved difficult to categorize politically. While social service organizations were linked with the liberal establishment, many saw radical possibilities within them and considered the turn a pragmatic extension of gay liberation.

As the 1960s faded from view, several New Left movements transformed in similar pragmatic ways. Dan Berger argued that the 1970s provided an opportunity for “movements to experiment and expand.” It was “a time when [social justice activists] felt they had to walk their talk.”⁴² That was true of

³⁷ Los Angeles Women’s Liberation Newsletter, September 1970. JAWP, box 1, folder 2.

³⁸ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 185.

³⁹ Los Angeles Gay Women’s Center fliers, 1971. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

⁴⁰ Los Angeles Gay Women’s Center flier, May 1971. TCOF, box 16, folder 25.

⁴¹ Don Kilhefner, “Creating a Gay Community: The Hoover Street Commune,” *Frontiers*, 1 November 2009, 38.

⁴² Dan Berger in Berger (ed.), *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 5.

the Black Panthers. Focusing on “survival pending revolution,” Panthers invested time and energy into free breakfast programs, shelters, positive educational opportunities, and community watch patrols.⁴³ In L.A., activists turned their attention towards urban poverty, employment discrimination, and community uplift. New organizations such as the Watts Labor Community Action Committee and the Sons of Watts Improvement Association focused on social services. Whether they were devoted leftists or liberals, they utilized the welfare state to fund their activism. So did Chicanos, who formed the East Los Angeles Community Union to assist Latinos and Latinas in East L.A.⁴⁴ The transformation of queer activism should be seen alongside these examples. For activists of all stripes, housing was the first step in the deployment of a social service program. Liberation houses were queer solutions to the L.A.’s ongoing urban crisis.

Grassroots Public Housing: L.A. Liberation Houses

Liberation houses relied heavily on the life experiences of activists, especially Jon Platania. He was an energetic booster for the program, thanks in large part to his personal and professional history. Platania came of age amid the collision of Great Society liberalism and New Left. While he completed a degree in urban studies, he devoted energies to the Peace Movement. Registering as a conscientious objector, he was assigned a term of service at a Nevada State hospital. During his stint at “the asylum,” he was exposed to sexual and economic injustice. One “gorgeous gay boy,” he recalled, was institutionalized for multiple violations of anti-sodomy statutes and was raped by inmates while incarcerated. The episode deeply impacted Platania. The “gorgeous gay boy...wasn’t free to get away with the things I got away with,” he concluded. “My parents had money. His didn’t.” This was a lesson Platania would not forget.⁴⁵

After leaving Nevada State Hospital, he moved to the Bay Area and developed a strong connection to urban renewal initiatives. He rose through the ranks of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency before going

⁴³ See Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Migration, Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ See Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*.

⁴⁵ Jon Platania oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Berkeley, California, 3 March 2014 (Hereafter Platania OH).

to work for HUD in L.A., a position which taught him lessons in governmental bureaucracy. Upon his arrival, Platania came to appreciate his new city. “I loved being in Los Angeles,” he remembered. It “was a very open, fun, big, challenging, exciting, thrilling, scary place.” He found it erotic as well, and quickly connected with men who became lovers, friends, and family. While he was “admittedly reluctant” to become associated with gay liberation, Platania found himself pushed into the movement in 1970 when he was entrapped and charged with “lewd and lascivious” conduct at Griffith Park. “I could hardly believe the terrifying reality that came crashing down upon my total existence,” he wrote. “Possibility had become fact; there *really were* vice officers who *really did* entrap innocent people.” The arrest brought employment concerns. As a state employee, the charge was dangerous. His HUD director came to the conclusion that, since the charge might be made public, “it would be better for him and the agency if [he] would resign.” The “blow to his public persona” left him “spiritually, psychologically, and emotionally devastated.”⁴⁶ With nothing to lose, Platania fought the charges against him, an effort which received considerable attention in *The Advocate* and the *L.A. Free Press* and brought him in contact with Kilhefner and Kight. In the end, he won and the LAPD were found to be “in violation of the very sections of the penal code which [Platania] had allegedly violated.”⁴⁷ Reconstructing his devastated ego, Platania emerged rejuvenated, moved into the Hoover Street commune, and “turned [his] energy towards helping others.”⁴⁸

Queer Angelenos faced new housing challenges in the 1970s. Activists estimated that hundreds of queers migrated to L.A. monthly.⁴⁹ Martin Meeker argued these migrants descended upon “imagined communities” in search of gay utopias. New arrivals placed additional stress on critical resources.⁵⁰ Moreover, movement leaders themselves grappled with homelessness. Kilhefner became homeless when he dropped out of graduate school, and Platania lost his housing when he resigned from HUD. Both found

⁴⁶ Jon Platania, “Gay is Good,” 12.23.72. Author’s personal collection; Ibid.

⁴⁷ “LAPD Entrapment Victim Fights Back,” *The Advocate*, 12.23.70, pg. 11; “Jury Acquits L.A. Gay in Park Entrapment Case,” *The Advocate*, 2.17.71, pg. 2.

⁴⁸ Platania, “Gay is Good”; Platania OH.

⁴⁹ Gay Community Services Liberation House proposal, 1972. GLCSC, box 7, folder 53.

⁵⁰ See Martin Meeker, *Contacts Desired: Gay and Lesbian Communications and Community, 1940s-1970s* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006).

refuge on Hoover Street and began to envision additional “liberation houses.” The commune “became a model for what was possible. You get a house, you rent it, you make separate bedrooms, you have two or three people per bedroom, and you provide a meal once a day.” Each day, “people look for jobs, [accomplish] tasks, and come back in the evening [for] dinner. And then in the evening there’s discussion groups, and consciousness-raising groups.”⁵¹ This model provided the initial strategy.

The first house opened at 1168 N. Edgemont Street, midway between Silver Lake and Hollywood. Platania played financier since his reputation enabled him to “talk to the important people” who provided start-up funds. Activists also relied on him to sign leases because he had established credit history. Platania designed and managed the program and “felt a lot for the kinds of guys hanging out” in the houses.⁵² Additional funds were raised through “gay funky dances.” Held most Friday nights, they became a source of steady revenue. Each week, activists could count on \$100-150, which covered rents and house supplies. Private donations were also important. “Once people knew what we were doing,” Kilhefner explained, “they started making donations of beds, linens, clothing, you name it.” Most months, liberation houses operated on a \$1,200 budget. Sometimes, activists could rely on clandestine alliances with other social service agencies. The Midnight Mission was “a Christian program on Skid Row” which happened to be “run by a [closeted] gay man.” When he had extra supplies, he “would share them...*sub rosa*.” Despite the assistance, the budget was still “very, very tight,” which meant most house staff and managers did not receive a salary.⁵³ This was a serious flaw which hampered the initiative.

At the height of the program, six houses served the communities of Greater Los Angeles. Locations were mostly concentrated in the Hollywood and Downtown areas, but served a geographically diverse group of people. At one house in 1973, individuals came from Watts, Downtown, and Northridge. Some came from elsewhere in Southern California: one man made the journey from Lake Elsinore, another from San Luis Obispo, and one woman came from Riverside. Outside California, new arrivals traveled from

⁵¹ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

⁵² Platania OH.

⁵³ Kilhefner OH.

Moss Point, Mississippi; Portland, Oregon; Cincinnati, Ohio; Hope, Indiana; and Honolulu, Hawaii.⁵⁴ This wide geographical pull strengthens scholarly assertions that California was a queer magnet in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵⁵ House staff kept few organized records, so it is difficult to say with certainty how many people were housed at any given time. Kilhenfer admitted that organizers “weren’t interested in documenting, because we didn’t even know if it was going to work.”⁵⁶ By 1972, however, activists claimed to have housed “over 200 gay women and men” and confessed that “scores of gay people of all ages [were] turned away each week due to a lack of available space.”⁵⁷

What survives of house intake forms suggests sporadic lengths of stay. Individuals were housed “on a temporary basis until an alternative living environment” could be located.⁵⁸ “Temporary” was a broad descriptor, however, as individuals might stay for a few days or for months at a time.⁵⁹ It is equally difficult to ascertain the social backgrounds of residents. Houses were open to any individual who could demonstrate need, regardless of sexual preference. K. Norton was “straight” and stayed for six days until he could “get on his feet.”⁶⁰ By and large, though, liberation houses attracted self-identified queers. Platania remembered that many were young males who “didn’t like working the streets.” Some were “political activists who didn’t have the money or resources to afford their own place” since “housing was so expensive” in L.A. The vast majority “were just young kids, not too prepared for anything.”⁶¹ A 1975 report revealed socioeconomic backgrounds. Residents were 69% white, 10% black, 10% Latino, 3% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 7% “other.” Houses thus appear to have been overrepresented by whites. Men comprised 62% of Liberation House residents in 1975; women accounted for just 38%. Most residents were under thirty. A unifying characteristic was poverty: “Virtually 100% of the persons being provided housing,” organizers

⁵⁴ Gay Community Services Center Liberation House intake form, 1973. GLCSC, box 11, folder 37.

⁵⁵ See Meeker, *Contacts Desired*.

⁵⁶ Kilhenfer OH.

⁵⁷ Gay Community Services Center Liberation House proposal, January 1972. GLCSC, box 7, folder 53.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Gay Community Services Center Liberation House intake forms, 1972-1974. GLCSC, box 11, folder 38.

⁶⁰ Notes on Liberation House residents, K. Norton, undated. GLCSC, box 11, folder 40.

⁶¹ Platania OH.

reported, are “poor or indigent.” Nearly 80% of all residents reported an annual incomes below the poverty line.⁶²

Liberation Houses connected a new generation of activists with homophile legacies. The Knights of the Clock and USM organizers certainly would have been impressed with the attention to housing. In other ways, however, liberation houses were products of the New Left and the sexual revolution. Economic shelter was important, but so was *emotional* security. Accordingly, houses were intended to be *homes* and fostered supportive, loving, and erotic family atmospheres.

“Like a Family”: Providing Sexual and Emotional Support

In an era of heated discourse surrounding the politics of “family,” liberation houses highlighted how queers could reconstruct the meaning of family at the grassroots.⁶³ Scholarship on the 1970s has focused primarily on conservative family activism, such as the Moral Majority, which characterized queers as threats. Activists rejected these arguments and built familial atmospheres of their own, contributing to a decades-long project of queer family-building. In courtrooms and support groups, Daniel Rivers revealed, gays and lesbians lobbied for recognition and rights as parents from the late 1940s into the 1960s. “The right to be a ‘family,’” he argued, proved a powerful way to “enforce normative sexual ethics” in America. Recognition mandated a destabilization of heteronormative family definitions, and the promotion of pluralistic alternatives.⁶⁴ This struggle often took place within “traditional households” as well. Heather Murray argued that “gays and their parents embodied a longing for eternal family life” which “endured into the postwar period and even into the late twentieth century.” Organizations such as the Parents and Friends

⁶² Gay Community Services Center general revenue sharing grant, 3 March 1975. GLCSC, box 11, folder 34.

⁶³ See especially: Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), and Daniel Rivers, *Radical Relations: Lesbian Mothers, Gay Fathers, and Their Children* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

⁶⁴ Rivers, *Radical Relations*, 5, 8.

of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) emerged alongside Anita Bryant.⁶⁵ Ideologically and practically, liberation houses promoted queer families in the 1970s.

By design, houses were meant to be alternatives to “flop houses” and “crash pads.” The concept of “crashing” lacked the overt political and emotional agenda of activists. In naming the houses, they conveyed this message. The program was “about affirmation,” Platania recalled. Residents wanted “to be in a place called a liberation house. That’s where [one] wants to *be*. It wasn’t a homeless shelter. I wouldn’t have managed a *homeless shelter* for love or money,” he insisted. “The minute you say *homeless shelter*, my mind goes to bedbugs, and drunks, and druggies, and washouts. But *liberation house*, that calls to me. I’m going to this place to be liberated.” Kilhefner agreed: “these were not flop-houses; these were *liberation houses*-something that we could be *proud* of.” As the first house manager, Platania instituted guidelines which dictated the program be “run like a family.”⁶⁶

Upon acceptance, residents chose new clothes and were guided to the nearest free clinic, where a medical examination was administered. This ascertained the health of the entering individual and protected from the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. Once through, residents signed a contract outlining the rules and guidelines of the house. These varied house to house, but shared a core set of principles. “As with all inter-personal relationships,” one form read, “there must be some guidelines. The Liberation Houses are multi-person households and it would follow that the first rule is that of common courtesy and consideration for your brother or sister.” These were “joint endeavors where-in each resident shares in responsibility and welfare.” The use of *brother* and *sister* was intentional. Far from regurgitating the groovy language of the seventies, these terms reflected the deliberate planning of a family atmosphere. Weapons and drugs were not allowed, yet “everybody smoked dope,” which house managers “did not think was a problem.” Of graver concern was heroin. Individuals with such drug problems were not to be admitted. Residents could invite guests, but were held “directly responsible for their actions while in the house.” Rules were framed in protective ways, safeguarding residents from potential trouble. The program was not free: rent was set at

⁶⁵ Murray, *Not in This Family*, xiii.

⁶⁶ Platania OH; Kilhefner OH.

\$2.50 per day, \$15.00 per week, or \$50.00 per month, which covered a private bed and at least one meal a day, most always dinner. However, most house managers adjusted rents to reflect income and most residents paid “about a dollar a day.”⁶⁷

Organizers made clear they were “only interested in people who are sincere and well-motivated as residents.” Those “*not acting in good faith,*” would “*be asked to leave.*” Sincerity could be demonstrated in multiple ways. Once the GCSC was established, residents were “encouraged to become active and devote at least two hours a week to volunteer work there.” This recommendation spoke to an emotional and political agenda. A majority of residents would “not have classified themselves as gay liberationists when they walked in,” Platania explained, but would “within a week” of staying there.” Most “didn’t have a [political] rubric...We were creating a context, and a language, and a rubric that didn’t exist before.” Liberation houses thus spread a political discourse to those who had not given their situation much political analysis. Residents were “bright, fun,” and believed “that the world was on the precipice of a great change. In their lifetime everyone would have medical care, everybody would have housing, everybody would have *everything* that we were trying to put into place.” In most houses, “there was a great enthusiasm, a great hope, a great optimism...This is what it *could* look like. This is how it *could* be done. This is what you *could* do, if you wanted to do it right.”⁶⁸

Daily tasks were designed to bind people together.⁶⁹ Under house management, “either you helped with chores in the morning, or you weren’t there that night. Collective effort was really important.” Similarly, collective cooking and eating were mandated. “I insisted that we eat at six,” Platania recalled. “Eating together and cleaning up together” encouraged bonding.⁷⁰ Kilhefner absolutely thought of the liberation houses as families, although sometimes he avoided “the term family” since it could often be “a coercive word and used against us.” To him the houses were “somewhere where we took care of each other

⁶⁷ Gay Community Services Center Liberation House intake form, 1973. GLCSC, box 11, folder 37; Platania OH.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Gay Community Services Center Liberation House intake form, 1973. GLCSC, box 11, folder 37.

⁷⁰ Platania, OH.

and assumed responsibility for each other.”⁷¹ In the coming years, as houses received public support, grant applications stressed the family atmosphere. These shelters provided “warm, supportive living environments in which” residents were “encouraged to develop positive self-images and to relate to other people.” Supportive environments “offset the high incidence of hospitalization, imprisonment and suicide among the members of the gay community,” thus lifting many out of poverty and also earning them an “accepting home environment.”⁷² As “pro-family” advocates such as Anita Bryant and Phyllis Schlafly emerged, liberation houses offered an important counter-narrative.

Activists developed rap groups and sessions focused around economic and emotional issues, such as employment and self-development counseling, alcohol and drug abuse treatment, and family crisis intervention.⁷³ Residents were free to choose between sessions, except for employment training, which was mandatory. House leaders reached out to “progressive gay businesses” in search of job opportunities. “Eventually, we bought a couple of trucks and did moving, and gardens, and hauling,” Platania recalled. “A lot of kids got good jobs and moved out. Some integrated from out there into the Center as volunteer workers. Some went to work at the Gaywill Funky Shoppe.”⁷⁴ This was indeed how many experiences ended. Final resident notes for one man read simply: “Found job. Moved. Paid rent. Good kid, no problem.” Another moved out after a month in the house when he became “involved in youth programs at [the GCSC],” which paid a small salary. Troy Perry’s MCC sometimes employed residents.⁷⁵ For those who moved on, however, they were encouraged to return, meet new residents, maintain relationships, and mentor those in crisis. Like a family, these were children who left the nest, but did not sever emotional cords.

Importantly, houses offered sexual opportunities. Without a doubt, many entered hoping to explore the sexual aspects of gay liberation. Searching out sex, however, did not preclude a larger commitment. Historians have sometimes isolated political activism from sexuality, even within gay liberation. One

⁷¹ Kilhefner OH.

⁷² Gay Community Services Center general revenue sharing grant, 14 March 1975, GLCSC, box 11, folder 34.

⁷³ Gay Community Services Center newsletter, “Outreach: The Extended Family,” February 1973. Author’s personal collection.

⁷⁴ Platania OH.

⁷⁵ Notes on Liberation House residents, undated. GLCSC, box 11, folder 41.

suggested that “gay liberation had divergent priorities, since certain members of the community were often more concerned with liberating their libidos...than rectifying economic injustices.”⁷⁶ While some individuals might have been interested *solely* in sex, the majority of house residents had multiple priorities. House managers recognized this and worked to ensure sexual safety. Potential residents “had to get checked out for STDs before being involved with any of the other people in the house” and organizers began “passing out condoms [long] before AIDS.”⁷⁷ The physical space of the houses provided an economic haven and an opportunity to experience the sex safely. Morris Kight argued that liberation houses provided space to “not make love in furtive and dangerous ways.” This was the “best way to avoid entrapment.”⁷⁸ Several residents utilized houses for such encounters. One man “stayed for one night, had fun, paid in advance,” and caused “no problems.”⁷⁹ House managers permitted this, since houses could offer “a cheap place to stay and have fun in L.A. for a few weeks.”⁸⁰ This was not antithetical to gay liberation, which promoted sexual freedom. So long as they were respectful, managers welcomed the occasional sexual explorer.

House advertisements sometimes appeared in queer pornography. Pat Rocco’s *Society of Pat Rocco Enlightened Enthusiasts*, or *SPREE*, spread information about the program. *SPREE* seamlessly combined the political with the erotic. Images of nude men accompanied information for local bars and community programs, and editorials tackled the political and economic issues of the day. In the October 1971 edition of *SPREE*, readers were informed that liberation houses were “offering housing services for our community that have long been sorely needed. They operate on a shoestring budget, and with a lot of love. If you need help or housing, by all means go and see them.” This caption appeared directly underneath an image of two male house residents in a loving embrace. Other images depicted the environment as sexually-charged, as residents were photographed with little or no clothing.⁸¹ One of the purposes of the houses was to liberate

⁷⁶ Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2013), pg. 117.

⁷⁷ Platania OH.

⁷⁸ “Center Aids Gay Parolees,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1973, F1.

⁷⁹ Notes on Liberation House residents, undated. GLCSC, box 11, folder 40.

⁸⁰ Platania OH.

⁸¹ *SPREE News Pictorial*, October 1971. Author’s personal collection.

economic barriers *which prevented* emotional and sexual desires. A potential resident could rightly hope to find sexual opportunities alongside economic ones.

The emphasis on family proved enduring. In the 1980s, Hudson House (founded by Pat Rocco) emphasized family needs to an even greater degree. Organizers found that many incoming residents had been “so alienated from family and community” that they suffered from “little to no self-esteem.”⁸² Family abandonment constituted something of a disability. For queer youths especially, “the sudden revelation of gayness” often led to the debilitating “break-up of a family.” Hudson House “provided an extended family environment” to those in crisis.⁸³ Rocco argued that this was the most appealing aspect of the housing program. Upon arrival, residents did not “feel too good about themselves. They came from difficult situations. They had been thrown out by their parents, who say ‘we don’t want a gay person or a lesbian in our house.’” Queer housing programs offered a “precious refuge;” an island of hope.⁸⁴

Advertisements and flyers emphasized emotional benefits. Residents were promised “a comfortable home” and “an instant gay family.”⁸⁵ *The Lesbian Tide* lauded Hudson House as “a place where lesbians and gay men can feel relaxed and comfortable. They can feel ‘at home.’”⁸⁶ Letters from interested individuals testified to family needs. A man from San Diego wrote that he needed “to get out of [his] current situation” quickly. “I still live with my parents,” he explained, “and because I’m gay I feel rejection from them and my friends. I really would like to get away.” He held high hopes for L.A. “I would not like to think I’m running *away* from something,” he wrote, “but running *to* something. I think L.A., because of its size and gay community, would be able to offer an opportunity.”⁸⁷ Emotional needs were prioritized. “We would never overlook a resident’s birthday,” Rocco recalled. “So there was a birthday almost every day. It [provided] the feeling that you’re part of a family.” One man “literally walked from the state of Washington

⁸² Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

⁸³ Hudson House project description, 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

⁸⁴ Pat Rocco oral history, interviewed by Morris Kight, Los Angeles, California, 27 April 1983. UCLA Film and Television Library, Los Angeles, California (Hereafter Pat Rocco OH).

⁸⁵ Hudson House flier, undated; Hudson House brochure, 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

⁸⁶ “Temporary Sanity,” *Lesbian Tide*, 1 November 1978.

⁸⁷ Letter to Pat Rocco, 5 May 1981. PRP, box 15, folder 2.

to Los Angeles” to “find Hudson House.” When he arrived, his feet were swollen and he could walk no further. Residents gathered a “big basin, hot water, Epsom salts,” and “soaked his feet for hours.” Each month, residents organized a large party which made “people feel like part of a community, an enterprise, a family.”⁸⁸ Communal cooking, cleaning, and discussions were continued. Social events were documented by Rocco, who maintained scrapbooks for each house. Several images suggested loving and sexual relationships between housemates.⁸⁹

For many, family environments were rescuing. “When I came to Hudson House,” one woman revealed, “my father had thrown me out and I had lost some of my closest friends.” She had been left feeling “very depressed” and emotionally “exhausted.” Hudson House helped her to “pull myself back together emotionally and get my strength back. With so many people to hug and so many shoulders to cry on, I could no longer feel hopeless, worthless, and lonely.” Her new family saved her “from the hell [she] went through.” Another “knew no one” upon her arrival in L.A. “I have travelled around quite a bit,” she wrote, “but [L.A.] is the only place that has anything like Hudson House. It’s a place where Gay People are welcomed” and offered “a chance to get your head together in a family atmosphere.” Two men “met at Hudson House” and became lovers. Together for three months, they had “met some real friends” and were “glad to part of the family.” Many residents stayed long-term. “I started as a resident more than two years ago,” one woman explained. “I then became a house manager. I’ve grown as a person since coming here.” “The most important thing I gained at Hudson House [was] a family,” one man explained. “I have never had support like this before and it makes me feel great.”⁹⁰ Testimonials illustrated how important family-building could be. Halloween parties, Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas events, and house get-togethers marked the program as both an emotional and physical shelter.⁹¹

Queer family-building might appear less controversial today, but in the heated cultural environment of the 1970s and 1980s it was a radical project. As the Moral Majority gained power, queers demonstrated

⁸⁸ Pat Rocco OH.

⁸⁹ Hudson House brochure, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

⁹⁰ All in Jerry Hyde and Pat Rocco, “The Cold, the Broke, and the Hungry,” October 1980. HHR, box 2, folder 3.

⁹¹ Hudson House holiday event fliers, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

that they could build stable and loving families. At the grassroots, they proved that Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell were wrong. In 1982, USM founder Bob Humphries declared that “HUDSON HOUSE [WAS] A ‘FAMILY’ BY DICTIONARY DEFINITION.” A “blood relationship,” he stressed, was “not essential to the concept and definition of ‘family.’” True families were formed when “people decide *for themselves* what constitutes a family.” Queer Angelenos “provided shelter, employment, food, and emotional security for over 4,000 people in hard times.”⁹² In queer housing programs, the definition of family was changed.

Limits of the Grassroots: Flaws and Shortcomings

As a grassroots initiative, liberation houses encountered significant obstacles. Funding, interpersonal conflicts, mental health issues, and drug abuse impacted the effectiveness of the program. The lack of stable funding was perhaps the most structural flaw. Reliance on private fundraisers made house budgets insufficient and unpredictable. When donations failed to deliver, house managers scrambled to pay rents and utility bills. Moreover, meager budgets precluded salaries, leading to great turnover. “We got to live there,” Platania concluded, “and eat, and enjoy the benefits...but the staff didn’t get paid.”⁹³ The model was unsustainable, and encouraged activists to pursue other forms of financing.

Among residents, personality conflicts were sometimes difficult to resolve. Several were asked to leave when they did not participate in house activities or clashed with others. One man only stayed at the house “to eat, bathe, and store luggage.” Using the house as a “crash pad,” he was asked to move on. Similarly, another “refused to make a commitment to [the] house” or “go through intake for re-admittance” and was evicted. Despite multiple efforts, a young woman was “unwilling to seek employment” and thus “unable to pay rent.” Staff asked her to leave and recommended counseling at the GCSC. “For those who sought conflict or abused other residents, eviction was guaranteed. One man was unceremoniously sent packing after he was caught stealing, and two additional residents were evicted for “taking jobs from other people in the house.” House managers could mitigate these disturbances, but were inadequately prepared

⁹² Robert Humphries memo, 1982. HHR, box 2, folder 1.

⁹³ Platania, OH.

to address the serious issues like mental health disorders and drug abuse. Early on, organizers improvised with little success. Internal notes on deeply-troubled residents highlighted unaddressed needs. For instance, one individual stayed three nights at a house, but was “psychotic.” Staff wrote that he was “not to be readmitted,” and encouraged others “to try and help [him] somehow.” Similar short notes abound of others. A woman’s “erratic mental state” resulted in “NO ADMITTANCE UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES,” while a man’s “bizarre behavior” made him “*persona non grata* to all Liberation Houses.” Excessive drug or alcohol abuse could also constitute grounds for removal. After he “attacked the house manager with a chair,” a man was “removed because of heavy drug usage” which resulted in “a tendency towards violence.” A young resident was labeled a “drug runaway, not to be let in any liberation house,” while another was “very disruptive, often [had] four guests a night,” and was reportedly “dealing [drugs] in the house.”⁹⁴ Activists were sympathetic to their situations, but lacked resources to help them.

Houses could also face crises of authority and management. The decline of the Van Ness House in late 1972 was illustrative. When residents refused to obey rules and regulations, house managers lost control. Eventually, residents were sent a letter informing them of their evictions. “It has become apparent,” it read, “that the Van Ness residence is not self-sustaining; nor has there been much indication that the experiment in collective living is working there.” Moreover, “none of the residents of the current Van Ness Liberation House have paid rents for the month of March.” Organizers suspected that alcohol and drugs explained the demise, and planned to “redevelop [Van Ness House into] a supportive living environment for gay sisters and brothers with drug and alcohol related problems.” Current residents could apply to the new program or vacate.⁹⁵ Instead, they launched a rebellion. “You don’t live in the Collective and haven’t even deigned to visit,” they charged. “Therefore, the internal development or working of our Collective is, bluntly, none of your damned business.” They admitted that “some of us in the house have had sufficient alcohol and drug problems,” but rejected appeals for help. “We’ve pretty much resolved our own problems simply by living collectively—a collective you now want to shatter.” In the weeks that followed, they

⁹⁴ Notes on Liberation House residents, undated. GLCSC. box 11, folders 38-41.

⁹⁵ Don Kilhefner to T. Johnson, 26 March 1973. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

promised to fight their evictions.⁹⁶ In the end, however, they vacated under threats of forced expulsion. The nasty revolt was an example of how grassroots collectives could breed resentment and internal turf battles. Organization mattered.

Despite such problems, liberation houses were an impressive grassroots solution to the housing crisis. Between 1971 and 1975, activists estimated that approximately 4,308 men and women has been housed in a queer shelter.⁹⁷ This illustrated need and potential for queer housing initiatives. Platania concluded that liberation houses were “a living example of what gay people could do with little more than a steadfast belief in the strength of our gay energy.”⁹⁸ They enabled activists to physically shelter the homeless and grow queer family environments. But housing was only the necessary first step in a larger development process that became the GCSC.

⁹⁶ Van Ness Collective residents to Don Kilhefner, 27 March 1973. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁹⁷ Gay Community Services Center general revenue sharing grant, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 11, folder, 34.

⁹⁸ Platania, “Gay is Good.”

Chapter Three: “Womb to Tomb” Social Service Activism

“The lack of housing and employment among adult gay men and women places them in positions of continuing economic insecurity. No small percentage finds themselves on an unending cycle between the streets, jails, clinics, hospitals and prisons. Los Angeles constitutes a nightmare of fear and self-depreciation for gay men and women.”

-GCSC founding document, 1971

“Thanks to the [GCSC], my self-esteem and confidence have improved because I am accepted for *what I am* and no longer have to build tissues of lies.”

-H. McElroy, a lesbian parolee assisted by the GCSC,
1974

Alexander: The Other Side of Dawn premiered on NBC in 1977. A sequel to *Dawn: Portrait of a Teenage Runaway*, the made-for-television film told the story of Alex, a young male hustler trying to survive in Los Angeles. In *Dawn*, Alex forged a relationship with a fellow female drifter, but now faced sexual confusion and lonesomeness. As a male prostitute, he wondered “whether he may be a homosexual (or at least bisexual).” Unremarkable in many ways, the film showcased an impressive organization in L.A. called the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC). Confronting sexual predators and economic hardships, Alex stumbled upon the GCSC, which offered housing, employment, and counseling programs. A *Los Angeles Times* review of the *Alexander* noted that GCSC organizers “took special interest in [Alex’s] welfare” and brought him in from the cold. Thanks to the GCSC, Alex turned his back on prostitution, sought gainful employment, and came to terms with his bisexuality.¹ Three years later, famed novelist Edmund White set out in search of “gay America.” When he arrived in Southern California, he too took note of the GCSC. “In Los Angeles,” he observed, queers “are looking after their own.” The GCSC offered “facilities for handling employment, health, psychotherapy, alcoholism, prison probation and parole, and so on.” It was a “permanent *place*, an organization that owns its own.” L.A. must be “the most active and

¹ “‘Alexander’: Life in a Gay World,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1977, F19.

civic-minded gay [city] in the country,” he concluded.² Both observations highlighted queer social service activism in 1970s L.A.

The GCSC developed a wide range of social programs in the areas of housing, employment, emotional counseling, healthcare, and parolee support. While it blazed new trails, it was one part of a larger mosaic of activism in L.A. The GCSC joined organizations such as the Sons of Watts Improvement Association, the East Los Angeles Community Union, the Los Angeles Women’s Center, and the Gay Women’s Center, all of which focused on the provision of social services. Although some worried about the consequences of this “institutional” approach, organizers argued that they were merely transforming radical politics. “Much like Mao Zedong and Ho Chi Minh,” one claimed, “providing services to the people fomented revolutions.”³ Through the GCSC, activists joined the War on Poverty on queer terms and constructed new, diverse poverty knowledge. This chapter examines the grassroots nature of the GCSC, while the following explores efforts to win it public financing and political support. The success of this organization demonstrated how gay liberation could impact both the grassroots and the establishment.

Launching a Queer War on Poverty

The GCSC was a bold addition to social service activism in L.A. Organizers built upon past lessons and explained queer discrimination in structural terms. By the founding of the GCSC, activists explained queer poverty and homelessness in sophisticated ways. Framing the organization as one weapon in the larger War on Poverty, they asserted that queers had an integral part to play in the fight against metropolitan blight, homelessness, and inequality.

The GCSC was first conceived within liberation houses.⁴ The idea excited Jon Platania, Morris Kight, and Don Kilhefner, and the name of the organization became important. “By ‘community,’” Kilhefner

² Edmund White, *States of Desire: Travels in Gay America* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1980), 26.

³ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

⁴ Jon Platania oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Berkeley, California, 3 March 2014 (Hereafter Platania OH).

explained, “we meant somewhere where we took care of each other. The use of the word ‘Gay’” indicated that “we were going to be open and upfront.” The name also implied a political ideology, for “the word ‘Services’ was clear from a political point of view. These were not social workers, these were revolutionaries. We saw there was something about the grassroots providing social services that was important and *revolutionary*.”⁵ Some scholars have suggested that activists “compromised” the “lofty ideals” of “the Gay Liberation Front [and] the New Left” by adopting an organizational strategy, but those involved saw the GCSC as a radical expansion of gay liberation.⁶ In order to obtain legitimacy as a community service center, the GCSC needed non-profit status. Organizers were assisted by attorney Alan Gross, who explained the requirements of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). At the state level, the GCSC faced little opposition. Elected alongside Governor Ronald Reagan, Secretary of State Jerry Brown “approved [the GCSC application] without blinking.”⁷ Organizers touted the endorsement within the national IRS application.⁸ Still, IRS officials “raised all kinds of questions.” Commissioners understandably insinuated that, by helping queers, the GCSC was discriminatory. In response, activists promised to “deal with anyone who comes to our door.”⁹ Some have argued that this was a “purposefully misleading ploy,” but the GCSC did welcome bisexual and questioning individuals who were “increasingly expressing the possibility of their gay natures.”¹⁰ Even with this promise, the IRS stonewalled organizers. At one point, Kilhefner was summoned to Washington, D.C. for questioning. Realizing that commissioners “were trying to find a reason not to grant the tax exemption,” he decided to regurgitate the written application “like some robotic parrot.” And still the IRS stalled. Some maintain that the “Nixon White House found out about [the application], and ordered the Secretary of the Treasury to keep it in his desk.” True or not, non-profit status was only granted after Nixon had been replaced by Gerald Ford.¹¹

⁵ Kilhefner OH.

⁶ Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 192-193.

⁷ Kilhefner OH.

⁸ Gay Community Services Center founding document, July 1971. Courtesy of Jon Platania.

⁹ Kilhefner OH.

¹⁰ Gay Community Services Center founding document, July 1971. Courtesy of Jon Platania.

¹¹ Kilhefner OH; Faderman & Timmons, 193.

The initial funding strategy was entirely private. Founders noted that “in spite of the legal, religious, medical, political, and social prejudice against gay men and women,” many queers had “become accomplished individuals at all levels of the professional, entertainment, and business communities.” Those with means (most of whom were white and male) were expected to support the GCSC. Although vastly removed from the day-to-day lives of low-income queers, wealthier gays were assumed to be “keenly sensitive to the needs of their own community.” This sensitivity would blossom into a stable funding relationship and be the organization’s “greatest single source of financial support,” or so it was thought.¹² Organizers quickly encountered the limits of this strategy. As outspoken leftists, Kight and Kilhefner proved ineffective fundraisers and developed “reputations for being difficult to work with.” Some wealthy queers accused them of being communists. Once he began soliciting funds, Kilhefner was shocked to learn that some queers were in fact conservative. “These were people,” he recalled, “who had made it. They owned some property [but] they were not a part of the antiwar movement, or civil rights movement... We got very little financial or brotherly support from them.” City Councilman Joel Wachs was a good example. A liberal Republican, Wachs was known as “a man in the closet.” Kilhefner believed he would offer clandestine support, but found that he “couldn’t count on him, because he was a conservative businessman.”¹³ The initial hesitancy among the donor class reflected deep political divisions among queers. For activists trying to build a community organization, this came as an unwelcome surprise.

Thankfully there were exceptions. Sheldon Andelson was a successful gay attorney and a staunch advocate of the GCSC.¹⁴ He agreed to serve on the GCSC Board of Directors and gave the young organization some badly needed credibility. Andelson was useful in raising funds from wealthy friends and remained committed to the organization. Still, he sometimes displayed a startling lack of understanding about the purpose of the GCSC. As late as 1976, Kilhefner remembered a call from Andelson: “He had to go to some fundraiser, and he said ‘Don, tell me again, why do we need a Gay and Lesbian Center?’ ‘Oh

¹² Gay Community Services Center founding document, July 1971. Courtesy of Jon Platania.

¹³ Kilhefner OH.

¹⁴ Not to be confused with Las Vegas casino magnate and conservative activist Sheldon Adelson.

Shelly, come on!” Kilhefner replied. This testified to a lack of ideological cohesion between many activists and donors, even friendly ones. Yet the relationship was important from a financial perspective. Andelson convinced many to donate clandestinely. Since solicitations came from one of their own, members of the gay business community were more likely to donate. Additional resources were raised through the gay funky dances and all funds were compiled into “one big pot” from which the organization could pull depending on needs.¹⁵

Relying on Platania’s HUD background, activists wrote a sophisticated founding document which explained the need and purpose of the GCSC. This document highlighted structural economic impediments facing queers. Alice O’Conner argued that the discourse surrounding poverty in the United States transitioned into “an approach that, however expedient amidst the uncertainties of the 1970s, made it easier to think about poverty as a failure of individuals or of the welfare system, rather than of an economy in which Americans faced diminishing opportunities.”¹⁶ This was the trajectory of many poverty analysts, but not these queer activists. They instead stressed structural discrimination and associated the GCSC with the War on Poverty. According to organizers, many lesbians and gays arrived in Los Angeles hoping to partake in a “fantasy that never existed.” Arriving with “a lack of financing” and “few marketable job skills,” many became ensnarled in a downward spiral of “disappointment, drugs, a lack of funds,” and “prostitution.” The “lack of housing and employment among adult gay men and women,” moreover, placed “them in positions of continuing economic insecurity.” The “enforcement of repressive statutes compounded [poverty] still further.” Activists described an “unending cycle between the streets, the jails, the clinics, the hospitals, and prisons” which trapped Angelenos in “a nightmare of fear and self-depreciation.”¹⁷ This revealed how a lack of individual *and public* resources created queer poverty.

Access to housing was important. Organizers reported that many had been turned away from public housing projects and other community housing programs “because they [were] gay.” Marked as

¹⁵ Kilhefner OH.

¹⁶ Alice O’Conner, *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth-Century U.S. History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 241.

¹⁷ Gay Community Services Center founding document, July 1971. Courtesy of Jon Platania.

“‘unacceptable’ in heterosexually oriented groups and homes,” there was not a single housing facility that “welcomed young or mature gay men or women in need of an accepting home environment.” Similarly, queers were locked out of employment programs and job opportunities, exacerbating the downward economic spiral. “The lack of social and human services available to gay men and women,” they reasoned, “can often be traced directly to the discriminatory practices of established employers.” Many businesses would not hire openly queer individuals because of “fear and ignorance.” Thus, opportunities for social mobility were blocked.¹⁸ Healthcare was a similar situation. It was “a well-established fact that the incidences of venereal disease [had] reached epidemic proportions throughout the Los Angeles area.” The “freedom of sexual expression which characterizes the gay community” made queer individuals more susceptible to disease, but so did poverty and exclusion from healthcare facilities. Many could not afford private healthcare and were reliant on free clinic programs. Even here, though, gay men and women were “reluctant to make use of free or public facilities for fear of exposure, ridicule, and embarrassment,” since most clinics were “heterosexually orientated.” This exacerbated the health crisis and increased risks for all Angelenos. After all, activists warned, accessible healthcare was “critical not only for the members of the exclusively gay community, but also for the members of the heterosexual community who are increasingly expressing the possibility of their gay natures.” This argument implied fluidity and crossover between supposed “gay” and “straight” communities.¹⁹

Once the structural problems had been established, organizers laid out a clear plan to tackle them. They pointed out that L.A. was exceptional. “The efforts of the Los Angeles homosexual community are particularly unique,” they argued, “in that its energies have been directed not only toward educating the majority of society...but also toward the immediate and critical needs of the individual homosexual.” Liberation houses demonstrated that queers could help their own. Safe and supportive shelter had “been provided to literally thousands of individuals of all ages” who came “from a broad range of socioeconomic

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

backgrounds.”²⁰ While organizations existed elsewhere, the GCSC was uniquely qualified to assist in the War on Poverty. This argument also built upon the legacies of racial minorities in the city, who advocated for local control of antipoverty initiatives. The GCSC was a product of the community, for the community.

Building a Multi-Layered Antipoverty Center

As the GCSC gained structure, housing programs remained integral. Liberation houses, while successful, had barely made a dent in the housing crisis. Organizers were reminded of this fact one “cold, misty morning.” Barricading the entrance of the GCSC, “young people huddled together seeking shelter. Unwanted, homeless, confused, they had nowhere else to turn.” After speaking with staff, leaders realized that “this [was] a common occurrence.” The spectacle reaffirmed that the GCSC needed to “make every effort possible at keeping a gay housing program in operation.” The problem was insurmountable, and organizers confessed that “we don’t know how we are going to meet the need; we simply know that we must. *If we don’t take care of our own homeless and hungry, who will?*” In addition to liberation houses, organizers offered other forms of housing assistance, such as emergency financial assistance to pay rents, which were often “desperately needed.”²¹ By 1975 several residential properties housed the homeless. These included liberation houses, as well as the Van Ness House for alcoholics, the Sappho House which provided “temporary residential housing” just for women, a recovery house for women with “drug problems,” and a fourteen-bed house for newly released prisoners. “Almost on a daily basis,” organizers reported, “the Center is contacted by individuals searching for housing.” While they housed to maximum capacity, each day “at least one or two persons [were] denied” for lack of room.²² As the GCSC grew, staffing problems emerged. Suffering from an injury and a spiritual crisis, Jon Platania left L.A. for an indefinite rest in the Bay Area. Additionally, the interim housing director was forced to resign due to low wages. While “working at the Center was a privilege,” his salary had put him in “bad financial straits.”²³

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Don Kilhefner to Friends of the Center, 7 December 1976. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

²² Gay Community Services general revenue sharing grant, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 11, folder 34.

²³ Letter, 23 March 1976. GLCSC, box 11, folder 36.

As the GCSC “tightened its belts in order to ensure the obligations of providing housing for our sisters and brothers,” it sometimes neglected to provide living wages to its employees.²⁴ Lack of funds sometimes foreclosed on good ideas. Imagined as a “cool, groovy, non-oppressive atmosphere,” organizers unsuccessfully attempted to lease an apartment building.²⁵ Such failures testified to queer ambitions, but also the inadequacies of private fundraising. This became clearer as the organization spread itself thin. In order to address the multifaceted beast of poverty, founders built a multi-layered approach. Sometimes, individuals mistakenly refer the GCSC as the Gay Community *Service* Center, missing the plural nature of *services* that the GCSC provided; today many simply refer to the organization as The Center, which one founder argued “inexcusably erases the significant words ‘community’ and ‘services.’”²⁶ Organizers “decided [that] this was going to be a multilateral” effort which provided “womb to tomb services for gay and lesbian people” through housing, employment, counseling, and healthcare programs.

The diversity of programs surprised the *Los Angeles Times*. “The range of services is impressive,” a reporter concluded. “There’s a venereal disease clinic and a women’s gynecology clinic; programs to assist members in finding housing, jobs and fighting discrimination.” The GCSC had also instituted “rap groups and ‘gay awareness’ groups which stress the positive aspects of homosexuality.” One housing complex boasted “an alcohol and drug abuse project.” While “similar service centers are opening in other cities,” he wrote, “the GCSC is the first and has the widest scope.”²⁷ The range of services was also emphasized in *Outreach: The Extended Family*, the self-published newsletter of the GCSC. *Outreach* guided individuals to individual and community services. These included “self-development, food and shelter, employment, legal, medical, senior citizens, prisoners, parole and probation.” A weekly schedule illustrated the range of options. Patrons could join a “Gay Awareness Rap for Men,” receive treatment at the free venereal disease clinic, attend an informational session on “The Blind and Sexuality,” receive guitar lessons, join a “Gay Awareness Rap for Women,” attend “Welfare Rights counseling,” visit the support group for gay parents,

²⁴ Letter, March 1976. GLCSC, box 11, folder 36.

²⁵ Gay Community Services Center flier, 1973. GLCSC, box 11, folder 33.

²⁶ Don Kilhefner, “Creating a Gay Community: The Hoover Street Commune, undated. Courtesy of Don Kilhefner.

²⁷ “Help Center for the Gay Community,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 July 1973, C1.

utilize the “Free Women’s Clinic” for “complete gynecological services,” join the “Transsexual Counseling Group,” or take classes in Yoga and Tai Chi. Friday nights were devoted to gay funky dances.²⁸ While the schedule fluctuated depending on turnout, it represented an impressive attempt to reach a diverse population. Organizers were most passionate for programs which reached the truly marginalized. This was most reflected in youth, healthcare, and parolee programs.

Rescuing “the Forgotten”: Street Life, Prostitution, and Youth Outreach

The story of *Alex: The Other Side of Dawn* (which opened this chapter) revealed a dangerous world for queer teenage runaways. Scores of young gays and lesbians, many of whom faced rejection from their parents, arrived in Los Angeles with big dreams, but few resources. They confronted homelessness, drug abuse, and prostitution. Activists partnered with existing organizations and crafted their own solutions in order to assist them. Amid a hostile discourse which conflated queers with pedophiles, activists shined a spotlight on “forgotten” teens in their communities.

The GCSC partnered with existing youth organizations, such as Project Heavy-West (PHW) to reach troubled teens. Founded in 1976, PHW referred at-risk teens to existing social service agencies in L.A.²⁹ Black, brown, and low-income teens were the prime targets. Activists suggested that young gay, bisexual, and questioning youths were in need of specialized attention and suggested that the GCSC could offer a “deterrent from juvenile crime.” Since queer youths of color were dually stigmatized, these services were desperately needed. As liberation houses could be sexually-charged environments, organizers suggested alternative housing arrangements for underage queers. Those in need of “emergency interim housing” could be placed “into private volunteer host situations,” or “low-cost roommate housing” instead. Once housed, teens could make use of the wide-range of GCSC services, including health and job development programs.³⁰ Activists noted that the GCSC had experience in this area. Recently, one organizer

²⁸ Gay Community Services Center newsletter, “Outreach: The Extended Family,” February 1973. Author’s personal collection.

²⁹ “HEAVY West Open House,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 April 1979, 5.

³⁰ Gay Community Services Center Project Heavy West Proposal, 7 August 1978. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

wrote, the GCSC assisted five gay juveniles with employment, eight with emergency food and welfare assistance, and sixteen with emergency housing.³¹ The proposal to join PHW was well-crafted and well-argued, but ignited a firestorm of controversy.

The PHW Board of Directors divided over the issue. “The position of opponents,” one observer remarked, was “reflected in the memos of Howard Ekerling,” who represented the County. Appointed by Supervisor Ed Edelman, who was supportive of the GCSC, Ekerling opposed the GCSC and fought to keep it out of PHW. “The problem of ‘labeling’ youngsters as gay in a predominantly heterosexual society,” he explained, would do “more harm than good.” He believed that activists were “inadequately trained” and would “over-emphasize sexual orientation” in counseling programs. GCSC organizers considered those statements unfair. The presence of Ekerling at PHW meetings “caused significant concern among gay community leaders,” one noted, and queers demanded his removal. Strategically, Ekerling was “promoted” out of PHW. An aide to Supervisor Edelman explained that “the reasons for his removal need not be detailed to him,” and encouraged his reassignment to “a commission where gay-related issues would be minor.” GCSC supporters argued that PHW referrals would only involve “youth [who] indicate that they are gay or are determined to be gay by the Project HEAVY-West counselors.” Officials would verify which individuals suffered from “sexual identity problems” and to what extent they were “a substantial source of their delinquency.” Referrals would also need to be at least fifteen years of age or older.³² These measures addressed homophobic fears that youths might be sexually molested at the GCSC. There remained one significant obstacle: the Sheriff’s Department was steadfastly against the GCSC. On Halloween in 1978, a GCSC assistant director received a hostile memo from Sheriff’s authorities. They argued that there were “*insignificant* numbers of youthful offenders who are gay.” Thus, “special referrals for gay youths (i.e. GCSC) [was] unnecessary.” A GCSC director questioned the Sheriff’s Departments methods of “*detecting* gay juveniles” and accused them of harmful stereotyping. “I fear that the department ‘detects’ homosexuals,” she explained, “according to stereotype criteria and thus fails to identify [many] gay youths.”

³¹ Gay Community Services Center-Project Heavy West contract, 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

³² Letter to Ed Edelman, 27 January 1978. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

This was a good point. How did the Sheriff's Department measure queerness? The records of both the LAPD and the Sheriff's Department made them particularly ill-suited for the task. "Given the homophobic attitudes already reflected in this report," she ordered a countywide survey. Results contradicted law enforcement claims.³³

The local chapter of the Boys Club of America had "no special program for gay youth," "no gay staff members" and "would *NOT* give any positive reinforcement for a person being gay." Catholic Social Services "suggested that gay youths talk with their parish priest." Since "many youths are just bored and so they have homosexual experiences," the reasoning went, "a good priest would give him something to do" (as it turned out, this was a risky suggestion). A local fire station offered youth counseling, but a representative admitted that "there [was] no way firefighters would work with a homosexual kid." The Hollywood YMCA "was officially neutral on the subject," but a representative boasted that "about 50% of his gay clients became straight." The United Way was the only agency which had a policy on queers, and this was "referral to the GCSC" where queers could "be with their own." The Sheriff's Department insisted that the GCSC was dangerously located only "two blocks from the chickenhawk capital of the City" and that staff lacked "professional qualifications." GCSC organizers tore this argument to shreds. "Where there are high crime areas in a city," they asked, "are service agencies or police departments discouraged from establishing? Why is it that our Center isn't viewed as being situated in the *best* of all locations as opposed to the worst?" The "baffling" list of complaints revealed a "discriminatory nature."³⁴ The new county representative, Barry Cohn, was supportive of the GCSC. Law enforcement officials "threatened the Board," Cohn reported, "by *implying* that if funds are made available to the [GCSC] then they shall not participate." Referrals were essential to the operations of PHW, so this was a serious threat.³⁵ Supervisor Edelman spoke with Sheriff Herman Block privately in an effort to smooth things over.³⁶ Edelman had a

³³ Letter, 31 October 1978. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 29 September 1978. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

³⁶ Aide to Edelman, 24 October 1978. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

decent relationship with law enforcement, many of whom “personally liked him.”³⁷ In this instance, though, Block was intransigent. Behind the scenes, he pressured PHW board members to reject the GCSC proposal, which they did. Director Laurence Rubin explained that approval would have “deleterious effects on the flow of referrals” and worried that “the welfare of young people” might be placed in jeopardy, since a “young person’s sexual orientation [was] not absolute.”³⁸ Another board member felt it “inappropriate to send ‘teenagers with sex identities problems’ to the [GCSC].” It would be better, he suggested, if the GCSC hired “independent consultants to serve gay oriented youth (i.e. straight counselors for gay kids).”³⁹ Queers lobbied for another vote. After a lengthy period of “intelligent discussion and debate” with GCSC organizers, PHW reversed course and approved the application.⁴⁰ In an impressive about-face, Rubin commended the “courageous vote” and congratulated the GCSC for “bringing bureaucracy to [queer] people.”⁴¹

PHW awarded the GCSC \$6,000 (measly in comparison to other agencies) in order to counsel a minimum of twenty clients. The partnership would “divert gay youths from entering, re-entering, or further penetrating the Juvenile Justice System.” Officials encouraged activists to be “gay role models” and foster “understanding of the special problems of gay youth.” GCSC activists could better tackle the “‘street culture’ of Hollywood,” they admitted. There remained, however, a referral hang-up. PHW mandated that “only overtly gay presenting youth” could be referred.⁴² What did *overtly presenting* mean? This provision was added to appease the Sheriff’s Department, but failed to reassure them. Both the LAPD and the Sheriff’s Department blasted the decision. Some crowed that there were “only a minimal number of documented homosexual juveniles in need of counseling,” and accused PHW of pandering.⁴³ Herman Block made good on his threat and withdrew from PHW.⁴⁴ Panicked organizers reached out to county leaders

³⁷ Rich Llewellyn OH.

³⁸ Letter to Project Heavy-West board, 10 January 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

³⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 6 January 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁰ Letter to Los Angeles Police Department, 19 January 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴¹ Letter to Project Heavy-West Board of Directors, 22 January 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴² Gay Community Services Center-Project Heavy West contract, 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴³ Letter, 3 January 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁴ Letter, 31 January 1979. EDE box 24, folder 5.

fearing that “the entire viability of the operation [was] in jeopardy.” If the Sheriff’s Department refused to offer referrals, many queers would be steered away.⁴⁵ In hopes of a compromise, PHW offered another concession. Block argued that “volunteer host situations” were “an open invitation to the solicitation of minors.”⁴⁶ Susan Kuhner of the GCSC found this homophobic. Only trained professionals, she insisted, would be eligible as “volunteer hosts.”⁴⁷ Block was stoking fears that “young individuals would be sent home with gay couples over the weekend for sex.”⁴⁸ County leaders agreed the fear was “overblown.”⁴⁹ Edelman brought GCSC organizers together with Block to “clean the whole thing up.”⁵⁰ No record of the meeting remains, but afterwards Block announced he would “re-evaluate the decision to leave [PHW].” Law enforcement officers would have “no intention of sending any individuals to the GCSC,” he confessed, but he was willing “to tour the Gay Community Services Center facilities” himself before he made his decision.⁵¹ Sure enough, the Sheriff’s Department remained within PHW; several queer youths were even referred from the West Hollywood sub-station. The struggle highlighted delicate issues of sexuality, queerness, and youth. The GCSC worked against decades-old stereotypes to prove that queers were not predators. The issue of prostitution proved even more contentious.

Organizers explained that queer teens found themselves trapped in a cycle of poverty and prostitution. In the Greater Hollywood area, queer prostitution was an epidemic, and much of it was underage. Neighborhood constituents confirmed the problem, and sent angry letters to elected officials. One man demanded that “police remove all male hookers along Santa Monica Boulevard” and “send them to San Francisco.”⁵² Business owners worried that prostitution blighted the neighborhood and drove customers away. One wanted to know why “responsible gay organizations” weren’t addressing the issue.⁵³ Queers

⁴⁵ Letter, 16 March 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 23 April 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 27 April 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁸ Aide to Ed Edelman, 13 April 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁴⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 6 April 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 13 April 1979. EDE, box 24, folder 5.

⁵² Letter to Ed Edelman, 30 November 1981. EDE, box 822.

⁵³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 12 October 1979. EDE, box 822.

worried about prostitution as well, but many distrusted law enforcement. A “campaign to clean up gay prostitution,” wrote one man, would end in a pogrom. Police officers harassed residents “not for the alleged charges of prostitution, but because they are GAY.” A “campaign of intimidation” would do more harm than good.⁵⁴ The problem was “not really a matter of gay prostitution,” some observed, “so much as a matter of prostitution in general (both gay and straight).” If the queer side of the issue was to be addressed, it would need to come from within the queer community. The GCSC made “an effort to deal with the problem of gay prostitution indirectly through Project HEAVY-West,” but more direct action was required.⁵⁵ Affiliated with the GCSC, Boyle Home was established to fill the gap.

Boyle Home was modeled after liberation houses but adjusted to serve underage youths. It consisted of two rented houses on Cloverdale Avenue and Olympic Boulevard. Named after its founder, Ed Boyle, it was founded in 1976 and helped queer youths in crisis, especially prostitutes. Boyle Home relied on the GCSC for referrals and received political support from the County (Edelman’s office offered funding and Dodger tickets for house residents).⁵⁶ Boyle’s private life was mysterious, but he was referred to as a “non-gay person” by organizers.⁵⁷ Whether he was straight, bisexual, or otherwise non-identifying, this label shielded him from predatory stereotypes. Organizers argued that gay prostitutes required special care and attention. The Hollywood Human Services Project labeled them “forgotten young men.” Largely a “runaway population,” male prostitutes came from “predominantly lower class and ethnic backgrounds.” Many suffered from “symptomatic family disorders” including neglect and abandonment. It came as little surprise, then, that Hollywood was “one of the greatest meccas for runaways” and “one of the most dangerous street scenes” in America. For gay youths, there was little chance of escape, since many facilities did not serve them. Queer teens were more likely to become “forgotten throwaways.”⁵⁸ The *Los Angeles Times* celebrated the boldness of Boyle Home. Residents were “self-identified gays” who found themselves

⁵⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 12 August 1981. EDE, box 250, folder 1.

⁵⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, 27 November 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

⁵⁶ Letter, 26 July 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 4.

⁵⁷ Letter, 20 May 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 8.

⁵⁸ “Report on Runaways,” Hollywood Human Services Project, 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

lost in prostitution. The *Times* described a non-threatening environment: Boyle managed the program with two female social workers, and permission from parents or legal guardians was required. Sadly, Boyle reported that this was not difficult to obtain. “Many parents and siblings may intellectually accept a gay brother or son,” he explained “but are unwilling to open their home to him.” Residents could “not have sex within the house,” “leave without clearance,” or “cruise Santa Monica Boulevard.” House counseling sessions offered “a place to examine what being gay means.” A sixteen-year-old runaway from Redlands, California revealed that his “attraction to street life” emerged after he was “abandoned” by parents. Thanks to Boyle Home, he longed for “more emotional and loving relationships.” Ed Boyle found this story typical. Young gays wanted “some guy who will make it OK forever and ever,” he explained. Instead, many found “weekends of drugs and sex” which caused “emotional damage.” Los Angeles was an exceptionally cruel place. The city had become a “ghetto for gays,” he opined. “Gays will say they’re happy they’ve got Hollywood; that’s like a Jew saying he’s happy he’s got the Warsaw ghetto. It’s all based on, ‘Am I young enough?’ ‘Am I pretty enough?’”⁵⁹ The streets of Hollywood could be mean and superficial.

When it came to gender, Boyle Home sometimes offered harmful advice. One staff member remarked that, “without role models,” many “gay boys tend to become flamboyant” and “effeminate.” Young gay males might “even try cross-dressing, or dressing like women” in order to “completely deny their masculinity.” Gender confusion, some charged, stemmed from a lack of exposure to “successful human beings who are gay.” What did that mean? Did “successful” queerness require “masculinity”? She implied as much. This could have troubling effects on teens. One young man “painted his eyebrows and polished his nails” before a weekly meeting. Counselors asked him how he would feel if “a woman handed him some lesbian literature” The worried teen asked, “would they think I was a girl?” After discussion, “the consensus was: If [he] didn’t like the assumption and if he doesn’t like kids at school calling him names, then he’d better remove the paint and polish.”⁶⁰ This was a troubling lesson in conformity, and spoke to a historical problem of gender within queer communities. “Swish,” Craig Loftin contended, was an

⁵⁹ “Foster Homes for Young Gay Runaways,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1980, G1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

“unacceptable mannerism” in mainstream gay life.⁶¹ In Philadelphia, Marc Stein found that “while lesbians and gay men were engaging in important struggles, they were not furthering the goal of abolishing the sexes.” Instead, activists “subverted the hegemony of heterosexuality” while simultaneously “strengthening the hegemony of sex.”⁶² It is difficult to know how committed Boyle Home organizers were to gender conformity. This example might have been deliberately conservative to fend off anti-gay attackers. Regardless, some residents seem to have gone without needed sexual *and gender* counseling.

Theoretically the program was open to females, but it privileged males. Boyle admitted that “10 boys were referred for every girl,” which encouraged the belief that male prostitution was more of a problem. Boyle was hardly alone in this assumption. Adolescent runaways were often depicted as male teens, which limited options for women. A women’s crisis counselor at the GCSC complained that “on any evening, there are usually a few lesbian runaways looking for a place to stay.” Many used the GCSC itself as shelter until it closed at midnight. When staff locked the doors, she said, young lesbians “often walk out in tears, saying ‘I guess I’ll have to find a straight man to spend the night with.’” Street life was not a male problem, yet there were “no licensed lesbian homes in Los Angeles.” Some women concluded that “men care about men, gay or straight.” Boyle Home was symptomatic of this exclusion. Even within the organization, some complained that “bed space was reserved to accommodate boys.” One county leader was warned that “this issue might get very hot. It has elements of women’s rights and justice, mixed with realities, fixed budgets and limited resources.”⁶³ Faults notwithstanding, Boyle Home was an important initiative. It contributed to a rethinking of adoption, foster care, and adolescent social welfare. Susan McGreivy, a GCSC lawyer and President of the SCACLU Gay Rights Chapter, used the program’s success to pressure the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) to “certify Gay foster homes” in L.A. County. If the county wanted to curb the “continuous stream of youngsters who often end up hustling on Santa

⁶¹ Craig Loftin, *Masked Voices: Gay Men and Lesbians in Cold War America* (Albany: The State University of New York Press, 2012), 203-205.

⁶² Marc Stein, *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945-1972* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004), 13.

⁶³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 19 March 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

Monica,” they needed to support programs like Boyle Home.⁶⁴ The DPSS actually had no official policy on the matter, but an internal memo declared that “homosexuality [was] a valid consideration in foster parent placement.” In other words, there was neither a pro- nor anti-gay position; DPSS staff had discretion.⁶⁵ The conservative nature of Boyle Home earned it approval. County representatives described it as “an experimental project” which “does not take the position of condoning or condemning sexual identity.” If organizers strategically sterilized the program to win approval, it worked. The DPSS even offered financial assistance, since “it would be unfortunate if a program as crucial as this folds because of lack of funds.”⁶⁶ The DPSS had previously “refused to process application forms from gays” but now signaled a new attitude. When a Palos Verdes queer couple applied to foster a seventeen-year-old runaway, the “DPSS could find no reason to deny the application. [The couple] had been together for 10 years. They had excellent references” and “excellent jobs.”⁶⁷ This application was processed shortly after Boyle Home obtained DPSS approval and funding.

Like liberation houses, queer youth programs impacted understandings of family and stability and remained an important aspect of the GCSC into the 1980s. By the end of that decade, activists founded the Gay and Lesbian Adolescent Social Services (GLASS) program, which experienced great success until it filed for bankruptcy in 2009. While the organization often assisted covertly to avoid controversy, the GCSC reached scores of queer teens. These efforts revealed a strong concern for sexual and economic justice, as did healthcare activism.

Providing Healthcare: Free Clinics and Substance Abuse Programs

Jenna M. Loyd documented an energetic free healthcare movement in 1960s and 1970s L.A. Within “Black freedom, women’s, and antiwar movements,” activists “situated questions of bodily harms and healing within the multiply scaled geographies of everyday life. Their ideas of bodily well-being included

⁶⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 8 August 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

⁶⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, 16 August 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

⁶⁶ Evaluation of Boyle Home, Department of Public Social Services, 8 July 1977. EDE, box 909, folder 8.

⁶⁷ “Foster Homes for Young Gay Runaways,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 May 1980, G1.

access to dignified healthcare, and went beyond clinic walls to include bodily self-determination and healthy living conditions.”⁶⁸ Historical revelations of medical abuses (most notably the Tuskegee experiments), led Black Panthers to establish community-controlled healthcare facilities, which tended both “body and soul.”⁶⁹ Queers contributed to this grassroots healthcare movement. Liberation houses mandated free clinic screenings, but the GCSC also developed comprehensive health programs. From routine healthcare needs, to venereal disease and gynecological treatment, to alcohol and drug abuse programs, activists expanded healthcare options for low-income lesbians and gays.

In fact, healthcare concerned motivated activists before the founding of the GCSC. As a young Peace and Freedom Party member, Kilhefner worked on behalf of the free-clinic movement. These “community-based free clinics,” he recalled, “were coming alive at the grassroots and questioning the establishment.” Neighborhoods molded clinics to address particular needs of residents and activists worked to establish clinics “in communities that were poor” and “many times non-English-speaking.”⁷⁰ Nationwide, the Brown Berets and Black Panthers opened clinics that were independent from complete state control. In Los Angeles, clinics emerged in diverse neighborhoods such as Long Beach, Watts, and East L.A. which were “unique because they saw themselves as not simply meeting an unmet health need, but [also] as part of a broader movement for liberation, justice, and peace.”⁷¹ Supported by volunteer staffs of sympathetic medical professionals, academics, and activists, free clinics offered healthcare to the marginalized. While controlled by community activists, local clinics relied on grants from the National Free Clinic Council to operate. When the GCSC sought funds to open a clinic of its own, a representative “called Morris [Kight] and [Kilhefner] and said ‘Look, I’d like to grant you the \$25,000, but I can’t.’” He suggested that “the gay issue” would be too controversial. Activists argued that, like racial minorities, sexual minorities deserved access to healthcare grants. “Look,” they reasoned, “there’s a civil rights movement going on in this

⁶⁸ Jenna M. Loyd, *Health Rights Are Civil Rights: Peace and Justice Activism in Los Angeles, 1963-1978* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 2.

⁶⁹ See for example Alondra Nelson, *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight against Medical Discrimination* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2011).

⁷⁰ Kilhefner OH.

⁷¹ Loyd, *Health Rights Are Civil Rights*, 99.

country, and it involves not only blacks, but it involves Latinos, and gay people, and women and *we're part of that.*" Activists also appealed to the Los Angeles Free Clinic Council, whose members endorsed the GCSC proposal and sent an "avalanche" of letters to the National Council. It worked, and helped secure the grant.⁷² Once operational, the GCSC clinic provided free venereal disease testing, gynecological exams, and routine physicals. For queers who worried about public exposure, the clinic was a lifesaver. A decade later it played an important role in the fight against AIDS. The experience encouraged activists to stress commonality with other minorities. They did so again in 1974 when the newly formed Echo Park-Silver Lake Regional Drug Coalition circulated fliers about drug abuse in Echo Park and Silver Lake. Reaching out to the "total community," coalition organizers encouraged activists to attend a meeting "to find out what we've been doing, to present helpful ideas of your own, and to find out how you can help."⁷³ Sensing opportunity, GCSC activists attended the meeting and noted that the only way to solve the drug problem in the area was to "represent ALL segments of the community," which included queers.⁷⁴ Submitting a proposal for over \$100,000, organizers argued that low-income queers, especially those of color, would respond best to fellow queers.⁷⁵ Substance abuse, in fact, was a top GCSC priority.

When the Van Ness liberation house underwent an organizational crisis in late 1972, it was transformed into a treatment facility for queer alcoholics. The Van Ness program was partnered with Alcoholics Together, an L.A.-based substance abuse program. By the summer of 1973, Van Ness became "a model for what will be houses springing up all over the country."⁷⁶ For those with means, it cost forty dollars a week; if no financial resources were available, clients were asked to volunteer in lieu of payment.⁷⁷ Treatment plans varied depending "on the individualized needs of the person." Most residents lived at the house for three months, but were encouraged to make a long-term commitment. After organizers assessed

⁷² Kilhefner OH.

⁷³ Letter to Echo Park and Silver Lake communities, 4 January 1974. GLCSC, box 6, folder 1.

⁷⁴ Minutes of Echo Park-Silver Lake Regional Drug Coalition meeting, 14 January 1974. GLCSC, box 6, folder 1.

⁷⁵ Gay Community Services Center proposal to Echo Park-Silver Lake Regional Drug Coalition, 1 August 1974. GLCSC, box 6, folder 1.

⁷⁶ Letter to Morris Kight, 18 July 1973. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁷⁷ Van Ness House brochure, undated. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

suitability, clients entered detoxification, then stabilization. At this point, individuals were assigned a sponsor and guided towards county welfare programs.⁷⁸ For many, this was a crash-course in “government and private sources for counseling, legal and probation matters, job and vocational counseling, medical and psychological counseling, and financial assistance.”⁷⁹ They were expected to make use of GCSC programs for personal and professional development. By the end of treatment, residents would “secure permanent employment or involvement in a vocational training program,” and become involved in “activities of gay and non-gay communities.” Active involvement might include “attending services at the Metropolitan Community Church,” or volunteering at the GCSC. Once graduated Van Ness residents were asked to “participate in Household Rap Groups” and volunteer in “staffing the telephone help-line at the house.”⁸⁰ Like most treatment programs, Van Ness stressed a lifelong commitment to sobriety.

Van Ness House replicated the liberation house project of family-building. A brochure pointed out that “the gay alcoholic faces two socially stigmatizing problems: alcoholism and homosexuality.” Genuine recovery required “a facility geared towards recognition, understanding, and acceptance of both.” As one was treated for their alcoholism, they also received emotional support and encouragement for their queerness. Residents developed a “family-style living pattern” and formed emotional relationships. On average, Van Ness housed ten to twelve individuals at a time, making it an intimate environment. Together, they “maintained the house, prepared meals, participated in” counseling sessions, and “learned to live comfortably without alcohol or drugs.”⁸¹ The popularity of the program was revealed in long waiting lists and grateful letters. One man wrote that the program was “fantastic.” He was a member of “Alcoholics Anonymous for over four years,” but felt rejected for being gay. At Van Ness he found dual acceptance and encouraged organizers “to open more houses quickly.” Out and sober, he was “currently sponsoring four people, one of which has been through Van Ness and one who is there now. Both are sober, functioning

⁷⁸ Van Ness Recovery House program description, 12 February 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁷⁹ Van Ness House brochure, undated. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

⁸⁰ GCSC “Van Ness Recovery House Program” description, 2.12.75. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁸¹ Van Ness House brochure, undated. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

very well, have jobs, and are becoming responsible citizens.”⁸² Unlike liberation houses, lesbians were well-represented in Van Ness.

One “very grateful homosexual alcoholic” wrote that she had never witnessed such a “wonderful program.” Van Ness guided the “confused and helpless” towards “a steadying hand and true purpose.” She lamented that there were not “enough of these facilities at the present time” and hoped “to see the program enlarged.”⁸³ Another woman acknowledged “how much it meant [for] other gay alcoholics to have meetings of their own. There are some of us who might not have made it if it were not for the gay meetings.” Counseling brought her sobriety and lesbian validation. “Now I have four years of sobriety and I’m living a fuller and happier life,” she reported.⁸⁴ Some women, however longed for lesbian-only spaces. One was “very fortunate” but believed that “a Women’s (Gay) only house would be substantial for other women.” There was “a need for communication [between] other alcoholic homosexual women,” and she admitted that, while she could “get along with the men,” she could not “relate to their problems.” Still, her experience was a success. She was now “functioning without alcohol and drugs, which I couldn’t do before.”⁸⁵ The GCSC did establish a female-only treatment facility while Van Ness continued to treat men and women. The program received commendations and support from elected officials. Mayor Tom Bradley and County Supervisor Ed Edelman were both fans, and Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson admitted that it was “a most valuable social service asset” which “enhanced the overall neighborhood.”⁸⁶ Long before AIDS, queers labored to provide affordable healthcare in L.A. As with housing, healthcare activism connected gay liberation with other social movements and strengthened the region’s mosaic. In similar ways, prisoner and parolee advocacy earned the GCSC respect.

⁸² Letter to Morris Kight, 25 February 1974. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁸³ Letter to Morris Kight, 27 February 1974. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁸⁴ Letter to Morris Kight, February 1974. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁸⁵ Letter to Morris Kight, 27 February 1974. GLCSC, box 10, folder 21.

⁸⁶ Peggy Stevenson to A. D., 11 December 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

“I Can’t Begin to Thank You”: Reaching Out to Prisoners and Parolees

One of the most progressive programs of the GCSC was the Prison, Probation, and Parole (PPP) Program, which provided housing, employment, and emotional services for incarcerated and newly released queers. This program fused the most important aspects of social service activism and came at a critical time. The arrival of the GCSC coincided with a dramatic escalation of mass incarceration in America. “Between 1970 and 2010,” Heather Ann Thompson argued, “more people were incarcerated in the United States than were imprisoned in any other country.” The reasons for the spike included a bipartisan “war on crime,” the corporatization of the prison industry, and a crackdown on social minorities, especially African Americans.⁸⁷ In California, the prison industry expanded rapidly, creating a network of profitable “golden gulags.”⁸⁸ Social justice activists did not sit idly by as individuals became ensnarled. Dan Berger found that mass incarceration shaped the trajectory of racial justice movements and forced the nation to confront injustice and the confinement of black bodies.⁸⁹ Queers also found themselves imprisoned. Targeted with anti-sodomy laws, gay men were particularly vulnerable to arrest and incarceration. Queers of color were more susceptible, and faced a double threat of sexual and racial profiling. While mass incarceration constrained social justice movements, Regina Kunzel argued that “political connections between lesbian and gay activists and prison inmates persisted” throughout the era.⁹⁰ In Los Angeles, GCSC organizers developed the PPP Program to fight back.

Activists were familiar with issues facing queer inmates. Many, including Platania and Kilhefner, encountered incarceration first hand. Aside from his entrapment and arrest, Platania confronted injustice while working at Nevada State Hospital, where he witnessed abuse and discrimination. While a student at

⁸⁷ Heather Ann Thompson, “Why Mass Incarceration Matters: Rethinking Crisis, Decline, and Transformation in Postwar American History,” *Journal of American History* (2010), 703. See also Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New Press, 2010).

⁸⁸ See Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2007).

⁸⁹ See Dan Berger, *Captive Nation: Black Prison Organizing in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

⁹⁰ Regina Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy: Prison and the Uneven History of Modern American Sexuality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 192.

Sacramento State University, he also witnessed a friend “busted for selling a lid of Marijuana.” Although he was a stellar student, he was “sentenced to five years to life in a maximum security prison.” Platania remembered the experience sourly, noting “it was really awful.” These examples illustrated that the criminal justice system was not always just and he worked for reform. Years after his involvement with the GCSC, he worked at San Quentin Penitentiary counseling inmates.⁹¹ Don Kilhefner also had encounters with incarceration. While with the LAGLF, the director of the Nelles School for Boys in Whittier informed him that he had “a group of gay boys” who “suffered a lot.” After a long conversation, he confessed, “I just don’t know what to do with them.” Kilhefner offered to visit the teenagers, “three quarters” of which “were youth of color.” Once there, he counseled them “about gay liberation and what it was trying to do.” The inmates revealed abuse: authority figures and fellow inmates “humiliated and shamed them” through physical and mental degradation. Some “would go around cell to cell to serve meals, and before they would serve the gay [inmates] they would masturbate into the food.” Authorities appeared to sanction the abuse. As they learned about gay liberation, however, the inmates became “more uppity, more politically aware, and more demanding.” This was good news for Kilhefner, but bad news for the director of Nelles, who terminated the counseling program. The ordeal provided Kilhefner “direct experience with the prison population” and informed his work in the PPP Program.⁹² These experiences, along with phone calls and letters from inmates, enabled organizers to address the unique needs of queers behind the wall.

Incarceration, much like poverty and homelessness, was a structural problem. PPP Program directors estimated that in California, “approximately 20% of those incarcerated are gay women and men,” and noted that no “public or private agency in Los Angeles County provided services specifically to meet the needs” of such individuals.⁹³ Interviewed by the *Los Angeles Times* about the program, Kilhefner and Morris Kight argued that “nine times out of ten, re-entry centers will automatically exclude people if they are gay because *they see gay people as a problem.*” This posed a burden on openly-gay inmates, for “enrollment in a re-

⁹¹ Platania OH.

⁹² Kilhefner OH.

⁹³ Gay Community Services Center Prison, Probation, and Parole Program general revenue sharing proposal, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 10.

entry program” was “often a stipulation for parole.”⁹⁴ Indeed, many parole boards required that applicants be accepted into some kind of supportive program, have adequate housing lined up, and employment prospects secured. Securing these things behind bars was nearly impossible. If one was open about their sexuality, they could encounter hostility. “Our clients report negative experiences in dealing with public and private agencies,” organizers reported. Queers were subject to “moralistic lectures based on sin or sickness myths, ridicule, direct verbal and physical abuse, insensitivity, and negative reinforcement.” This led “most prisoners [to] feel isolated, cut off and forgotten.” The feeling of isolation was “even more pronounced and cruel for the gay prisoner who is rejected and abandoned by family, relatives, and friends.”⁹⁵ Organizers referenced the story of “a 16 year old, black youth who was openly gay.” Eligible for release, “his family refused to deal with him” and “no suitable placement could be found for him anywhere in the County because of his ‘sexual identity problems.’” Aside from the GCSC, the only alternative was sending the young man to an asylum.⁹⁶

Queer prisoners were ideal candidates for social rehabilitation. Since “very few gay persons [were] incarcerated for crimes of violence,” activists reasoned that most were not “hardened criminals.” Kilhefner knew “a friend who was in prison [for] seven years on a simple sodomy charge.” While “he should have been out in one year, there was no program willing to take him, so he stayed in year after year, a forgotten person.” These individuals “would be excellent candidates for release by the courts to a community based rehabilitation and re-entry program” that was accepting of their sexuality. Framing incarceration as costly, they argued that the “lack of housing facilities for gay prisoners [in L.A. was] a major factor contributing to the continued incarceration, *at public expense*, of gay prisoners.” Queer prisoners struggled to find adequate and affordable housing as well as employment; they faced the debilitating stigma of having been

⁹⁴ “Center Aids Gay Parolees,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1973, F1.

⁹⁵ Gay Community Services Center Prison, Probation, and Parole Program general revenue sharing proposal, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 10.

⁹⁶ Don Kilhefner to Friends to the Center, 7 December 1976. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

branded a felon and gay. These structural impediments created “a critical need for positive, supportive re-entry housing in Los Angeles County.”⁹⁷ The PPP Program addressed this need.

Stability required a safe place to call home. Housing brought emotional security and also allowed individuals to make “better judgments.” In a liberation house, inmates would “learn they need not hide out, need not make love in furtive and dangerous ways,” organizers argued. A safe and loving environment would allow queers to “seek tenderness, caring, and sharing in open and honest ways. That’s the best way to avoid entrapment.”⁹⁸ Once housed, individuals were assisted with employment. This proved “most difficult, since many employers did not offer jobs to known felons or homosexuals.” Discrimination resulted in “a tremendous unemployment rate in the gay community” turning it “into a poverty community” where “crimes of survival” abounded.⁹⁹ By 1975, however, the GCSC established relationships with companies such as Campbell Construction Company, Bio-Feedback Technology, and queer-owned businesses in the hopes of locating jobs. The United States Mission (USM) and Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) also provided employment, and by 1977, jobs were secured with the County through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) program.¹⁰⁰ Outside of housing and employment assistance, queer parolees were offered counseling.

The PPP Program was framed as an arm of a larger social services movement. It reached “low income, handicapped and disadvantaged persons” who were often ignored.¹⁰¹ In 1976 the *Prisoners Yellow Pages*, a national resource guide, included the GCSC. Listed in the California section, the GCSC program was one of only two listings which accepted open queers (the other being Troy Perry’s MCC, which offered referrals to the GCSC). The editor of *Prisoners Yellow Pages* noted that it was his “hope that prisoners who turn to the Yellow Pages will find the assistance they need regardless of their race, creed, color, sex, sexual

⁹⁷ Gay Community Services Center Prison, Probation, and Parole Program general revenue sharing proposal, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 10; “Center Aids Gay Parolees,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1973, F1.

⁹⁸ “Center Aids Gay Parolees,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 October 1973, F1.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Letters of employment assistance to Gay Community Services Center, 1974-1975. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹⁰¹ Gay Community Services Center Prison, Probation, and Parole Program general revenue sharing proposal, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 10.

preference, or national origin.”¹⁰² Once word spread about the program, inmates from across the nation sought assistance. In March of 1976, 172 individuals contacted the GCSC. Twelve were accepted into Liberation Houses and 106 were provided employment referrals. Overall, 1,093 letters were received that year.¹⁰³ One man wrote that his “plans are set up to be paroled to the Los Angeles area soon,” but he required housing to finalize his release. Onto this letter, Morris Kight scribbled “OK-Housed-Job,” seemingly indicating that he was housed and assisted with employment.¹⁰⁴ In many instances, the promise of assistance helped secure parole. “The Gay Community Services Center has been requested to supply employment and housing for the above named person,” one letter to a parole board read. “We will provide the prisoner with housing in one of our Liberation Houses. Emphasis in the house is placed upon accepting responsibilities, working with house members, and participating in the programs offered at the Center. We will also provide employment, full-time, through our Job Placement Office.”¹⁰⁵ Securing these elements gave a parole application hope.

Such was the case with a black lesbian incarcerated at the California Institution for Women. She began her correspondence with the GCSC while still behind bars. At that time, her future “looked quite bleak.” Her parole had been delayed because she had been unable to secure employment, a necessary requirement. “One of the biggest problems any person has who leaves prison is obtaining a good job,” she wrote. Because she was queer, however, she labored “under a double problem” since she was “both a lesbian and an offender” (she might have added a third, being that she was black). She had almost given up hope, but then stumbled across the GCSC in the *Prisoner Yellow Pages*. Since she planned to live with friends upon her release, the most pressing matter was employment. GCSC organizers informed her that “there was a definite possibility of a job with Campbell Construction Company.” One week later, she learned that “the job offer was definite,” which enabled her to finalize her parole application. Employment secured, she was granted parole three months earlier than expected. Upon her release, she relied on the GCSC for

¹⁰² *Prisoners Yellow Pages*, Summer 1976. EDE, box 910, folder 15.

¹⁰³ Prisoner, Probation, and Parole Program progress report, march 1976. GLCSC, box 14, folder 15.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to Morris Kight, 19 February 1972. USM, box 1, folder 3.

¹⁰⁵ Gay Community Services Center to H. Kerr, 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

transportation and “some initial financial assistance” in acquiring food and clothing.¹⁰⁶ Back in Los Angeles and enjoying her freedom, she expressed her gratitude. “All the facilities of the [GCSC] were put at my disposal,” she wrote. “Both my self-esteem and confidence have increased because I am accepted for *what I am* and do not have to build tissues of lies.” Her experience demonstrated the need of the PPP Program. As a queer woman, it was important that she secure assistance *as a lesbian*. The “tissues of lies” that she lamented spoke to past experiences of hiding. Dual affirmation was “needed by so many people,” she wrote, “many of whom might be successful citizens rather than failures if given just a little help.” She hoped that the GCSC would expand the PPP Program in order to “reach every gay person who is now incarcerated.”¹⁰⁷ Her story demonstrated that some queer inmates could overcome the system.

GCSC staff sometimes became personally involved in cases. After a young gay man was arrested for breaking and entering, his friend wrote for help. He hoped that the GCSC would be able to sway the Ohio Adult Parole Authority in granting parole. “Only 22 and just a kid,” his friend had “no family and no friends except me.”¹⁰⁸ Taking up the case, a GCSC organizer wrote back and explained the various requirements that would need to be met, including housing and employment. The friend assured that he would “offer [him] permanent housing for as long as he wishes” as well as “employment in my place of business located in Glendale, California.”¹⁰⁹ Officials then sought a direct relationship with the inmate. “We can and will provide you with ongoing counseling services,” a GCSC representative wrote, “to help facilitate your successful reentry into the community. Of course, when you come to Los Angeles, you will have access to the entire range of services at G.C.S.C.-the free Men’s Clinic, supportive rap groups with peers, etc.”¹¹⁰ Organizers then wrote directly to the Ohio parole board. “[The inmate] is scheduled for release in December of 1977,” they wrote, “but since housing, employment and post-release counseling are presently available to him, we are hoping he will be released earlier. When he comes to Los Angeles he

¹⁰⁶ Letter to J. Gold, 5 July 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, 5 July 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹⁰⁸ Letter, April 1977. GLCSC, box 14, folder 16.

¹⁰⁹ Letter to the Ohio Parole Board, 1977. GLCSC, box 14, folder 16.

¹¹⁰ Letter, 15 April 1977. GLCSC, box 14, folder 16.

will have access to the full range of services offered by our [PPP Program].”¹¹¹ The young man was released early and arrived in L.A. by November. He sent along the briefest of notes to appreciation: “I can’t begin to thank you for your understanding.”¹¹² What became of him is unclear, but his case testified to the ways that the GCSC could make a difference.

Not all cases were so successful. Sometimes GCSC involvement could do more harm than good. This was the case with a San Luis Obispo inmate, who reached out for help in 1974. Organizers offered up a range of services to expedite his release, but during an appearance before the parole board “a representative told [him] that [the] G.C.S.C. was against the law, and would not be accepted as a place to parole men coming from prison.” He pleaded with the parole board, promising that “if granted parole, [he] would have the help of [the] G.C.S.C. to find a job, and a place to live.” Instead of compassion, the board “talked to me as if I were shit. I was made fun of because I am homosexual.” In letters supporting his application, the GCSC stressed that the organization would assist him with “common emotional problems [that people faced] because of their gayness.” This backfired and hurt his chances of parole because members of the board did not approve of homosexuality. “I know that I have been denied parole mainly because of my being gay,” the inmate confessed. He warned PPP Program staff that they should “make it known to other gay prisoners what they should expect when they go before the parole board.” In his case, housing and employment plans with a queer organization were evidence of his continued illegality. This decision left him “feeling quite alone.” Out of options, he vented: “I understand that [the] G.C.S.C. has a Prisoner Parole and Probation program, but is it working?”¹¹³ One of the weaknesses of the GCSC was that recognition was not guaranteed. In this case, there was little the GCSC could do. It hit a homophobic wall.

Within the PPP Program, activists continued the project of family-building as well. Queer prisoners suffered from both the loneliness of incarceration and familial neglect or abandonment. Regina Kunzel noted that many prisoners sought kinship from gay activists. Seeking “a sense of belonging,” they were

¹¹¹ Letter, 18 April 1977. GLCSC, box 14, folder 16.

¹¹² Handwritten note on Ibid.

¹¹³ Letter to Donald Kilhefner, 6 June 1974. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

attracted to alternative models of family that were possible within gay liberation.¹¹⁴ After receiving a note of encouragement in 1975, one inmate wrote in gratitude: “Thank you very much for your letter. It makes me feel very good to know that there are people who care and are willing to help persons like myself.” The support encouraged him to be hopeful about his parole, and look forward to “returning to Los Angeles.”¹¹⁵ A man incarcerated at a San Luis Obispo penitentiary sought “warm assistance in helping me locate someone who is able and willing to write me.” Including a picture, he described himself as “a 27 year old black journalist” who liked “the outdoors, reading, writing, good music, pleasing the one I am with, and having loads of SEX.” He had “no family or friends” who could “assist in my moments of need,” making him desperate for human contact. “I would like to correspond with someone whether Gay or not, single, married, or divorced,” he wrote, adding “I do not discriminate, I love all people, no matter what color they may be.” If possible, he hoped to establish a “lasting relationship.”¹¹⁶ Emotional isolation hit many hard. One inmate longed for “someone to correspond with” but was blunt about his deteriorating situation. “I am losing contact with the outside world,” he wrote. “I have been in prison five years now and will be in a lot longer I am afraid. I have no one on the outside to write.” After providing a physical description of himself, he implored the GCSC to “help a lonely convict. It really would be appreciated, believe me.”¹¹⁷ He was delighted to get a reply from a GCSC organizer, who asked him to “write and tell me a little about yourself. What are your likes and dislikes?” He added, “I hear you clearly when you say that you are losing contact with the outside world. That is a real fear when you are locked up for any length of time.” He encouraged the inmate to write back, so as the GCSC could develop “something positive for you.” He closed his letter offering “much gay love,” something likely not offered to this inmate in some time.¹¹⁸

These experiences revealed important emotional and economic needs. The GCSC addressed both through the PPP Program. If possible, inmates would be welcomed into a liberation house and given

¹¹⁴ Kunzel, *Criminal Intimacy*, 213.

¹¹⁵ Letter to Morris Kight, 19 February 1972. USM, box 1, folder 3.

¹¹⁶ Letter to the GCSC, 15 January 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

¹¹⁷ Letter to Gay Community Services Center, 28 July 1974. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

¹¹⁸ Letter, 23 August 1974. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

employment assistance. If parole seemed unlikely, however, activists still sought to spread “gay love” across the miles. In 1975 the GCSC initiated a volunteer pen pal program to reach more inmates. “You probably take your relative freedom for granted,” activists wrote to the community. “At the [GCSC] there are dozens of files about Gay prisoners who don’t take their freedom for granted. They don’t have any.” Activists asked others to “Put yourself in their place-locked in a cage, subjected to regimentation, harassed for being Gay, day in and day out, year after year, perhaps never hearing from old friends, family, lovers.” If this image was upsetting, individuals should “write as a friend to a friend, on a regular basis, to one, two, perhaps three Gay prisoners. Your letters can help a brother or sister keep up spirits. Share your love and pride.”¹¹⁹ These letters spread precious emotional support and extended gay liberation to the most vulnerable and excluded segments of society.

“Fostering Dignity” and Building Bridges

In 1973, the *Los Angeles Times* published an article on the GCSC written by columnist Art Seidenbaum. Expecting a short visit, Seidenbaum spent hours interviewing organizers and clients. “My visit to the Gay Community Services Center,” he concluded, “persuades me that dignity is being fostered there.” The GCSC was helping “the gay membership which has needs that have not been met heretofore in this city.” Of equal importance, the GCSC had earned “respect from the larger community because it has helped spread human understanding rather than antagonism.”¹²⁰ Rather than incite controversy and division, the GCSC built political bridges to other social minorities. In this way it advanced a long project of queer coalitional politics in L.A.

Within a few years of opening its doors, the organization received numerous letters of support from fellow social service agencies. The PPP Program was signaled out by a representative of the Sons of Watts Assistance and Rehabilitation Project. He commended the “untiring efforts” of the GCSC in “providing the most vital services to persons in need, such as counseling, job referrals, [parole] applications, and

¹¹⁹ Gay Community Services Center flier, 1975. GLCSC, box 14, folder 14.

¹²⁰ Art Seidenbaum to Gay Community Services Center, 18 July 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

emergency housing.” Noting that many black queer residents of Watts were in need of those services, he thanked the GCSC for spreading understanding and implored organizers to “hang in there!”¹²¹ The Southern California Prison Coalition enthusiastically supported the GCSC. “There are all too few organizations operating in our society today to help ex-convicts adjust to living again in the community,” a representative wrote. For queer parolees, “the transition is sometimes so severe that their return to prison is precipitated.” By addressing sexuality directly, the GCSC had instituted “constructive efforts to help our most disadvantaged citizens who need so much support... You can be assured that you have our support in any way that is possible.”¹²² Prominent liberals in L.A. lauded the PPP Program. “It is only through the participation of concerned citizen groups such as yours,” City Attorney Burt Pines wrote, “that arrestees and ex-offenders feel that they have a continued stake in society.” The GCSC offered a “chance” for those who “otherwise had none,” making it “vitaly important to the city.”¹²³ One constituent wrote to Los Angeles County Supervisor Ed Edelman to express his “full support” for the “housing of gay prisoners and parolees.” He believed that the program showcased the “best aspects of our humanity” and encouraged Edelman to “fully support and fund these efforts.”¹²⁴ Edelman concurred.

The multi-layered approach of the GCSC was impressive to other community agencies. A representative of the East-Los Chicano Education Training and Research Organization admired the “refreshing and innovative” approach of GCSC programs. They were a “step in the right direction.”¹²⁵ A black activist and employee at Martin Luther King Jr. General Hospital in Watts wrote that he was “very much encouraged to see the progress [the GCSC] has made in providing services to a previously neglected segments of our population, specifically gays and females.” Commenting on housing and drug abuse programs, he added that “homelessness and alcoholism” were “critical problems” in Watts and thanked the

¹²¹ Letter to Morris Kight, 17 July 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 57.

¹²² Letter to Morris Kight, 20 July 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 57.

¹²³ Burt Pines to the Gay Community Services Center, 18 July 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹²⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 29 October 1977. GLCSC, box 910, folder 1.

¹²⁵ East-Los Chicano Education Training and Research Organization to Gay Community Services Center, 22 February 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

GCSC for “outstanding achievement in this area.”¹²⁶ The Asian Women’s Center was impressed by attention to women’s issues and the “diversity of [GCSC] programs.”¹²⁷ These letters admired queer activism and also acknowledged that queers within their communities were clients. The GCSC was a rising tide that lifted all boats.

Other relationships were also strengthened via the GCSC. The Southern California Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (SCACLU) became a booster. “On behalf of our members,” a representative wrote, “thanks for the job you’ve done.” He expressed his “best wishes for your continued growth.”¹²⁸ Some businesses also linked themselves with the GCSC. A representative of Campbell Construction Company, which hired gay parolees, commended “the excellent employment program [the GCSC had]. As you are well aware,” he wrote, “I have hired a number of people through your program and, to date, these employees have evolved into hard working, loyal and honest individuals. No employer could ask for more.”¹²⁹ After a tour of the GCSC, a UCLA professor of sociology wrote that he was “impressed with the program.” A researcher in sexuality, he “knew it would be difficult to establish a place for poor gay people,” but believed that the GCSC had proven successful because “it is run by the members of the community it serves.”¹³⁰ Local control bred trust and respect.

Within a few years, the GCSC became the largest queer social service agency in the nation. Providing a wide-range of services, including housing, employment, healthcare, counseling, and parole support, it offered a “womb to tomb” solution to the problem of queer poverty. This achievement is well-known. The reasons for its success are not. How did activists fund their efforts? Where did resources come from? This was an equally remarkable story. Throughout the 1970s, queers made political breakthroughs with the establishment which assured public financing for grassroots activism. Remarkably, they brought gay liberation into the halls of power and the welfare state.

¹²⁶ Letter to the Gay Community Services Center, 27 February 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹²⁷ Asian Women’s Center to Gay Community Services Center, 25 February 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹²⁸ Letter to Morris Kight, 21 July 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 57.

¹²⁹ Letter, 5 July 1974. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

¹³⁰ Letter to Gay Community Services Center, 2 March 1973. GLCSC, box 7, folder 59.

Chapter Four: A “Ray of Sunshine”: Gay Liberation, Establishment Politics, and the Welfare State

“Several [GCSC] programs are now closely connected with County government. We are deeply appreciative for the ray of sunshine which you have become for our community and the entire Third District.”

-Don Kilhefner to County Supervisor Ed Edelman, 1976

“This change was not made in response to pressure. We are simply trying to expand low-income housing for *all* families.”

-HUD spokesman Tom Bacon, 1977

In 1970 Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front (LAGLF) activist Don Kilhefner made a trip to the County Hall of Administration. Concerned with rising rates of sexually transmitted diseases, he asked to speak to a county supervisor. “Looking like Alan Ginsburg” and “naïve as hell,” he introduced himself as a “gay man with the Gay Liberation Front.” The clerk asked him to wait in the lobby, at which time she called security. Confronted by two deputies, he was escorted out and told not to come back. “You don’t belong here,” they explained. Just a few years later, however, he returned under very different circumstances. Now an employee of the Gay Community Services Center (GCSC), Kilhefner came by invitation of County Supervisor Ed Edelman. A GCSC grant had recently been rejected by the Health Department and Edelman brought representatives together in his conference room to find out why. Health Department officials were put on the spot and grilled. Soon enough, Edelman ended debate. “Just give them the money,” he instructed. “At that point,” Kilhefner remembered, “it was all over; they caved; they gave us the money.”¹ These two experiences could not have been more different and testified to the remarkable degree by which queers gained ground within the political establishment in the 1970s.

¹ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

Queer activism has often been celebrated as a grassroots success story.² While this narrative is important, it minimizes the role of the state within the story. In L.A., activists were successful because they *transcended* the grassroots and utilized tools of the establishment. This chapter reveals how political and economic relationships with the liberal establishment, a strategy begun in the 1960s, yielded considerable rewards in the 1970s. Like others, queers molded themselves in liberal ways but retained leftist worldviews. Doug Rossinow has characterized such movements as “left-liberal.”³ Historians who view the 1970s as a prologue to the 1980s miss the dynamic success of left-liberal movements, including gay liberation.⁴ For much of the decade, it was difficult to see the decline of liberalism. Instead, as Robert Bauman found, many progressives were expanding the War on Poverty and carrying it forward.⁵ Queers were important players in this story. While the 1970s have been characterized as an “era of limits,” activists successfully located social welfare programs to fund their activism.⁶ At county and city levels, they harnessed the potential of the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. As they won funds, they also carved space within liberalism. Through the Stonewall Democratic Club (SDC) they encouraged Democrats to incorporate queers in political coalitions. Far from

² Examples include Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Tom De Simone (et. al.), *Images of America: Lavender Los Angeles* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2011); and Jeanne Cordova, *When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love and Revolution* (Midway, FL: Spinsters Ink, 2011).

³ See Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

⁴ This literature is vast. See especially and Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001); Philip Jenkins, *Decade of Nightmares: The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Bruce Schulman & Julian Zelizer (eds.) *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008); Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: Norton, 2010); and J. Brooks Flippin, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011). Two important exceptions are Dan Berger (ed.), *The Hidden 1970s: Histories of Radicalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010) and Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013).

⁵ See Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008).

⁶ Speaking at a campaign event in 1976, California gubernatorial candidate Jerry Brown famously asserted that Americans were “living in an era of limits and better get used to it.” Historians have since used the descriptor to characterize the 1970s. Examples include W. Carl Bevin, *Jimmy Carter’s Economy: Policy in and Age of Limits* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002) and Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), Epilogue.

“splintering” liberalism, gay liberation strengthened the Democratic Party.⁷ Nor were political gains confined to the local level. While this chapter begins in L.A., it ends with breakthroughs at the national level. Within the Presidential Administration of Jimmy Carter, in fact, the definition of family changed and housing subsidies were opened to queers.

County Breakthrough: Ed Edelman and the New Democrats

The relationship between activists and Los Angeles County Supervisor Ed Edelman was most influential. The alliance developed due to shared geography and ideology. Since many queers lived in the unincorporated area of West Hollywood, the County was their immediate governing body. West Hollywood had greater access to funds via grants that were reserved for unincorporated areas. The fact that L.A. County was one of the most populous in the nation meant that these opportunities were considerable. Moreover, decisions regarding the allocation of funds were left to the discretion of county supervisors. Unlike cities, there were fewer bureaucratic entanglements, which made L.A. County incredibly powerful.⁸ With the election of Edelman in 1974, queers gained an ally in control of discretionary spending. They also gained a political bedfellow who brought queers to the political table.

Close aides considered Edelman “a new type of Democrat” from a “new political generation.”⁹ He bridged the Great Society with the New Left. Prior to announcing his 1974 supervisory bid, he served as L.A. City Councilman. Elected in 1965, he touted his involvement in the John F. Kennedy administration as well as his support of minority civil rights movements of all stripes.¹⁰ He espoused a decidedly leftist

⁷ On the breakup of liberalism via identity politics, see Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984); Steven Gillon, *The Democrats’ Dilemma: Walter Mondale and the Liberal Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); Alan Brinkley, *The End of Reform: New Deal Liberalism in Recession and War* (New York: Vintage, 1996); Todd Gitlin, *The Twilight of Common Dreams: Why America is Wracked by Culture Wars* (New York: Holt, 1996); David Plotke, *Building a Democratic Order: Reshaping American Liberalism in the 1930s and 1940s* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Bruce Miroff, *The Liberals’ Moment: The McGovern Insurgency and the Identity Crisis of the Democratic Party* (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2006).

⁸ See Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: The Historical Society of Southern California 2013).

⁹ Jim Gilson oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 20 December 2013 (Hereafter Gilson OH).

¹⁰ Ed Edelman campaign brochure, 1974. EES, folder 2.

populism, promised “a philosophy of inclusion,” and championed “underdogs, outsiders, [and] neighborhoods [which] were not politically represented.” More than once he railed against “downtown interests and developers,” who exacerbated urban inequities.¹¹ One aide remembered that Edelman “believed people could be lifted up” and that “government was going to be part of the solution.” First elected in his early thirties, he “was one of those people who was going somewhere...He was part of the next generation that was going to make a difference *within* the system.”¹² His cohort included Jerry Brown, Alan Cranston, and Tom Bradley. Jonathan Bell argued that modern liberalism was “forged in the crucible” of California’s “diverse mosaic,” and Edelman was one of its products.¹³ As a supervisorial candidate Edelman promised new affordable housing and labor protection, spoke out against the Vietnam War, and supported personal privacy rights. He assured that “equal rights in housing, education, and employment” extended “to all persons, regardless of age, sex, religion, race, or sexual orientation.” Alongside a picture of Robert F. Kennedy, one ad chided “business as usual” on the County Board of Supervisors. For too long, “land owners, developers, oil companies,” and “big business” controlled precious resources. Edelman promised Third District voters he would “open up government to the people.”¹⁴ Queers were listening.

Indeed, lesbians and gays were already flexing political muscle. In 1969, City Councilman Paul Lampert sponsored “an anti-loitering ordinance aimed primarily at chasing male homosexuals from the streets of Hollywood.” Activists mobilized against him and contributed to his defeat, which emboldened them. Unlike some Democrats, Edelman seemed to genuinely support queers. Running for a supervisorial district encompassing West Hollywood made attentiveness to queers necessary, and rumors have also persisted that Edelman had a queer brother or daughter.¹⁵ These no doubt contributed to his support, but did not define it. An advocate of personal privacy, he “was incredibly supportive of the personal and political

¹¹ Gilson OH.

¹² Richard Llewellyn oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 25 April 2014 (Hereafter Llewellyn OH).

¹³ Bell, *California Crucible*, 264.

¹⁴ Ed Edelman campaign brochure, 1974. EES, folder 2.

¹⁵ Faderman and Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 165, 216.

empowerment of gays.”¹⁶ He viewed queers as a marginalized minority in need of protection. On the City Council, he supported California Assemblyman Willie Brown’s Consenting Adult Sex Bill, which repealed sodomy laws in the state.¹⁷ Moreover, he supported the economic activism of organizations like the GCSC. Affordable housing, employment opportunities, universal healthcare, and criminal justice reform were fundamental to his political worldview. When he began his campaign, it made sense to court queer voters.

His impressive win among lesbian and gay voters (he received 80% of the vote in West Hollywood) led *The Advocate* to muse over the possibilities of his election. Edelman had been “the only major candidate in California who made a public bid for the gay vote,” the paper reported. Shortly before the election he even introduced “an unprecedented gay rights plank in his general campaign brochure” which called for “an end to discrimination in housing and employment on the basis of sexual preference.” Most impressively, Edelman fought back against queer-baiting. When his opponent sought to “create a voter backlash by calling attention to [Edelman’s] gay support,” Edelman called it an “unfortunate” case of “gay-baiting.” On election night, he admitted that the “election indicates the strength of the gay community and the significance of having people in public office who are going to be sensitive to its needs and to the discrimination it has suffered for too long.” An ally on the County Board of Supervisors meant much more than friends on the City Council. “The County’s five supervisors wield sultanic [sic] power,” *The Advocate* noted. Supervisors decided “hundreds of appointments” and controlled “appropriations totaling \$2.6 billion. How such funds are spent sets policy.” Through, Edelman activists could change the “concrete mentality of widening streets and putting up buildings” into one of concern for human needs.” There were “Gays of vision with the skill to combat drug abuse...to open halfway houses for the homeless, and to develop employment programs for the jobless.”¹⁸ The County offered tremendous power.

In 1975, Edelman declared a countywide gay pride week, predating L.A. His most important decision, however, was to hire a gay liaison. From Edelman’s perspective, a liaison would help “open County

¹⁶ Gilson OH.

¹⁷ Los Angeles City Council resolution, 1975. EES, folder 1.

¹⁸ “L.A. Gays Win the EDE,” *The Advocate*, 4 December 1974. EES, folder 2.

Government to people of all lifestyles” and “raise the level of consciousness in County Government to the needs of gay people.”¹⁹ The selection moved queer activism into the halls of political power. While Edelman received letters of interest from many (including Don Slater of the conservative Homosexual Information Center (HIC) he settled on GCSC insider David Glascock.²⁰ His politics mixed well with Edelman’s. A veteran of the LAGLF and the GCSC, he also worked on behalf of the Community Relations Conference of Southern California, a well-established organization that promoted “better human relations through intergroup cooperation.” Founded in 1947, it nurtured many young liberals, including Kenneth Hahn, Tom Bradley, and Maxine Waters.²¹ Glascock was a loyal Democrat, but his selection was controversial. The *Los Angeles Times* questioned his moral character and revealed “offenses involving minors in Wisconsin and New Jersey.”²² One article speculated as to why his ex-wife “had custody of their 5-year-old daughter.” Glascock defended himself against “certain individuals [who] cannot deal with homosexuals on an even level” and promised “never [to] ask a constituent what he does in bed.”²³ Edelman stood by his choice. “Those incidents were 12 and 14 years ago,” he told reporters. “I knew about both... We hired [Glascock] because, if we’re going to solve our problems in the gay community, we want someone who understands those problems.”²⁴ At another event, Edelman revealed why Glascock was a good choice: through him, “the County [would] provide for [gay] needs through the Gay Community Service [*sic*] Center.”²⁵

Paid a monthly salary of just over one thousand dollars, Glascock provided weekly briefings, monitored funding of GCSC programs, made appearances on Edelman’s behalf, and fielded constituent requests and complaints.²⁶ In these areas he boosted the GCSC and defended it from external threats. In 1978, for example, Edelman received a cantankerous note from a Homosexual Information Center

¹⁹ Ed Edelman to David Glascock, 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 7.

²⁰ Don Slater was notably divorced from the Gay Liberation movement. An example of his conservatism was displayed in Slater, “A Gay Opposes Rights Just for Gays,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 April 1977, D7.

²¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, January 1975. EDE, box 910, folder 1.

²² “Edelman Says He Knew of Gay Aide’s Past Convictions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 January 1975, B3.

²³ “Edelman Hires Assistant to Work in Gay Community,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1975, 29.

²⁴ “Edelman Says He Knew of Gay Aide’s Past Convictions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 January 1975, B3.

²⁵ “Edelman Hires Assistant to Work in Gay Community,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 January 1975, 29.

²⁶ David Glascock to Bill C., 2 December 1977. EDE, box 909, folder 2.

representative. This group emerged from a conflict among activists at ONE in the late 1960s, and stood opposed to gay liberation.²⁷ The man warned that “the Gay Community Services Center [was] not the exclusive spokesman for the homosexual community. In fact, the center may not even be the representative of a majority.” He suggested Edelman “look into the Homosexual Information Center to determine where the power really is in this community.”²⁸ Instead, he turned to Glascock for a political appraisal. “The Homosexual Information Center,” the aide reported, “consists of two men who are both extremely conservative and guilt ridden because of their homosexuality. They have attacked every part of the organized Gay Movement from Troy Perry on down.” Pointing out that the writer had endorsed a conservative over Edelman in 1974, he reasoned that these folks were “very troubled persons.”²⁹ The conservative charges were indeed correct: in 1980 members marched in a gay parade under a banner reading “Homosexuals for Ronald Reagan.”³⁰ Glascock helped isolate these groups. Shortly after Harvey Milk’s election to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977, Edelman queried his liaison about his politics. “Harvey Milk,” Glascock reported, was “the first upfront gay man to be elected to any office in California’s history.”³¹ He was also a good Democrat (Glascock ignored or overlooked Milk’s conservative past, in which he had supported Barry Goldwater).³² He suggested Edelman send a welcoming note, which the Supervisor did.³³ When he was invited to speak before the Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), Glascock explained that “the membership is made up of the wealthier, more conservative members of the gay community” but was “one of the most politically powerful groups because of the amount of money they are able to pour into campaigns.”³⁴ These briefings allowed Edelman to tailor his

²⁷ For more on the founding of the Homosexual Information Center, see C. Todd White, *Pre-Gay L.A.: A Social History of the Movement for Homosexual Rights* (Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2009), 190-191.

²⁸ Letter to Ed Edelman, 31 March 1978. EDE, box 909, folder 1.

²⁹ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 25 May 1978. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

³⁰ C. Todd White, *Pre-Gay L.A.*, 194.

³¹ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 9 November 1977. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

³² Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1982), 27.

³³ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 9 November 1977. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

³⁴ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 9 March 1978. EDE, box 909, folder 1.

remarks to different political tastes. In addition to briefings, Glascock fielded constituent requests and brought queer concerns to county government.

Queers found community in a multitude of ways in postwar America. In coffee shops, bars, social clubs, sporting leagues, and other venues, queers found their movements.³⁵ In L.A., many also discovered gay liberation through Edelman's office as Glascock guided individuals to the services and agenda of the GCSC. When one man moved to the area in 1975, he paid a visit to Edelman's office seeking information on the GCSC and the Homosexual Information Center. Staff directed him to Don Kilhefner, and provided no information for the HIC.³⁶ When a lesbian wrote seeking "a place for gays," Edelman's office sent her a map with the GCSC address.³⁷ These referrals steered people towards the organization. Letters also bore witness to rampant and multifaceted sexual discrimination. A former hospital controller had returned to California after "a bad case of depression" and hospitalization in Iowa only to find harassment. On his way to visit a friend in Riverside County, he explained, he was stopped by police officers who had been following him since he left a gay bar. "They asked me about my marital status. When I told them I had never been married, one had the audacity to ask if I was Gay. I told them I was and that I wasn't ashamed of it. After that, they arrested me and hauled me to jail." In "what was obviously a case of Gay Discrimination," he sought advice from Edelman. "I just don't know where to turn. What does a person do when he is so unsure of his rights, his attorney, the judge, etc.?"³⁸ In his reply (drafted by Glascock), Edelman informed him that "the Los Angeles Gay Community Services Center provides a legal services referral program" and gave him necessary contact information.³⁹

His office also kept notes on police brutality. In San Francisco and New York, queers mobilized at the grassroots to combat police violence throughout the 1960s and 1970s.⁴⁰ Activists did so in L.A. as well,

³⁵ See Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

³⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 2 May 1975. EDE, box 821.

³⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 28 June 1977. EDE, box 822.

³⁸ Letter to Ed Edelman, 11 January 1984. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

³⁹ Letter, 19 January 1984. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁴⁰ See Christina B. Handhart, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

but also advocated within the establishment. Edelman was made aware that the “LAPD harassed and arrested 40 gay persons” during a weekend raid in Hollywood.⁴¹ When he was stopped for the “crime” of “being black and gay,” one man headed straight to Edelman’s office to report it.⁴² Another detailed how his “roommate was arrested in the West Hollywood Park’s men’s room while on his way home from a job interview.” Edelman advised him to notify the “ACLU-Gay Rights Chapter” and report the incident.⁴³ An elderly man believed that “FBI agents followed him to restaurants in downtown” and instructed “waiters not to let him eat.” Queer and a former communist, he was sure he was on an “enemies list.” Edelman’s office forwarded the complaint to local law enforcement and requested that he be taken off any list.⁴⁴ In a lengthy call, one man told of “a vicious attack on a friend” who was beaten and “called a ‘faggot’” by police. He warned that, if things didn’t change “gays who live in this area will form vigilante groups to do their own surveillance.”⁴⁵ “It is not criminal to be Gay,” another constituent wrote, “and as a citizen and taxpayer I resent ‘gestapo’ exercises of intimidation and resentment.”⁴⁶ His letter received a supportive and apologetic note from Edelman, who promised to fight on his behalf. Dozens of others found themselves in similar situations, as queers battled against the tactics of Police Chief Edward M. Davis. While it took years to achieve meaningful reform, each letter increased the arsenal by which progressives could fight.

By the close of the 1970s, Edelman’s office received scores of letters and calls from queer constituents. Whether it was to report an eviction, an act of violence, or to solicit information about how to contact queer organizations, his office helped many find gay liberation in Los Angeles. As queer boosters, Edelman and Glascock helped to open the county to lesbians and gays. The partnership benefited both men and represented a genuine alliance. Two years after he was hired, Glascock was offered a job with the Department of Social Services. He “decided not to accept the job offer,” which “was a difficult decision because of the money and security involved.” But, he explained, “I have a strong commitment to my gay

⁴¹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 12 April 1976. EDE, box 821.

⁴² Letter to Ed Edelman, 15 December 1977. EDE, box 823.

⁴³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 22 August 1979. EDE, box 823.

⁴⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 4 August 1975. EDE, box 821.

⁴⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 30 May 1981. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁴⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 8.12.81. EDE, box 250, folder 1.

brothers and sisters and an even stronger loyalty to Ed Edelman.” He could be more effective within Edelman’s office than outside of it.⁴⁷ When he did leave in 1980 (for a job at the GCSC), Edelman thanked him for his “yeoman work” which “insured social betterment” in L.A.⁴⁸ “I want you to know,” Glascock replied, “that my years on your staff was truly the most rewarding period of my life. I learned more and accomplished more during that time than ever before.” He held a deep respect for Edelman’s “integrity” and “concern for people,” a “true political rarity. When it is time for you to campaign, I want to help.”⁴⁹ As Edelman’s liaison Glascock was an effective lobbyist for the GCSC, a fact not lost on activists. In one note to Glascock, Kilhefner wrote, “As always, ‘Praise the Lord’ that you are where you are and doing what you do. We love you.”⁵⁰ That love was well-deserved.

Financing Gay Liberation through CETA and CDBG Programs

Ed Edelman was elected to the County Board of Supervisors in a very fortuitous year. The County was already powerful, but two new federal programs made it more so. The presidential administrations of Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford created the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) and the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program in order to trim the War on Poverty, but ended up expanding it. These programs were boons to social activists. By the end of the 1970s, hundreds of thousands of dollars were flowing annually to the GCSC from CETA and CDBG grants. Public financing literally *paid activists to be activists* and allowed gay liberation to thrive at the grassroots.

The CETA program was a game-changer. Signed into law by Richard Nixon in 1973, it offered employment grants to community service organizations. Although largely ignored or diminished by scholars, it provided thousands of employment opportunities to low-income men and women. Part of a larger stimulus package, CETA funds were congressionally allocated to job training programs in the public sector. The program was an effort to “consolidate the many manpower programs that had been started

⁴⁷ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 28 September 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 4.

⁴⁸ Ed Edelman to David Glascock, 14 February 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁴⁹ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 11 March 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁵⁰ Don Kilhefner to David Glascock, 12 July 1976. GLCSC, box 15, folder 91.

during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations,” but resulted in a broadening of public opportunities beyond what Nixon intended.⁵¹ Indeed, CETA was the “most significant federal jobs program in the 1970s” and was expanded greatly in the presidential administrations of Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter.⁵² Eligibility was determined broadly and relied on the discretion of local county or city officials, giving county supervisors discretionary power. “Once we got wind of where it seemed like [CETA] was going,” Kilhefner recalled, “we said, ‘Let’s start spreading the word that the County is funding organizations that are helping poor people.’ And we just spread the word.”⁵³ Other organizations were mobilizing low-income people in Hollywood, including the Greater Los Angeles Community Action Agency (GLACAA). Metropolitan in scale, GLACAA emerged from the ashes of the Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency, which empowered racial minorities. Comprised of a workforce that was eighty percent nonwhite, the agency divided L.A. into ten target zones and funded social service programs for minorities, including African, Mexican, Jewish, and poor Angelenos.⁵⁴ In 1974 activists requested that “all [GLACAA] meetings be open to the public” so they could present a queer face to poverty.⁵⁵ While they lobbied GLACAA officials, Edelman and Glascock helped open doors. In May of 1975 a GLACAA organizer came to Edelman for help “coordinating unemployed persons in West Hollywood.” He wished to recruit “people who are looking to hire job trainees” and “wanted to know if [the Edelman office] knew of any employees who would participate” or were “looking for work.”⁵⁶ Glascock recommended the GCSC. In 1976, the GCSC submitted a \$400,000 CETA proposal, the bulk of which funded “housing for poverty persons” and the GCSC “Employment Project.”⁵⁷ Endorsed by Edelman, CETA funds were awarded that spring.

⁵¹ Edward D. Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 123; see also Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factories for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 179.

⁵² Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*, 124-125.

⁵³ Kilhefner OH.

⁵⁴ Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty*, 66-67.

⁵⁵ Letter, 9 December 1974. GLCSC, box 6, folder 2.

⁵⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 9 May 1975. EDE, box 823.

⁵⁷ Letter to Los Angeles City Council, 29 August 1977. SDC, box 1, folder 25.

Glascook was particularly thrilled. Attending the award ceremony, he reported that the victory was “an important issue for gays” since “CETA funds will allow the [GCSC] to hire 75 persons for training and will help their programs.”⁵⁸ Indeed, the allocation of funds provided the first salaried positions at the GCSC. There were good political reasons to celebrate as well, for activists had overcome homophobic opposition. One City Councilman had crowed that “providing funds to an organization to further the aims of homosexuals should not be condoned or supported. [Homosexuality] perverts the use of this nation and can only add to the further destruction of American family life.” The idea of utilizing federal funds to nurture alternative lifestyles was enough to garner “four hours of heated debate” during which some tried to “divert [funds] to other programs.” In the end, the effort failed. The portion awarded to the GCSC was, after all, rather small in comparison to other allotments. The Los Angeles Unified School District received \$4.9 million; the Watts Labor Action Committee \$1 million; and the Chicana Service Action \$949,000.⁵⁹ Within the mosaic, queers were not funded equally, but it was significant that they now enjoyed a piece of the pie. It is difficult to overestimate CETA grants. For activists, they provided the “highest return to the community” and allowed the GCSC to embark on an “exciting period of growth and high quality social services.”⁶⁰ To Kilhefner, CETA symbolized queer power. “They thought they could divide up the pie anyway they wanted to,” he explained, “but were forced to allocate some of this money to us.”⁶¹ CETA funded a number of political positions, including Mayor Tom Bradley’s gay liaison. Until the termination of the program in the 1980s, it allowed activists to commit themselves to full-time activism.

CDBG programs were also helpful. Signed into law by President Ford in 1974, the Housing and Community Development Act contained substantial urban policy reforms, including Section 8 housing and the sometimes overlooked CDBG program. The concept was bipartisan: liberals applauded additional urban investment and conservatives celebrated that local communities would control funds, not the Federal Government. Developers were pleased with the initiative as well, since private investors could apply for

⁵⁸ Letter, 30 August 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 4.

⁵⁹ “Council Oks Federal Jobs Funding for Gay Center,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 August 1976, C1.

⁶⁰ Letter to Los Angeles City Council, 29 August 1977. SDC, box 1, folder 25.

⁶¹ Kilhefner OH.

funds alongside social service agencies. Like CETA, the program was designed with great flexibility. Funds could be allocated for public infrastructure, housing, administrative planning, public services, economic development, and property acquisitions. Those categories were deliberately vague to allow local authorities maximum discretion. Funds were awarded by county, based on need and population. Again, in L.A. county supervisors controlled most of the money. Beginning in 1975, organizers submitted proposals to Edelman on a regular basis. “Whenever we got requests for proposals we applied,” Kilhefner remembered. “Nobody else [in the country] was doing that, but *our* government was *supporting* gays.” Grant-writing could be unpredictable and tedious. Many “didn’t know anything about writing proposals.”⁶² In fact, Kilhefner had experience writing grants in graduate school and Jon Platania’s background in HUD proved useful. Although he had since left L.A., he had left behind a sophisticated explanation of the GCSC in the organization’s founding document. Stressing poverty knowledge and the language of liberal social uplift, this became the backbone for many grants which others wrote.

Activists secured funds for a range of services. One 1975 grant won \$71,000 for “services to low income, handicapped, and disadvantaged persons.” Arguing that “no other public or private agency in Los Angeles County [was] providing,” such services, the GCSC positioned itself as a metropolitan remedy. “Almost on a daily basis,” activists explained, “the Center is contacted by human service workers searching for housing for gay clients.” This was a burden for the county, as it greatly contributed to the homeless population. Moreover, “by offsetting the high incidence of hospitalization, imprisonment, and suicide among the members of the gay community in Los Angeles County,” the GCSC saved “the general public large sums of public funds.” Activists argued that queer investments were in the interests of taxpayers. GCSC service programs had “broad application” and did not “just serve gay people.” They were models that could “easily be adapted for numerous other problem areas” and made “a direct impact on the general welfare of the area.”⁶³ This framed queer activism within a larger context of metropolitan renewal.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Gay Community Services Center general revenue sharing grant, 14 March 1975. GLCSC, box 11, folder 34.

Tying GCSC programs to CDBG funds carried risks. In the summer of 1976 a county budget error placed GCSC programs in jeopardy. Activists reached out to Glascock for help. Since both the Interim Housing and the Prisoner, Probation, and Parole (PPP) programs were reliant on county funds, organizers needed to “process [the] renewal right away” and “put people in the machinery on notice.”⁶⁴ Morris Kight wrote directly to county agencies. “Two of the Center’s vital programs [Housing and PPP] have been funded through General Revenue Sharing Funding,” he explained. The announcement of funding cutbacks caused “great concern for both of these programs” which provided “housing for those who would otherwise be homeless.” Kight admitted reliance: “One of the crucial lessons we learned is that we cannot operate a housing program without external funding. Thus our resort to [the] County.”⁶⁵ In an internal memo, Kilhefner warned that “until we have a definite agreement with the County” liberation houses would not be “accepting residents.”⁶⁶ If additional funds were not secured, programs would be “badly crippled.”⁶⁷ Here is where it helped to have friends in high places. In addition to submitting letters of recommendation, Edelman could bestow discretionary funds himself. On this occasion, he awarded \$40,000.⁶⁸ While funding could be stressful, activists could usually rely on such intervention. In one letter to Edelman, activists admitted that “the continuing support which we have received from you has played a critical role in our development. Several important programs are now closely connected with that of County government. We are deeply appreciative for the ray of sunshine which you have become for our community and the entire Third District.”⁶⁹ In other ways Edelman’s office helped fund queer activism.

Friendly staff helped to perfect grants. In 1976 the GCSC submitted a \$25,000 grant for a “Lesbian Resource Program.” The purpose of the program was to “provide direct internal and external linkages to social services for lesbian women.” Individuals would be “integrated into the community at large” and

⁶⁴ Letter to David Glascock, 12 July 1976. GLCSC, box 15, folder 91.

⁶⁵ Letter, 29 September 1976. GLCSC, box 11, folder 35.

⁶⁶ Don Kilhefner to Gay Community Services Center program directors and staff, 11 October 1976. GLCSC, box 11, folder 33.

⁶⁷ Don Kilhefner to Friends of the Center, 7 December 1976. GLCSC, box 14, folder 8.

⁶⁸ Aide to Ed Edelman, 7 June 1977. GLCSC, box 248, folder 1.

⁶⁹ Don Kilhefner to Ed Edelman, 10 August 1976. GLCSC, box 15, folder 91.

given “a sense of self-esteem and a constructive self-image.” The GCSC estimated that “approximately 250 low-income women per month, ages 16-60, will receive program services,” including “employment, housing, welfare rights, and legal services.”⁷⁰ While it was a decent application, Glascock worried that it might be denied, and reached out to county employees for help. One man enclosed a model winning proposal, and recommended that the GCSC focus on employment and housing programs in its application. He advised deleting sections detailing “lesbian art, literature, and music” and “a Resource Center relating to the Herstory, Sexuality, life-style, and concerns of lesbian women.”⁷¹ The GCSC took the advice, which “assisted immeasurably in the approval procedure.”⁷² Sure enough, the revised application was a winner. In these cases, Edelman’s office held impromptu grant writing workshops. Once they received funds, organizers could utilize money as they saw fit (a lesbian resource center was established), but organizers needed to learn the language of bureaucracy. Edelman’s office helped them play things safe.

Personal vouchers and letters of endorsements also helped. Edelman was often called upon to assist with other politicians. Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson and Mayor Tom Bradley were GCSC supporters, but far more cautious. Van Ness House, a GCSC program, was located in Stevenson’s district and activists needed her assistance in obtaining a zoning permit to allow fourteen residents in the house. Her office reached out to queer attorney Sheldon Andelson with reservations. She worried that “some might object” and encouraged residents to “solicit support from neighbors” through “an open house.”⁷³ Activists were displeased by this response and went to Edelman, who endorsed the zoning request and submitted a letter to Stevenson. “It is my hope,” he wrote, “that the City will grant this variance so that the Van Ness Recovery House can continue with its important work.”⁷⁴ Attached to the letter, activists asked “Would it *now* be appropriate for Councilwoman Stevenson to forward a letter of support?”⁷⁵ This time she did.⁷⁶ Did

⁷⁰ Gay Community Services Center proposal to Los Angeles County Department of Community Development, July 1976. EDE, box 249, folder 2.

⁷¹ Roy D. Hoover to Ed Edelman and Don Kilhefner, 7 September 1976. EDE, box 249, folder 2.

⁷² Cheryl Swannack to Roy D. Hoover, 9 September 1976. EDE, box 249, folder 2.

⁷³ L. Reh to Sheldon Andelson, 20 October 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

⁷⁴ Ed Edelman to Gay Community Services Center, 19 November 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

⁷⁵ Don Kilhefner to Peggy Stevenson, 24 November 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

⁷⁶ Peggy Stevenson to Arthur Dvorin, 11 December 1975. GLCSC, box 10, folder 24.

Edelman's pushing help Stevenson along? It is impossible to say for certain, but it likely helped. When the Blue Ribbon Revitalize Hollywood campaign was announced, queers applied. "Mindful of our civic responsibility to the total community," they promised to "do our part in making this City a better place to live for all of its citizens." The Blue Ribbon campaign promised to "deal with the problems of poverty, crime, employment, housing, and the general deterioration of the Hollywood area," of which the GCSC was an expert. The proposal requested \$300,000 for improvements on the GCSC's deteriorating headquarters and liberation houses. This would improve "blight" and contribute to the "beautification of the neighborhood."⁷⁷ While the proposal was "classified as acceptable," it was "assigned a low priority."⁷⁸ When appeals to Mayor Bradley went unanswered, Glascock asked Edelman to "call [Mayor] Bradley and indicate how important it is to respond to the needs of gay citizens. He needs a gentle push."⁷⁹ If Edelman made such a push, it is unrecorded. However, the application soon received approval. An aide recalled that Edelman was often responsible for "bringing Mayor Tom Bradley to a place of support," since Bradley was "not as identified with the gay community."⁸⁰ As a respected political leader, Edelman could encourage others.

In relatively short order, the GCSC became a publically-funded social services agency in Los Angeles County. Funds were secured at city and Federal levels, but the county remained the most consistent benefactor.⁸¹ By 1976 Glascock calculated that over \$600,000 had found its way to the GCSC, with more grants outstanding.⁸² During one funding cycle, Edelman dipped into his discretionary budget three times: once to secure \$75,000 for the GCSC Venereal Disease Treatment and Education Program, again to provide \$10,000 for the PPP Program, and a third to award \$25,000 for emergency housing programs.⁸³ Activists learned the craft of grant-writing and enjoyed its rewards. Kilhefner estimated that the GCSC took in "four

⁷⁷ Don Kilhefner to Tom Bradley, 30 July 1976. GLCSC, box 6, folder 6.

⁷⁸ Don Kilhefner to Arthur Snyder, 19 October 1976. GLCSC, box 6, folder 6.

⁷⁹ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 26 September 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 3.

⁸⁰ Llewellyn OH.

⁸¹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 203.

⁸² Letter to Ed Edelman, 15 June 1976. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

⁸³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 28 June 1977, EDE, box 909, folder 2.

million dollars [in county funds] over the whole period.”⁸⁴ As is often the case, local success enabled greater rewards. The largest was a three-year National Institute for Alcohol and Alcohol Abuse grant for \$1 million.⁸⁵ While activists were just as dedicated in other cities, queers accessed state resources in unprecedented ways in L.A. This financial development nurtured a political one as gay liberation became embedded within local Democratic politics.

“Now we’re Establishment”: The Stonewall Democratic Club

The Stonewall Democratic Club (SDC) emerged as one of the most influential queer political organizations in L.A. The name of the organization implied a left-liberal orientation. While “Stonewall” identified it with gay liberation and the New Left, “Democratic” signaled its willingness to work within the liberal establishment. Could the SDC do both? In 1976, *The Advocate* published a revealing cartoon. At an SDC meeting a young demonstrator interrupted with sign readings “2-4-6-8, Register as Democrat [sic].” An embarrassed Morris Kight replied, “Now that we’re establishment, dear brother, we’re just not sure we’ll be picketing with signs anymore.”⁸⁶ The cartoon revealed a shift in strategy which mirrored the GCSC. Both organizations adopted mainstream tactics while they pushed liberalism in queer directions.

The prospect of the “gay vote” emerged in 1953 when Paul Coates described Mattachine as a “strange new pressure group.”⁸⁷ By the end of the 1960s, *The Advocate* endorsed candidates in local and national elections. The SDC was a continuation of these efforts. Founded in 1975, it was organized by Morris Kight and David Glascock. Many members were previous LAGLF activists and many also worked at the GCSC. Future leaders, like Valerie Terrigno, cut their political teeth within the organization. As a tax-exempt social service agency, the GCSC could not play politics in the open. The SDC could, and did. It resembled other grassroots Democratic clubs in California. Membership fees were nominal and varied depending on income. The organization was formed “in recognition of a new awareness within the Democratic Party that Gay

⁸⁴ Kilhefner OH.

⁸⁵ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 203.

⁸⁶ Cartoon, *The Advocate*, 22 January 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 3.

⁸⁷ Paul Coates, “Well, Medium, and Rare,” *Los Angeles Mirror*, 12 March 1953.

People should be fully and equally represented in the Community and the National Body Politic.” The SDC agenda was simple and sought to “make the Democratic Party and its elected officials responsive to and responsible for the needs of all people and to promote a sane and humanist society.” Much like homophiles, SDC organizers framed their struggle as part of a broad “general human and civil rights movement” and made economic issues paramount. The SDC promoted “welfare rights” and primarily represented “single and lower income persons.”⁸⁸ Unlike earlier organizations, the SDC provided detailed prescriptions for discrimination through a sophisticated “gay rights plank” which connected queers to the Democratic Party.

Released in late 1975, the gay rights plank urged “passage of civil rights legislation to prohibit discrimination against gay people in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and public services.” Discriminatory policies in the military, in government employment, and within immigration policy had to be eliminated. Representing gay men *and lesbians*, the SDC championed sex and gender equality and called for the immediate passage of the Equal Rights Amendment (indeed, this was point one in the plank). Of fifteen points, at least ten addressed economic discrimination. The tax system needed to be rewritten so as to not “victimize single persons and same-gender couples.” Queers deserved access to welfare, and Congress needed to draft “legislation to enable persons covered by Social Security and all federal pension programs to designate whomever they so choose to receive benefits in the event.” This language was decidedly queer, not gay. Rather than call for civil unions or marriage, activists encouraged individuals choose “*whomever*” they wanted as beneficiaries. Several points pulled directly from the GCSC. For example, point ten called for “the establishment of an Office on Gay Awareness,” which would “recruit qualified gay women and men to conduct Gay Awareness Workshops within federal government agencies, and commence the eradication of homophobia.” The GCSC founding document had called for the exact same thing. The SDC also supported increased “funding for qualified gay social service agencies,” clearly with the GCSC in mind.⁸⁹ When it came to housing, the plank was more than specific. It targeted heteronormative HUD and FHA policies with zeal. Activists demanded “a policy change” which would

⁸⁸ Stonewall Democratic Club bylaws, March 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 1.

⁸⁹ Stonewall Democratic Club Gay Rights Plank, 1975. CDC, box 24, folder 37.

encourage “all persons to choose housing and living arrangements in accordance with their own preferences.” HUD needed to end “discrimination against gay people in public housing projects, federally guaranteed housing loans, and in all other areas under HUD’s jurisdiction.” Targeting the actual method of discrimination, the SDC promised to lobby HUD until the “families only” policy had been eliminated. While they did not explicitly state that HUD needed to redefine family, implicitly they did. How else could it be revised? The plank looked and read very much like a civil rights document. Gay men and women, for instance “needed to be immediately added to the Federal Civil Rights Commission.”⁹⁰ Liberation, however, was in the details.

Perhaps to the surprise of activists, the California Democratic Council (CDC) adopted the gay rights plank in the same year of its publication. Jonathan Bell found that the CDC moved Democratic politics leftwards in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹¹ By the 1970s the CDC was a dominant authority and influenced clubs throughout the state. Democrats such as Alan Cranston, Phil Burton, and Jerry Brown succeeded thanks to CDC endorsements and support. At the 1975 CDC Convention in San Jose, Kight and Glascock served as delegates.⁹² Along the way they gained allies and a few foes. In an unpleasant encounter with L.A. District Attorney Candidate Vincent Bugliosi, Glascock recalled that he had been accosted. Bugliosi threatened to “destroy me and my credibility in the Gay community because of my support for [another D.A. candidate].” Glascock “told him that if he wished to attempt to destroy me, there was nothing I could do to stop him,” but advised Bugliosi that he was “the chairman of the Candidate Evaluation Committee of the Stonewall Democratic Club and that our Club would be looking for someone to endorse in the near future.”⁹³ Queers, he warned, were now political players. On November 17 the gay rights plank was approved without debate by voice vote.⁹⁴ At the start of a presidential election year, planks were sent to Democratic frontrunners,

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ See Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

⁹² Stonewall Democratic Club memo, 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 20.

⁹³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 5 March 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 3.

⁹⁴ California Democratic Caucus pamphlet, 1976. CDC, box 17, folder 2.

including Hubert Humphrey, Jesse Jackson, Sargent Shriver, Birch Bayh, Fred Harris, and Jimmy Carter.⁹⁵

In less than a year, the SDC had become a statewide political player.

At county and state levels, organizers flexed muscle through endorsements. To win SDC backing candidates had to support the gay rights plank in its entirety. When Sabrina Schiller ran for a State Senate seat in 1976, she vowed to “support legislation which will take the ambiguity out of the Unruh Civil Rights Act and specifically list sexual orientation as a prohibited basis of discrimination,” which would “prohibit landlords from refusing to rent to gays or single persons.”⁹⁶ Her strong stance won her an endorsement in the competitive Democratic primary. When Tom Hayden announced his candidacy for the United States Senate, he promised to “go beyond just legislating.” If elected, he would “ensure affirmative action programs are carried out in federal agencies and among federal contractors” to “promote the full integration of gays with the social and economic life of America.”⁹⁷ Hayden and Schiller won their primaries, but narrowly lost their elections. The SDC took special aim at anti-gay Democrats. When Supervisor Edelman endorsed Democrat Joe Montoya for a State Senate seat, the SDC protested. “We are very disturbed at the news that you have endorsed Assemblyman Joe Montoya,” leaders wrote. “You have every right to endorse whomever you like, but we wish you had compared the voting records” of the two candidates “with special regard to GAY RIGHTS. Mr. Montoya has *not*, to use the word loosely, been favorable to our cause.”⁹⁸ Edelman met privately with Montoya, who suddenly reversed course on gay rights.

At the city level activists opened doors with Mayor Bradley and Councilwoman Stevenson. First elected in 1973, Bradley built a “biracial political coalition” which was reliant on African American, Latino, and “established white liberal” support.⁹⁹ Thanks to SDC pressure, he was the second politician in L.A. to appoint a gay liaison (a position funded through CETA), hiring Bill Carey in 1976.¹⁰⁰ Bradley also declared

⁹⁵ Letters urging adoption of Gay Rights Plank, 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 20.

⁹⁶ Sabrina Schiller campaign brochure, 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 8.

⁹⁷ Tom Hayden for U.S. Senate brochure, 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 20.

⁹⁸ Letter to Ed Edelman, 21 March 1978. SDC, box 2, folder 1.

⁹⁹ Robert W. Bailey, *Gay Politics, Urban Politics: Identity and Economics in the Urban Setting* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 148.

¹⁰⁰ Letter to Ed Edelman, 26 March 1976. EDE, box 909, folder 3.

a gay rights week and visited the GCSC personally. Supporting gay rights was “brave,” one constituent wrote, and evidenced his “prestige as a man of character.”¹⁰¹ As an African American, Bradley’s support of the GCSC was important. One black Angeleno thanked him for recognizing queers, which would ensure “hate and bigotry can be diminished and better relations between people of all kinds established.”¹⁰² Bradley replied that “receiving such a letter” was “one of the greatest rewards a public official” could receive.¹⁰³ Councilwoman Stevenson was a harder sell. In 1973, *The Advocate* endorsed her husband for the City Council but did so apprehensively. Activists bemoaned politicians like Stevenson, “who support gay rights [but] have not been aggressive enough in pushing for city legislation which would insure those rights.” Queers demanded “more than lip service.”¹⁰⁴ When Stevenson died in 1975, his wife ran to replace him. The idea of a gay pride parade unnerved with her. “I agree with many others,” she explained “who feel that the Parade is not in the best interests of the Gay Community and that it is totally counterproductive to the cause of Gay Rights.”¹⁰⁵ One activist found her lack of support disturbing. “How could a parade be counterproductive?” he asked. Who were the “many others” that Stevenson alluded to? Stevenson must be “talking about the non-gay people in your district who complain about the faggots on Hollywood Blvd. Make no mistake,” he warned “we have the right to be here. The parade has brought many closeted gays out and made them aware of their responsibility to the city as responsible citizens.”¹⁰⁶ Stevenson did not reply. On one occasion, Christopher Street West demanded “an open community meeting with [Stevenson]” in order “to clarify positions and other matters relevant to the Gay Community.” If she “refused to meet with the community” she would “be declared antagonistic to the goals of Gay Pride.”¹⁰⁷ In her refusal to endorse issues of “Gay Pride,” Stevenson resembled other Democrats of the era, such as Jimmy Carter. But like Carter, she was receptive to issues of economic discrimination. She endorsed the SDC gay rights plank and

¹⁰¹ Letter to Tom Bradley, 15 August 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

¹⁰² Letter to Tom Bradley, 16 January 1978. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

¹⁰³ Letter, 8 February 1978. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

¹⁰⁴ “Vote for Stevenson,” *The Advocate*, 28 March 1973. PSS, folder 2.

¹⁰⁵ Letter, 9 June 1977. PSS, folder 1.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to Peggy Stevenson, 21 February 1977. PSS, folder 1.

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Peggy Stevenson, 30 September 1977. PSS, folder 1.

supported GCSC housing programs. She especially approved of housing programs like Van Ness and Hudson House, a program established in the 1980s. To different degrees, Bradley and Stevenson demonstrated that when gay rights were tethered to economic liberalism breakthroughs were possible.

By the summer of 1980, the SDC was courted by numerous Democratic hopefuls. The group's leanings were displayed when they feted icons of the left, including George McGovern and Ted Kennedy.¹⁰⁸ In local and national venues, the SDC had "taken gay and lesbian issues from the streets to the halls of government."¹⁰⁹ "The Gay rights movement in Los Angeles," the *Los Angeles Times* reported, "has more momentum than ever before." In reference to an SDC reception of George McGovern, the *Times* marveled at "the growing respectability of the gay rights movement in Democratic political circles, particularly in Los Angeles."¹¹⁰ The SDC helped to change Democratic politics in L.A. and California. Earlier than in most states, liberals began including queers. In a few short years, the SDC had become a major political player, but not all supported the project. Believing that gay liberation was being sold to "the establishment," some queers attacked.

The Perils of Success: The Queer Left and the GCSC Strike

As the SDC and GCSC gained power and resources, alternative discourses emerged from queer socialists, communists, and lesbian feminists, many of whom felt underrepresented within left-liberal gay politics. Emily Hobson found that queers built strong ties to leftist liberation movements in California.¹¹¹ Los Angeles, Laura Pulido demonstrated, was a major source for multiracial radicalism and fostered a flowering of the queer left.¹¹² Many who built beds of support within radical groups found the SDC and GCSC counterproductive and antithetical to social revolution (of which gay liberation, they argued, was an

¹⁰⁸ Stonewall Democratic Club Reception announcement, 9 May 1980. SDC, box 2, folder 3.

¹⁰⁹ Stonewall Democratic Club Tenth Anniversary letter, 1 May 1985. SDC, box 2, folder 9.

¹¹⁰ "Gay Rights Movement Gains Political Momentum in L.A.," *Los Angeles Times*, 19 March 1978, C1

¹¹¹ See Emily Hobson, "Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-Imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990" (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Southern California, 2009).

¹¹² Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Red: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2006).

integral part). In some ways, they were quite correct. Gay liberation manifestos espoused language of *revolution*, not integration. Social norms and economic structures needed to be built anew, not remodeled.¹¹³ In utilizing Democratic politics and the liberal welfare state, the SDC and the GCSC appeared supportive of mainstream structures and institutions. In other ways, however, queer leftists viewed politics in simplistic ways. Since the GCSC received grants, and the SDC garnered Democratic endorsements, many reasoned that successes masked straight, capitalist takeover. For them the ends did not justify the means.

The success of the SDC earned it enemies. On one occasion, the president of Christopher Street West felt he had been “deeply insulted” by SDC leaders. He was “astonished by [the] behavior” of the organization, which was “supposed to have expertise in politics.” At a recent community gathering, he explained, he had been snubbed. “It is a shame when any organization thinks it is so big and so powerful that common courtesy and understanding is lacking,” he crowed. Then he went political. The SDC was morphing into a “money hungry, capitalist, S.O.B.” he fumed.¹¹⁴ Did the SDC deserve criticism? Probably. It is easy to see how the success of the organization might go to the heads of its leaders. Not since MECLA had a queer organization been so powerful. But were the political characterizations of the SDC fair? Hardly. Far from being “money hungry capitalists,” many leaders worked at the GCSC and collected CETA salaries. The Revolutionary Socialist League applauded the gay rights plank for its economic message, but bemoaned the missing “S word.” “The fight for a better society, for *socialism*,” they maintained, “includes gay people as valuable and militant allies.” Both groups battled economic discrimination, but from different ideological vantage points. Socialists believed that “attacks on gays” were “only one part of an attack on all working people by the rulers of this country.” What was needed was a “fight against gay oppression” that was also a “fight against capitalism.”¹¹⁵ The most influential queer socialists could be found in the Lavender and Red Union (LRU). The LRU suggested that heterosexuality was a device “to enslave workers

¹¹³ For example, see Carl Whittman, “A Gay Manifesto” in Chris Bull (ed.) *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay and Lesbian Liberation* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1969, 2001), 67-79.

¹¹⁴ Pat Underwood to Stonewall Democratic Club, 2 February 1981. SDC, box 2, folder 5.

¹¹⁵ Revolutionary Socialist League flier, 1976. FMGL, box 1.

in sexual repression and monogamy,” and printed fliers in Spanish.¹¹⁶ Leaders believed that “the liberation of all oppressed peoples can only be accomplished through class struggle.”¹¹⁷ On Halloween in 1975, members protested President Ford, who travelled to Los Angeles for a fundraiser. “Ford is another trick of the ruling class,” they declared. His economic policies included a “soak the rich tax for single people... which hit gay people unfairly.”¹¹⁸ This overlooked queer use of state resources. The real trick was that Ford had inadvertently funded gay liberation.

The LRU sometimes struggled to remain pure to socialist principles. Leaders devoted “energy to public demonstrations,” including “against L.A. Police Chief Ed Davis” and “Barney’s Beanery—a large non-Gay bar in West Hollywood [that] had a sign, t-shirts and matchbooks that said, ‘Fagots [*sic*] Stay Out.’”¹¹⁹ These “super-structural” issues were diversions from the revolution, one might have argued. How would picketing a bar advance class revolution? When the SDC released a gay rights plank, the LRU countered with its own. The organization defended “the rights of Lesbians and Gay men to equal opportunity in employment, to custody of our children and to decent medical care,” and promised to fight to “abolish all anti-gay laws.”¹²⁰ Aside from supporting socialist revolution, the platforms were identical. The Los Angeles Socialist Workers Party “stood in solidarity with the aims of the gay liberation movement to eliminate legislation restricting the rights of gays in housing, jobs and social services” and supported “passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.” It endorsed the gay rights plank, but not the SDC. When Mayor Bradley announced a visit to the SDC, socialists congratulated “the fact that the mayor of the nation’s second largest city feels it important to address your organization.” It surely implied strength, but they warned against cozying up to the establishment. “Sam Manual is running against Bradley,” they advised, and “presents a real alternative to the working people of this city.” Running as a socialist, Manual had few chances of breaking through. Still, socialists urged the SDC to “organize independently of the Democratic

¹¹⁶ Lavender and Red Union flier, 1974. FMGL, box 1.

¹¹⁷ Lavender and Red Union leaflet, 21 July 1974. FMGL, box 1.

¹¹⁸ Lavender and Red Union flier, October 1975. FMGL, box 1.

¹¹⁹ Lavender and Red Union leaflet, 1974. FMGL, box 1.

¹²⁰ *Come out Fighting! The Newspaper of the Lavender and Red Union*, No.24.20, 1976. FMGL, box 1.

and Republican parties, which are responsible for perpetuating discriminatory laws.”¹²¹ No good could come from working within the system.

Most communists were intransigent. The Los Angeles Research Group, an organization of “approximately ten communists who are gay women” claimed that the SDC and GCSC were not advancing gay liberation. To them, “liberation” implied “the coming of revolution,” which the SDC did not support. These women, however, also felt isolated from the CPUSA. They were “disturbed with the consolidation of an anti-gay line” within the CPUSA, and outraged that queers had been refused communist memberships.¹²² Others shared that concern. One man had been “politically active on the left for many years” and felt “emotionally and ideologically drawn to the traditions and policies of the Communist Party.” But the policies of the *Daily World*, a communist newspaper, turned him off. He warned that the CPUSA was “losing support [and] growing old and stale.”¹²³ A *Daily World* representative chastised him in response. “You should know,” he wrote, “that the Communists want to ‘change the world’ by changing its mode of production. Then we will tackle the superstructure, which largely takes care of itself.”¹²⁴ That reply was insulting. “Postponing an active struggle against a very real and often violent oppression until ‘after the revolution,’” the man fired back, “is an affront to the mind.” While “straight” Party leaders could comfortably wait for the revolution, he could not and canceled his membership.¹²⁵ On the far-left, sexuality and ideology did not always mix well. Within the GCSC, activists learned this lesson painfully.

In 1975 activists were rocked by a protracted and intense strike at the GCSC. It came at a vulnerable moment in the organization’s history, as organizers began relationships with county funding agencies. The GCSC was entering a new phase of power and professionalism. Narratives of the strike differ, yet at its core it reflected ideological tensions. Successful breakthroughs with the establishment bred fear, anxiety, and resentment. The strike did not purge leftists from the GCSC, but did expel those unwilling to work with the

¹²¹ Socialist Workers “Statement on SDC,” 19 February 1977. SDC, box 1, folder 25.

¹²² “Toward a Scientific Analysis of the Gay Question,” the Los Angeles Research Group, 1974. FMGL, box 1.

¹²³ Letter, 19 November 1982. EGC, box 1.

¹²⁴ Letter, 27 November 1982. EGC, box 1.

¹²⁵ Letter, 13 December 1982. EGC, box 1.

state. The discord began when six women and five men were fired from the GCSC (they named themselves the “Gay Feminist Eleven”). The motivation for the firings stemmed from a published newsletter entitled *It’s About Time*. This exposé claimed that the GCSC suffered from a history of exclusion. Men and women of color claimed that they GCSC was too white; lesbians charged that the organization catered primarily to men; and leftists accused leaders of exploiting workers with measly salaries.¹²⁶ Historical memory has focused almost exclusively on the complaints from lesbians. Longtime activist and GCSC employee Jeanne Córdova suggested that the strike emerged in response to the eradication of feminism at the GCSC.¹²⁷ Some historians have agreed, arguing that the strike pitted “radical lesbian feminists against gay men.”¹²⁸ These tensions were real and did contribute to the strike, yet its cause was more firmly rooted in ideological anxiety concerning state strategies and public financing.

The LRU was the chief instigator. In an irony that seems to have been lost, the organization utilized space at the GCSC to hold meetings (where members condemned “establishment” strategies of both the SDC and the GCSC).¹²⁹ LRU organizers turned the conflict into a traditional struggle between workers and owners and highlighted the conflict between women and men. The LRU claimed that the SDC and GCSC “created an ideology in which the world is divided between Gay and non-gay people and ignores class contradictions.” This resulted in “boss rule at the GCSC.” They targeted recent breakthroughs with county funding agencies as evidence. “The Gay community must be educated,” organizers wrote, “as to the nature of the [GCSC] and the government’s role in it.” Establishment strategies transformed activists into “bosses and enemies to other workers.”¹³⁰ On the one hand, the LRU rightly noted that class divisions were important. On the other, it inaccurately painted a black-and-white depiction of the GCSC. What “boss rule” did the LRU refer to? Leaders were mostly poor. It was true that managers offered little pay for excessive work, but they did so because of few resources (recall that many leaders had themselves been homeless).

¹²⁶ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 203-205.

¹²⁷ See Jeanne Cordova, *When We Were Outlaws: A Memoir of Love and Revolution* (Midway, FL: Spinsters Ink, 2011).

¹²⁸ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 201.

¹²⁹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 204.

¹³⁰ Lavender and Red Union anthology, 1976. FMGL, box 1.

Ironically, the breakthroughs with CETA and CDBG programs (the very things the LRU condemned) allowed staff to receive better wages. Don Kilhefner found the accusations outrageous. We were “hardly joining the establishment,” he argued. “We were anti-establishment. But, strategically, if we were going to make this revolution work, we were going to have to shift gears.” To him, “the question became, how do we *finance* this radical movement?”¹³¹ Could the intent of the movement be maintained if “strategy shifted”? The LRU and the Gay Feminist Eleven answered no.

In fighting for their beliefs, queer leftists tried to sabotage GCSC funding. It is unclear who sent *It's About Time* to Supervisor Edelman's office, but it triggered the firings of the eleven agitators. When David Glascock read it he was mortified. He swiftly contacted Kilhefner and Morris Kight and demanded that “internal squabbling” come to an immediate end. If it did not, he suggested that the GCSC might “lose its public charter as well as the federal revenue-sharing funds” which he had just secured.¹³² The result was the abrupt firing of those most associated with the publication. Context is key in explaining the harsh response. GCSC proposals were then working through bureaucratic channels and activists were nearing CETA approval. It was an exciting but stressful moment. The crackdown on dissent was a severe, but understandable purge of ideological intransigence. Once fired the Gay Feminist Eleven picketed. Banners assailed the GCSC's “patriarchal management” and accused it of “racism, sexism, and classism.” One of the eleven who was fired, Jeanne Córdova was angry, but even she had difficulty with the harshness of language. The GCSC was a “place my baby gay brother might go ask for a bed when my Catholic parents throw him out,” she recalled. The firings were wrong, but histrionic condemnation of the GCSC was equally injurious. In the end, she supported the LRU-backed strike, but did so on feminist grounds. “This is not a labor issue,” she declared. “Our fight is about lesbian feminism versus male-dominated hierarchy.” Yet even this was somewhat misleading. Prior to her firing, Córdova had been a GCSC director; after the purge, women remained in leadership positions. While they might not have been genuine *lesbian feminists* according to some, the struggle was not male versus female as some portrayed it. If there was hope for

¹³¹ Kilhefner OH.

¹³² Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 204-205.

reconciliation, it ended when protestors condemned GCSC leaders as “capitalist pigs.”¹³³ In response activists parted ways and GCSC leaders wrote a detailed defense of their actions.

A special edition newsletter aimed to quell negative publicity and reassure allies (especially Edelman) that the GCSC was stable. Organizers admitted that the young social service agency was in the midst of an “organizational crisis” which had arisen from “a period of rapid growth.” In short order it had transformed “from a volunteer-run, non-traditional agency to an organization with a large incumbency.” New “personnel and fiscal requirements that come with grants, contracts, and complex programmatic growth” had caused tensions. “Some [staff] positions were filled by people whose goals and objectives conflicted with the goals and objectives of the GCSC.” These “political dissidents” did not support government involvement and refused to play by the rules. As activism shifted from streets to grants it was time to bid adieu to “professional agitators.” Justifying the political and financial alliances they had forged, activists asked supporters to rally behind the GCSC. “If you have ever benefited from a Gay Community Services Center Program or service,” they pleaded, “this is the time to come forward with your support, your love, your gifts, and your presence. You may have needed the Center in the past. You may need it in the future. *It needs you know.*” This campaign was necessary: behind the scenes, members of the Gay Feminist Eleven sent letters to Edelman suggesting he cancel contracts with the GCSC.¹³⁴

While the strike subsided, it did so at great political costs. Córdova had been an influential lesbian organizer, but was now gone. The ordeal left her angry and she carried a grudge against Kight and the GCSC for nearly thirty years. Even in her memoir, she had difficulty letting go. “With its businesslike louvered windows,” she wrote, “L.A.’s best known gay organization had morphed into a ‘gay institution’...It became ‘the man.’”¹³⁵ That was not quite fair. Other members of the Gay Feminist Eleven came to regret their actions. Some felt duped by the LRU. One even believed that the FBI instigated the strike as a way to “destroy the first and largest gay center in America” from within.¹³⁶ In looking for

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Gay Community Services Center Board of Directors report, 20 May 1975. EDE, box 249, folder 2.

¹³⁵ Cordova, *When We Were Outlaws*, 120.

¹³⁶ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 205.

scapegoats, some downplayed their own ideological intransigence. In the final analysis the strike was unavoidable. Organizers forged new political strategies which harnessed the tools of liberalism and the welfare state. To them this was not a Faustian Bargain, but pragmatic progress. Protecting that progress required them to disconnect from hardliners opposed to the establishment. The 1975 strike was not a purge of lesbians. Women continued to influence the GCSC, including future West Hollywood Mayor Valerie Terrigno. Nor was it a purge of leftists: Kight maintained he was of the “Communist tradition,” while Kilhefer declared himself a “Maoist.”¹³⁷ Instead it purged those unwilling to work with the state.

Going National: Gays for Carter

As they secured local gains queers also influenced national politics. For liberals the 1970s was a curious time, especially since the Democratic standard-bearer proved to be a sphinx. Jimmy Carter disappointed the left on many fronts. According to some, his conservative economic policies unintentionally exacerbated an “age of inequality.”¹³⁸ However, Carter expanded CETA and placed avowed leftists (including many feminists) in key positions of power. The former Governor of Georgia was an evangelical Christian who was proudly “born-again.” Yet, as Randall Balmer suggested, he was cut from decidedly progressive religious cloth.¹³⁹ Carter frankly admitted his moral anxieties regarding non-marital, heteronormative sex, but he supported an end to economic discrimination. Through Carter’s Administration, queers demonstrated how local activism could shape the nation.

Carter’s political relationship with queers began in Los Angeles in March of 1976. Relying on primaries, Carter won a series of upset victories against Democratic frontrunners and hoped to do well in California’s June primary contest. He was dealt a significant challenge when Governor Jerry Brown jumped into the race. Brown represented a serious challenge from the left and was well-liked by queers. After winning election in 1974 the young governor secured “landmark legislation” which “extended the reach of

¹³⁷ Kilhefer OH.

¹³⁸ See Judith Stein, *Pivotal Decade: How the United States Traded Factory for Finance in the Seventies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

¹³⁹ See Randal Balmer, *Redeemer: The Life of Jimmy Carter* (New York: Basic Books, 2014).

Democratic liberalism,” including “collective bargaining rights for public school employees and farm workers.”¹⁴⁰ He also supported and signed the Consenting Adult Sex Bill, which repealed sodomy laws in the state. Within the GCSC, Kilhefner recalled, Brown’s consistent support led many to wonder if he “might be gay himself.”¹⁴¹ Even so, Carter built important relationships with queers. While he insinuated that abortion and homosexuality were sins, he “did not believe it was his role to mandate personal morality” to others.¹⁴² Supervisor Edelman’s support of Carter encouraged activists to give him a look. At one fundraiser in March of 1976, SDC member and MCC founder Troy Perry grilled Carter on discrimination in housing, immigration, military policy, and civilian contract employment. To Perry’s surprise, Carter pledged support to all areas except military policy.¹⁴³ While many remained loyal to Brown, others founded Gays for Carter (GFC) to support the Georgian. “We can, for the first time,” organizers proclaimed, “help elect a President who has openly declared himself a supporter of the Gay movement.”¹⁴⁴ Yet, to what degree was Carter supportive of the “gay movement”? He was not comfortable with the message of gay pride, and he criticized sex outside of marriage (making sex for lesbians and gays impossible). Hope rested in policy change. One month before the primary, the SDC held an endorsement meeting. When Morris Kight announced his support of Carter, it swayed others to endorse him. Kight then took an active role in GFC, which quickly became a carbon copy of the SDC. When Carter condemned racist housing practices in a California speech, Kight verified that this protest “also extended to sexual minorities.” A Carter aide replied that the candidate was “opposed to discrimination in all forms, including sexual preference.”¹⁴⁵ Although Brown bested Carter by nearly 40 points, an important relationship had been established.

Once the nomination was secured, queers worked to galvanize the “national gay community.” They confessed that Carter’s religion made them nervous but declared that “all gay persons throughout the

¹⁴⁰ Bell, *California Crucible*, 271.

¹⁴¹ Kilhefner OH.

¹⁴² J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 62.

¹⁴³ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 83-84; Dudley Clendinen & Adam Nagourney, *Out for Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 272-273.

¹⁴⁴ Gays for Carter “A Message to the Gay Community,” 1976. SDC, Box 1, Folder 21.

¹⁴⁵ Letter, 4 March 1976. SDC, Box 1, Folder 20.

country” ought to labor on behalf of Carter because he had “openly declared [his] support for gay rights.” They also highlighted the ticket’s strong support for labor rights.¹⁴⁶ Yet, when activists sent along the gay rights plank, they received a tepid response from Carter aides. “As you know,” they wrote, “Governor Carter is not entirely comfortable with the issue of homosexuality for personal reasons, but he strongly stresses his belief that gay people should not be singled out for harassment, abuse, or discrimination” and “has repeatedly expressed his opposition to all forms of discrimination.”¹⁴⁷ Carter could endorse the plank, but could not be a vocal supporter of homosexuality per se. That reply irritated as much as it revealed. Carter would not be a loud supporter, but instead a clandestine ally. Major advancements would occur under the table. Although effective, this strategy angered some. When the election was called for Carter, GFC organizers celebrated that his “administration will be one which insures an end to discrimination based on sexual orientation.” They anxiously awaited Carter’s fulfillment of his “promise to issue an Executive Order outlawing discrimination against Gay people within the first two years of his administration helped get out this vote.”¹⁴⁸ But here activists made an assumption. Carter had never promised an executive order, and one would not be forthcoming. His administration would advance surreptitious, but consequential progress. This was best revealed in two major achievements: a 1977 HUD policy change and the White House Conference on American Families, both of which recognized the pluralism of family life in America.

HUD and the Rewriting of Family

In May of 1977 HUD officials rewrote the definition of family. Since the establishment of housing subsidies in the 1930s, eligibility required marital or biological attachments. This locked many queers out of crucial social welfare programs. While overlooked by historians, the decision by HUD represented a weakening of heteronormative hegemony within the “straight state.”¹⁴⁹ The political strategies of queer

¹⁴⁶ Letter, 18 August 1976. SDC, Box 1, Folder 21.

¹⁴⁷ Letter, 31 October 1976. SDC, Box 1, Folder 21.

¹⁴⁸ Gays for Carter news release, 5 November 1976. SDC, box 1, folder 21.

¹⁴⁹ I am borrowing the descriptor from Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

Angelenos helped craft national change. Activists within the SDC sent copies of the gay rights plank to all cabinet heads and secretaries in the Presidential Administration of Jimmy Carter. Emphasizing economic discrimination the plank outlined how family definitions could be changed to expand subsidies for low-income queers. On the surface this breakthrough might seem surprising. A born-again President, Jimmy Carter has not been remembered as a queer or feminist champion. Yet, as Susan Hartmann and Marisa Chappell documented, Carter appointed leftist feminists within his administration. These women (some of whom were lesbians) pushed his policies away from patriarchal, male-breadwinner ideals and towards plural, feminist alternatives.¹⁵⁰ Queers were also actors, and beneficiaries, in this story. The HUD development revealed how they covertly gained ground in the 1970s.

Officials in HUD actually began to question family policies during the Ford Administration. Some administrators worried that exclusionary policies discriminated against single people. Queers were not apparently included in this concern, nevertheless HUD moved to open a loophole in the 1974 Housing and Community Development Act. Officials announced that individuals could declare themselves a “single-household” in order to gain eligibility. Reporters with *The Advocate* believed that “gay people [were] now benefited by President Ford,” since many “have been discriminated against, not because someone suspected they’re gay, but merely because they aren’t married.” The “we take married people only stance” had been shaken. Now “persons who are discriminated against because of their marital status...may take their complaints to the local discrimination office” of HUD.¹⁵¹ Others guided queers towards the “HUD ‘hot line’ telephone system” in order to “report housing discrimination” under the new law.¹⁵² The policy change offered an outlet, but a marginal one. Complainants had to demonstrate their *singleness* in order file a grievance. What if they wanted to live with a partner of the same sex? If these relationships were to be recognized the definition of family would have to be expanded. The 1977 policy change did just that.

¹⁵⁰ See Susan Hartmann, “Feminism, Public Policy, and the Carter Administration,” in Gary Fink & Hugh Graham (eds.) *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998) and Marisa Chappell, *The War on Welfare: Family, Poverty, and Politics in Modern America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

¹⁵¹ “‘Married Only’ Housing Outlawed,” *The Advocate*, 29 October 1974. HOSF, folder 1.

¹⁵² “New Programs Aimed at Housing Discrimination,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 April, 1974. HOSF, folder 1.

Before that announcement, activists in Los Angeles and San Francisco unsuccessfully attempted to mount a housing discrimination test case. In July of 1976 Glenn Schmoll filed a case with the Superior Court of California. Schmoll had been an Angeleno since the 1950s, and worked for Troy Perry as his “first secretary” as well as a “receptionist for *The Advocate*.”¹⁵³ In 1976 he moved to San Francisco to work at *NewsWest*, a queer publication. Upon his arrival he attempted to rent a vacant apartment. After a tour, the unit was “offered for rent at \$175 per month.” When the owner inquired discovered Schmoll was gay, however, “the offer to rent was withdrawn” and “the owner made clear that he would not rent to gay persons.” Schmoll reached out to Donald Knutson, a professor of law at the University of Southern California, to represent him in court. Knutson predicted it would be a “precedent-setting case” and incorrectly believed he could argue damages under the California Unruh Civil Rights Act of 1959. This measure prohibited racial discrimination in housing, and was followed in 1963 by the Rumford Fair Housing Act. Neither Unruh nor Rumford mentioned sexuality. However, some believed that the language was broad enough to include queers. Knutson cited California Attorney General Evelle J. Younger, a liberal Republican, who mused “that homosexuals [were likely] protected under the Unruh Act.” He was mistaken. Without legal merit, the case was dismissed.¹⁵⁴ Legal scholars suggested that the Unruh Civil Rights Act was utilized by queers to battle homophobia in the 1970s and 1980s, but it provided no security for Schmoll (the Unruh act was revised in 2005 to specifically protect sexual minorities).¹⁵⁵ The case might have had better luck had Schmoll been denied housing as a *single* man, something the 1974 Housing Act prohibited. Just a year later, officials announced the HUD policy change.

Within the gay rights plank activists argued for a change to “family policy.” HUD needed to permit “all persons to choose housing and living arrangements in accordance with their own preferences.”¹⁵⁶ While they might not have intended to do so, activists called for a radical solution to housing discrimination in

¹⁵³ “Glenn Schmoll: Letter to the Editor,” *San Francisco Bay Times*, 24 August 2006.

¹⁵⁴ “NewsWest Staffer Tests Housing Law,” *NewsWest*, 23 July 1976. PHOSF, folder 1.

¹⁵⁵ Steven Wyllie, “The UNRUH Civil Rights Act: A Weapon to Combat Homophobia in Military On-Campus Recruiting,” *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review* 1333 (June 1991).

¹⁵⁶ Stonewall Democratic Club Gay Rights Plank, 1975. CDC, box 24, folder 37.

making this argument. Unlike mainstream civil rights efforts, protective legislation was not the goal. Rather, *the entire qualification of family* was condemned. This transcended gay rights and suggested multiple familial possibilities. In their critique of HUD queers joined feminists, especially women of color, who were also applying pressure to HUD. They argued that single mothers who cohabitated (including lesbians) ought to be eligible for the same subsidies as married couples.¹⁵⁷ Queers strengthened this argument further. By 1977 the SDC gay rights plank had been endorsed by Supervisor Edelman, Mayor Bradley, and Jerry Brown.¹⁵⁸ It was also considered by national heavyweights, including Hubert Humphrey, Jesse Jackson, Sargent Shriver, and President Carter.¹⁵⁹ Once elected Carter's office sent it along to all department heads, including HUD Secretary Patricia Roberts Harris.

Since its creation, HUD has been a powerful weapon in ensuring fair housing, but it matters who administers the department. Appointed by the President, HUD secretaries have bent the organization to represent their own politics. In the Nixon and Ford eras, HUD was led by less-than enthusiastic conservatives, including George Romney. The appointment of Patricia Roberts Harris in January of 1977 was a welcome change. A graduate of Howard University, she gained stature in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations as a Civil Rights and Democratic Party organizer. In 1963 she was appointed co-chair to the National Women's Committee for Civil Rights by President Kennedy, and was selected as the Ambassador to Luxemburg by President Johnson in 1964 (the selection made her the first black female ambassador in U.S. history).¹⁶⁰ She was an enthusiastic supporter of public housing and "attempted to use financial incentives" to "encourage suburbs to accept a fair share of [new] public housing" construction.¹⁶¹ A liberal, Harris was also a vocal supporter of the New Left, especially women's liberation and black power. Under her leadership, HUD moved in a decidedly feminist direction.¹⁶² Indeed, televangelist Pat Robertson

¹⁵⁷ See especially Chappell, *The War on Welfare*.

¹⁵⁸ Memo on California Democratic Council, 1976. GLCSC, box 1, folder 20.

¹⁵⁹ Letters urging adoption of SDC Gay Rights Plank, 1976. GLCSC, box 1, folder, 20.

¹⁶⁰ Lonnie Bunch, "A Higher Standard: Patricia Roberts Harris." Smithsonian Web: http://go.si.edu/site/MessageViewer?em_id=17367.0 (Last accessed July 2014).

¹⁶¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 368.

¹⁶² Hartmann, "Feminism, Public Policy, and the Carter Administration," 235.

considered her an “avowed enemy” after she labeled the Moral Majority “dangerous, intolerant, and polarizing.”¹⁶³ She was one of numerous feminists appointed to key administrative posts in the Carter Administration, including outspoken gay rights activist Margaret “Midge” Costanza.

It is unclear if Harris studied the gay rights plank, but her actions aided its agenda. The summer of 1977 was volatile. In Dade County, Florida former Miss Oklahoma and orange juice saleswoman Anita Bryant fought to repeal a gay rights ordinance. In the heat of the drama, the HUD policy change was subjectively ingenuous. “Any stable family relationship,” HUD spokesman Tom Bacon explained, was now eligible to apply for housing subsidies. He did not mention queers, nor did he define “stability.” When reporters asked if queers influenced the decision, he deflected. “The change was not made in response to pressure from any group,” he insisted. HUD was not “trying to get a particular group in. We were simply trying to expand the eligibility of low-income housing for *all* families.”¹⁶⁴ What HUD administrators decided to do was radical: the “stability” policy *destabilized* any definition of family. The policy change did not prohibit discrimination, but opened the door to queer recognition. Theoretically a *stable* queer family might be eligible for subsidies while an *unstable* heterosexual one might not be. Stability was in the eye of the beholder. According to HUD, family was no longer beholden to marital and biological constraints. Historians have argued that the New Right and Moral Majority coalesced around “attacks on the family” in the 1970s.¹⁶⁵ The 1977 HUD decision allows us to better understand the context.

Press reports immediately connected the policy change with queers. A *New York Times* editorial declared that “the government [was] opening public housing to homosexual couples.”¹⁶⁶ At a press conference, reporters grilled Carter on the decision. Asked if homosexuals could be families, he gave a

¹⁶³ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 119, 301.

¹⁶⁴ Barbara Katz, “Rules Say Gay Couple Can Be A Public-Housing Family,” *New Hampshire Observer*, 20 June 1977. Housing Subject File, ONE, folder 1.

¹⁶⁵ See especially: Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*; and Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012).

¹⁶⁶ “H.U.D. Will Accept Unmarried Couples for Public Housing,” *New York Times*, 29 May 1977, 22.

confused answer. Homosexuals did not form “normal interrelationships,” but he didn’t “see homosexuals as a threat to the family either.” Puzzled reporters pushed further, at which point an annoyed Carter complained that it was “a subject I don’t particularly want to involve myself in. I’ve got enough problems.” This was classic Carter. His appointments nurtured breakthroughs that he rarely took credit for.¹⁶⁷ Across the nation queers noted the policy change, which was met with excitement and confusion. One woman celebrated that HUD would now “permit low-income homosexual couples to live in public housing,” but the language of the policy confused her. “What does a ‘stable family relationship’ mean?” she asked. “The new regulations do not define it.” If “each public-housing authority and private owner who receives Federal assistance” could “determine whether a couple fits the new description” then the law could be “endlessly vague.”¹⁶⁸ *The Advocate* mostly celebrated. “Public housing will now be open to gay couples in a ‘stable family relationship,’” reporters announced. The decision asserted that, in addition to “married, heterosexual families...gay people need roofs over their heads, too.”¹⁶⁹ Anti-queer conservatives took note of HUD’s actions and resisted them.

Lawmakers fiercely debate queer inclusion within HUD. In the House Edward Boland (D-MA) joined forces with Tom Hagedorn (R-MN) to propose an amendment to HUD’s appropriations bill which barred queers from all subsidies. “The issue of homosexual rights,” Boland claimed, “is too sensitive to thrust on local housing authorities.” The House passed the bill by voice vote, “nullifying federal housing assistance for unmarried persons living together.”¹⁷⁰ This placed discrimination within the public record, which caused headaches and a Democratic rumble in the Senate. As Senators reviewed the House amendment, “the usually stolid Appropriations Committee room became a forum on gay rights.” Supporting the amendment, William Proxmire (D-WI) and Lawton Chiles (D-FL) pointed out that since “there is a waiting list for public housing,” Americans “with traditional wife-husband stable family relationships

¹⁶⁷ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 144-145.

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Katz, “Rules Say Gay Couple Can Be A Public-Housing Family,” *New Hampshire Observer*, 20 June 1977. PHOSF, folder 1.

¹⁶⁹ “Public Housing for Gay Couples,” *The Advocate*, 27 July 1977. PHOSF, folder 1.

¹⁷⁰ “House Bans Housing Aid for Unmarrieds,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 16 June 1977. PHOSF, folder 1.

should have preference.” It would be a mistake, they asserted, to “say that homosexuals have equal access with *families*.” HUD had forced a decision on whether “public policy should assist homosexuals with subsidized housing.” They answered no, but two Democrats fought back. Lowell Weicker (D-CT) of and Warren Magnusson (D-MA) opposed the amendment on constitutional grounds. “Such language would put Congress on record favoring discrimination,” Weicker warned. “We don’t want to get caught up in some temporary hysteria and start mashing people’s constitutional rights all over the place.” This argument carried the day. Lawmakers removed the anti-queer provision and emphasized that subsidy “eligibility would be determined” by authorities on a case-by-case basis.¹⁷¹ This allowed Congress to approve the appropriations bill “without a whisper of gay rights,” but did nothing to alter the nature of HUD’s policy change.

Urban historians have not been terribly kind to the Carter Presidency.¹⁷² His Administration certainly failed American cities on multiple fronts, but the 1977 HUD policy change opened housing to previously excluded people. It demonstrated how queers could infiltrate the state clandestinely. For Angelenos, it fit nicely within a decades-long project of queer family legitimization. One activist celebrated the victory as an “advancement in gay rights” and an “extension of...family” life in America.¹⁷³ The victory did not belong to Angelenos alone, but was certainly assisted by their activism. So too they helped queer Carter’s White House Conference on American Families in 1980.

“The Pluralism of Family Life” and the White House Conference on Families

Many evangelicals supported Jimmy Carter in 1976 because he ran on a message of moral redemption and family values. “The American family is in trouble,” he told one campaign crowd. What was needed was a “pro-family government policy,” he told another.¹⁷⁴ But what did that mean? Shortly

¹⁷¹ “Senate Bill on Housing Skips the Gay Issue,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, 25 June 1977. PHOSF, folder 1.

¹⁷² See Thomas Sugrue, “Carter’s Urban Policy Crisis,” in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham (eds.), *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices* (Lawrence, KS: The University of Kansas Press, 1998).

¹⁷³ *OUT!*, 12 August, 1977. PHOSF, folder 1.

¹⁷⁴ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 89.

before the election, he commissioned a report on the status of the family in the nation. It did not highlight “militant homosexuality” as a problem. Instead “unemployment and lack of adequate income” were the culprits. Carter promised to host “a national conference on families” to solve the crisis in the home. Marisa Chappell and J. Brooks Flippen argued that he “selected his words carefully, deciding on ‘families,’ not ‘family,’ to reflect diversity.” By 1980, Carter assured the conference would “recognize the pluralism of family life in America.”¹⁷⁵ His insistence on *pluralism*, like HUD’s insistence on *stability*, fostered change.

Over the course of the 1970s, conservatives politicized and narrowed the idea of family. Jerry Falwell, a Virginia businessman and host of the *Old Time Gospel Hour*, argued that “family” was defined as a “God-ordained institution of the marriage of one man and one woman together for a lifetime with their biological or adopted children.” He echoed a definition that had been codified in federal welfare policies since the 1930s. Many did not want it to change. Falwell explained that “militant homosexuals” were a group of “influential people who hate families” and warned that queer men “sought out young boys” for sex and recruitment.¹⁷⁶¹⁷⁷ Anita Bryant strengthened that charge. “The recruitment of our children is absolutely necessary for the survival and growth of homosexuality,” she explained. In L.A. alone, police “reported that 25,000 boys 17 years or younger have been recruited into a homosexual ring.”¹⁷⁸ What did this “ring” look like? Did it include liberation houses and the GCSC? Bryant did not explain. Subtling her passionate tome *The Survival of Our Nation’s Families and the Threat of Militant Homosexuality*, she refocused the issue of gay rights around the protection of children. This played a central role in the 1978 fight over the Briggs Amendment in California (discussed in the next chapter). Any conference on American families would have to navigate tricky and increasingly dangerous political waters.

In his announcement of the conference, Carter called for “a national discussion of the state of American families.” He was “encouraged by the increasing interest in the state of families by people from

¹⁷⁵ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 103, 163; Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 164.

¹⁷⁶ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 56-58

¹⁷⁷ Jerry Falwell, *How You Can Help Clean Up America* (Lynchburg, Va.: Liberty Publishing Company, 1978), 70-72.

¹⁷⁸ Anita Bryant, *The Anita Bryant Story* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1977), 146.

all walks of life” and assured that the “conference will recognize pluralism.”¹⁷⁹ The chief organizer, Patricia Fleming, represented this. “An African American divorced mother of three teenage sons,” Fleming was an unpopular choice with conservatives. Some even threatened to boycott, leading Carter to replace her with John Carr, a “white, male, married Catholic.”¹⁸⁰ Even so, the conference prioritized diversity. Three regional meetings were planned in Baltimore, Minneapolis, and Los Angeles. As the first neared, the politics of family became volatile when U.S. Senator Paul Laxalt (R-NV) introduced the Family Protection Act which “proposed denying federal funds for sex education, school desegregation, legal services in cases involving abortion and divorce, and the banning of federal support for any form of gay rights.”¹⁸¹ While it failed, it reflected growing conservative militancy. Falwell insisted that conservatives needed to “counteract disruptive federal intervention into family life.”¹⁸² In all three conference meetings, conservative and progressive activists sought to define family on their terms.

At the opening salvo in Baltimore, they went to war. Conservatives accused Carter of having “the worst record for family issues for any president in history.”¹⁸³ Progressives, however, outnumbered them and voted to endorse the Equal Rights Amendment and gay rights.¹⁸⁴ Anti-feminist Phyllis Schlafly decried the meeting as a “media event” designed to “promote an alternative lifestyle” and stormed out. Conservatives regrouped, reloaded, and headed to Minneapolis. In the second round, they won control and voted to oppose “the imposition of a secular, humanist philosophy on public institutions.” Significantly for queers, they also voted to “exclude homosexuals in the definition of family.”¹⁸⁵ Ideologically confused, the conference moved to Los Angeles for its final meeting. Unsurprisingly feminists and queers stole the show. Attendees voted to “approve government-funded abortions” and “outlaw housing laws that would

¹⁷⁹ Jimmy Carter: "White House Conference on Families Statement Announcing the Conference," 30 January 1978. Online by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29884> (Last accessed July 2014).

¹⁸⁰ Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 166.

¹⁸¹ Self, *All in the Family*, 336.

¹⁸² Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 227.

¹⁸³ “Carter Opens Conference on Families,” *New York Times*, 6 June 1980, A2.

¹⁸⁴ “Conference on Families Produces a 57-Point Plan,” *New York Times*, 9 June 1980, C16.

¹⁸⁵ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 270-271.

discriminate based on sexual preference.” The latter passed by an overwhelming 64%.¹⁸⁶ “The emphasis” of the conference, a *Los Angeles Times* article remarked, “remained on ensuring equal opportunity in employment, transportation, healthcare, housing, [and] education.” Unlike in Baltimore and Minneapolis, the L.A. event revolved around economics. To the horror of conservatives, queers won inclusion in Carter’s plurality. Often a quiet supporter, after the L.A. gathering Carter was more forceful. As his showdown with Ronald Reagan neared, he revealed how his definition of family had changed since he became President. Families, he now believed, were “networks of relationships, rooted not in blood but on shared experiences, shared joys and sorrows, and most of all, a shared love that crosses vast distances.” He warned against conservative definitions. “Americans often feel nostalgic about a past that seems to be simpler and sometimes seems to be better,” he explained. “We can learn from the past, but we must not limit our vision of what a good family *is* just to what a family *was*.”¹⁸⁷ This view extended to other Democrats, including Vice President Walter Mondale, who explained that, since America was “a diverse and pluralistic nation,” there could be “no single, ideal model for family.”¹⁸⁸ Queers had long made the same argument.

While historians have adequately documented the rise of the “straight state,” less attention has been placed on its demise. Queers have not often been included in War on Poverty narratives, but they should be. As the War on Poverty extended into the 1970s they won public financing and established political inroads within the establishment. The combined effect was an impressive queering of the American welfare state. The timing of these breakthroughs was unfortunate. As queers joined liberal efforts to curb poverty and homelessness, a conservative counterrevolution was brewing in Southern California. In 1978, Proposition 13, or the Tax Revolt, systematically weakened the welfare state in L.A. County. Combined with federal budget cuts in the Reagan Administration, it devastated social activists. Queers had inadvertently jumped onto a sinking ship. As they encountered new and insurmountable obstacles, many questioned the durability of their politics.

¹⁸⁶ “Conference on Families Endorses ERA,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1980, A3.

¹⁸⁷ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*, 220, 272.

¹⁸⁸ Quoted in Chappell, *The War on Welfare*, 182.

Chapter Five: Austerity Activism in the Era of the Tax Revolt

“The challenge of the 1980s will be more complex and difficult to overcome in light of the public mandate issued with Proposition 13, [which may] polarize the government from the very people it attempts to serve.”

-Mayor Tom Bradley, 1979

“Did you ever wonder how a national political organization for homosexuals came into being? Why are millions of dollars of public funds being channeled to Gays? Why does the California Tax Payer have to pay?”

-Billie and Virgie Bynum, 1978

In October of 1982 two activists wrote the “The Cold, the Broke, and the Hungry,” a short pamphlet which described a program called Hudson House. An average day began at 6 a.m. When the alarm clock rang, a house manager “slowly crawled out of bed, reached for his robe and stumbled into the kitchen.” His first task was to make coffee and prepare “enough bacon and eggs, juice and bread to feed sixteen people.” As “the house began to fill with the smell of frying bacon and hot coffee,” it began to come alive. By 7 a.m. “the whole house bustled with activity, laughter, small talk, and a few groans.” Blocks away, “the same scene was taking place at another house.” This routine went on “day in and day out, rain or shine, seven days a week” and was “just another day at Hudson House.”¹ In many ways this housing program resembled earlier queer efforts. Like Gay Community Services Center (GCSC) programs, it provided shelter and fostered supportive family environments for low-income queers. Yet something was also different. Unlike the programs of the 1970s, Hudson House was never adequately funded. Without stable financing, organizers faced periods of insolvency and resorted to selling food stamps to stay afloat. In short order the program disintegrated. Instead of public financing, queers struggled to overcome the effects of austerity in the 1980s.

When he ran for President in 1976, California Governor Jerry Brown warned that Americans were entering an “era of limits,” but that statement was premature. As Brown spoke, queers made impressive local and national political inroads within the welfare state. Two years later, however, the Governor seemed

¹ Jerry Hyde and Pat Rocco, “The Cold, the Broke, and the Hungry,” October 1980. HHR, box 2, folder 3.

clairvoyant. Clear trouble emerged in 1978 with the passage of Proposition 13, commonly known as the Tax Revolt. This measure appeared on the ballot in the same year as Proposition 6, or the Briggs Initiative, which threatened to bar lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, and transgender teachers from classrooms in California. Historians have focused on the successful effort against Briggs, but Proposition 13 was equally consequential to queers.² Its passage forced California cities and counties to broadly cut social service programs. Alongside others, queers faced devastating cuts which negatively impacted their activism. Upon the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, things got worse. He fulfilled campaign promises to reduce Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding and eliminate the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA). These actions contributed to the rise of austerity, or “neoliberal,” politics which privileged privatization at the expense of the welfare state.³ This chapter explores the effects of austerity politics upon gay liberation. While scholars have explored this transition in economic and ideological contexts, less attention has been given to the grassroots. The fate of queer programs in L.A. helps to provide a fuller cost accounting of the war on welfare. Social programs serving low-income queers were truncated or eliminated. Those devoted to the most marginalized, including homeless, young, and incarcerated queers, were disproportionately wounded. Austerity measures disrupted attempts to solve metropolitan problems; indeed, they exacerbated these problems. Moreover, this worsening urban crisis encouraged the political geography of gay liberation to shift as frustrated activists rethought the utility of state solutions to poverty.

² On Briggs, see Elizabeth Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities: Organizing Sexuality in San Francisco, 1950-1994* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002); Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Josh Sides, *Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

³ See Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Culture, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003); David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); and Mark Blyth, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013). For an excellent overview and critique of the neoliberal thesis, see Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 3-5.

Fomenting Backlash

The queer political gains of the 1970s did not go unnoticed by opponents. They watched in horror as lesbians and gays received political credibility and public financing. Historians have labeled these restless forces the nascent Moral Majority.⁴ In L.A. conservative grumblers were not irrational. Queers *had* gained power and public funds *were* flowing their way. Conservatives reacted to a factual political landscape which threatened hegemonic heterosexuality. Anti-queer backlash dovetailed with growing anti-state sentiment. Both were ingredients to Propositions 6 and 13.

County Supervisor Edelman's strong support of queers made him a marked man. Compared to others, he received a heavy share of hate mail. His endorsement of gay pride parades outraged more than a few voters in the Third District. One woman was "disappointed to hear the news" and chastised the supervisor. Since he commanded "a position of responsibility and influence," his "actions [might] affect others [especially] young, impressionable persons."⁵ Another woman expressed "indignation about Edelman's lack of 'good taste'" while a man promised to "tell his friends not to vote" for Edelman again.⁶ An angry constituent felt a "deep, burning indignation" towards him. "The vast majority of your constituents do not for one minute condone, approve or accept homosexual behavior as acceptable." It was "loathsome for a supervisor to...flout, legitimize [*sic*], glorify and adulate homosexuality." Edelman's actions were "one of the reasons politicians are held in such low repute (almost as low as homosexuals)." If elected officials were willing to "wade and wallow in shit in order to get votes from sodomists [*sic*]," he promised that "come next election they [will be] kicked off the public payroll."⁷ Edelman flagged the letter as homophobic and "the type which should not be acknowledged."⁸ Some letters sought mutual understanding, but still displayed anger. A woman complained against the queer "monopoly of West

⁴ See Willam A. Link, *Righteous Warrior: Jesse Helms and the Rise of Modern Conservatism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008); Daniel K. Williams, *Gods Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).

⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 27 June 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 23 June 1980. EDE, box 822; G. Prescott to Edelman, 2 June 1980. EDE, box 824.

⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 5 July 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁸ Handwritten note on Letter to Ed Edelman, 5 July 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

Hollywood streets” which was “offensive to all decent and normal residents.” When a gay parade congested streets and prevented her from attending church services, she asked Edelman if he “would permit such a wrong-doing parade to pass by your Temple, hampering free and usual passage to worshippers on your Sabbath?” Regrettably, she believed Edelman’s support of queers was “a very shooty [*sic*] way of seeking votes” and warned that “gay votes are miniscule when compared to all others.”⁹ Edelman replied that he was sorry for the inconvenience, but stood by his decision to “represent all members of the Third District.”¹⁰ She wrote again the following year, still angry. “Property owners and...*tax-paying residents*” would no longer “allow the Gay Parade to ‘hog’ the streets,” she wrote.¹¹ This time she got no reply.

As queers assumed greater visibility in West Hollywood, constituents lobbied against their presence. A physician hoped Edelman would use his “sympathy [for the gay community] to effect a constructive change.” He and his neighbors endured “a seemingly endless parade of cars” and “street-walking hustlers.” Sadly, “individual residents [were] powerless to do anything, for if we complain we are branded as bigots.”¹² Similarly, a woman worried that “the homo-sexual situation in our area is getting out of hand. They are expressing their homo-sexuality on the streets where children can see,” a “problem which is getting worse every day.”¹³ Edelman explained that there was “no simple way to deter ‘cruising,’” but promised to “use more indirect and approaches to address the problem.” He also urged compassion and understanding, since “all people are granted certain fundamental rights such as peaceful assembly and freedom of speech” regardless of whether one “agreed with their lifestyle.”¹⁴ Queers were often associated with urban blight and decay. One businessman was convinced that “the gays [were] responsible for the deterioration of Hollywood” and demanded “a news conference to enforce the law in the area.”¹⁵ Others believed that “gay cruisers [had] invaded the community.” How could it be, a woman asked, that elected

⁹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 25 June 1983. EDE, box 250, folder 1.

¹⁰ Letter, 1 July 1983. EDE, box 250, folder 1.

¹¹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 1 July 1984. EDE, box 250, folder 1.

¹² Letter to Ed Edelman, 27 July 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 22 November 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹⁴ Letter, 18 August 1982; Ed Edelman to G. Suarez, 23 November 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹⁵ Anonymous to Ed Edelman, 24 September 1975. EDE, box 821.

officials would “condone such illegal activity”?¹⁶ One man spent several hours in Edelman’s office demanding an appointment after his “8yr old nephew” was supposedly “harassed by gays hanging out at a park restroom in West Hollywood.”¹⁷ One woman wanted “all the homosexuals out of Hollywood”; “Send them to San Francisco” suggested another.¹⁸ For many, religion dictated their views.

Typical was one letter. “God [had] made it clear that homosexuality [was a] sin,” it read. “God does not change His mind. God sets guidelines for our lives because as our creator, He knows what is best for us.” This woman was hopeful, but worried that “the day will come when He will judge what we have done with our lives, and encouraged Edelman to “change course quickly”.¹⁹ Particularly venomous was the Printed-Page Ministry, led by Billie and Virgie Bynum. The Bynums began to distribute homophobic leaflets and letters in 1976. In October of that year, they infiltrated several public buses and replaced stacks of bus schedules with a pamphlet entitled “WAKE UP CHRISTIANS.” It encouraged moral revolution. “Gays may be Sex Perverts,” it read, but they “have many friends in local, State, and Federal Government.” In Los Angeles, “politicians friendly to Gay causes are: MAYOR TOM BRADLEY, City Council Members Peggy Stevenson...Not to mention UNCLE EDELMAN.” These politicians, as well as the ACLU, would soon “be faced with the wrath of God’s Judgment.” Distributed in time for November elections, it urged Christians “to take note of the politicians who advocate sex perversion” so “that you may vote against these people. There is estimated to be about eight million Christians here in the State of California. We as a group have the potential of having the most powerful voting group in the State, so let’s begin to use it.”²⁰ Edelman’s office learned of the mass distribution and assigned David Glascock to investigate.²¹ A few years later, the Bynums struck again. “Did you ever wonder how a national political organization for homosexuals came into being,” the dynamic duo asked. “Who erected the infra-structure? Who trained the inner circle?”

¹⁶ Letters to Ed Edelman, 8 May 1981. EDE, box 821; 29 May 1980. EDE, box 822; 4 June 1976. EDE, box 824; 1 October 1976. EDE, box 825.

¹⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 25 April 1983. EDE, box 821.

¹⁸ Letters to Ed Edelman, 20 May 1976. EDE, box 826; 30 November 1981. EDE, box 822.

¹⁹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 27 June 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

²⁰ “WAKE UP CHRISTIANS,” pamphlet, 1976. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

²¹ Letter, 13 October 1976. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

Who taught them the art of using dis-information, political contacts?” Most importantly, “who bankrolled the group??” How had “the Gay Community” become “so deeply entrenched in local politics.” Why were “millions of dollars of public funds being channeled into the local Gay Community? Why does the average California Tax Payer have to pay for Gay’s? [sic].”²² The answer was Edelman. Far from a crank accusation, the Bynums followed the money. Organizations like the GCSC accessed public funds via County coffers. In a nasty letter to Edelman, this time in the midst of the AIDS crisis, one woman asked, “shouldn’t the liberal politicians be blamed for the tragic situation [of AIDS]??” After all, wasn’t “it only fair to blame the liberal pro-Gay politician whose promotion and support for sex perversion” had “directly resulted in these horrible diseases??” If voters wanted to exact retribution in the next election, they ought to target “politicians who have helped extol and advance the cause of homosexuality in California” including Edelman.²³ These writers responded to an altered political landscape. For queers it was a blessing; for them it was a curse.

For the most part, Edelman could challenge or ignore these complaints. Most county supervisors were impervious to election challengers. One aide recalled how “seldom” it was “that a member of the [County] Board of Supervisors” would be “voted out of office.” Edelman was “an example of that. His deciding to run made [others] *not* want to run. The consolidation of money and endorsements made a challenge untenable.²⁴ City leaders were less secure. When Mayor Bradley endorsed the GCSC, constituents ridiculed him. “I vigorously protest your publicly coming out in favor of the ‘Gay Community’s’ so-called rights at the expense of the *majority* and its welfare,” a La Crescenta woman wrote. Queer were entitled to “the rights of all mentally ill people: medical, psychological and spiritual care in order that they might become whole people. No more except for the right to life and to vote.” If Bradley condoned homosexuality, he “was either hopelessly ignorant or a very unworthy public servant.” She promised to “remember at election time.”²⁵ Some writers claimed to be disaffected Democrats. In the 1970s religious and “moral”

²² Letter to Ed Edelman, 9 January 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

²³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 1984. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

²⁴ Jim Gilson oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 20 December 2013 (Hereafter Gilson OH).

²⁵ Letter to Tom Bradley, 22 June 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

issue voters had yet to coalesce around the Republican Party. Queers helped facilitate the transition for some. “I was completely shocked when you opened your doors to the ‘gays’,” wrote one man. “Now we have a haven for all the perverted sub-humans congregating in the southern California area.” This “loyal Democrat” expected “laws to protect the family,” not harm them. “Where do you stand Mayor Bradley?” he asked. “For God’s laws or against?”²⁶ One man chastised the Mayor for “convoluted thinking.” He had seen two article in his newspaper. One showed the Mayor “working to clean up the stink in Hollywood” while the other announced “plans to name [an] aide as [a] link to the gays.” This made no sense. “It appears obvious that much of the mess now being tackled in Hollywood arises from homosexuals” who spread “the rot which leads to growth of the criminal element.” The inconsistency smacked of political pandering. “The homosexual population is but 10% of the whole,” he reasoned. “I suggest that you reverse course for the good of the City of Los Angeles, and for the good of Tom Bradley.” Was this the “new Democrats [*sic*] strategy,” he wondered.²⁷ Others agreed. “Homosexual people are sick,” a woman wrote Bradley. “They do not need a ‘sounding board’ through your office...I have an idea it will be your last term unless you stand with the majority.”²⁸ The Mayor sometimes responded to these angry letters.

When one resident “drew the line when it comes to paying the salary of a known homosexual,” Bradley defended himself. “In a city of 2.8 million,” he explained, “it is to be expected that people with varied lifestyles and points of view will be living alongside one another.” However, “When I was re-elected to my second term in office, it was not in order that I might be Mayor of some of the people, but rather, to be Mayor of all the people.”²⁹ Considering the political atmosphere, this response was bold and resembled Bradley’s attitudes towards racial animosity. When he hesitated announcing Gay Pride Week in Los Angeles, one constituent urged him forward. “As an elected official you are answerable to the electorate.” In light of the “bigoted religious views of Anita Bryant,” how could, Bradley, “*a Black person* align himself

²⁶ Letter to Tom Bradley, 7 July 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

²⁷ Letter to Tom Bradley, 29 June 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

²⁸ Letter to Tom Bradley, 25 June 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

²⁹ Letters to Tom Bradley, 25 June 1977; 15 July 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

with forces of hatred and discrimination?”³⁰ Racial and sexual struggles were linked. When he ran for Governor, Bradley made the connection himself. “In Los Angeles,” he wrote, “the gay and lesbian community has worked hard for public recognition of basic human rights.” He “recognized the special needs of the gay and lesbian community,” but also cast it alongside “minority efforts to improve human relations” and extend “Civil Rights.” He took credit for supporting the GCSC in this endeavor and celebrated queer endorsements.³¹

When Edelman or Bradley defended their support of queers, they demonstrated transformed liberal thinking, not just politicking. It would have been easy to ignore letters or, in these private correspondences, attempt to play both sides. But they defended queer inclusion in local politics, testifying to the degree by which queers had changed the Democratic Party. Still, backlash was significant. In 1978, Propositions 6 and 13 fused anti-queer and anti-state discourses in transformative ways.

Briggs and the Tax Revolt

The Briggs Initiative was a significant test for queers. To many observers the defeat of Proposition 6 was a consequential victory. While it was important, so was Proposition 13, which succeeded that same year. Both concerned queers and the state, and should be analyzed together.³² As Daniel K. Williams and J. Brooks Flippen argued, by the late 1970s the cultural and economic aims of the Moral Majority and Christian Right had fused.³³ While the Briggs Initiative failed, the main conservative assault triumphed. This crippled the welfare state in California and altered queer activism.

Proposition 13 proved central to the conservative counterrevolution. At its core, however, it emerged from populist rage that defied easy political categorization. “It was,” Jonathan Bell suggested, “in some senses a product of the failure of liberals to grapple with the problem of taxes as much as the success

³⁰ Letter to Tom Bradley, 29 June 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

³¹ “Tom Bradley and the Gay and Lesbian Community,” 1982. TBP, box 612, folder 2.

³² Jonathan Bell has analyzed both in tandem, but for different reasons. See Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 275-278.

³³ Williams, *Gods Own Party* and Flippen, *Jimmy Carter*.

of the right in making government the problem.”³⁴ Molly Michelmore convincingly argued that the Tax Revolt stemmed from a structural deficiency within liberalism. While Democrats expanded the welfare state, they concealed the costs. Indeed, “stealth [welfare] programs...in combination with a bipartisan defense of low tax rates” served to “undermine support for the activist state.”³⁵ Few Angelenos realized their dependency on state subsidies or county programs. As conservatives gained traction, taxation and welfare fueled a populist revolt that cast middle-class homeowners as victims of wasteful minority social service programs. As the economy suffered amid stagflation these trends created a perfect environment for tax rebellion. Proposition 13 was spearheaded by Howard Jarvis and Paul Gann. While Gann gained the spotlight after the election, Jarvis became the official face in 1978. The Republican was also an apartment owner and lobbyist for the Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association (AOA). Although the campaign revolved around homeowners, it was from the beginning supported by business interests. Jarvis was a staunch opponent of rent control and hoped that Proposition 13 would liberate landlords and owners from burdensome regulations. He concealed these aims and “cast himself in the mold of the American populist,” not an AOA lobbyist.³⁶ Isaac William Martin argued that many supporters did not share Jarvis’ ultra-conservative politics, but were mobilized by a belief that the government needed to protect them from the market.³⁷ The tax crunch that hit middle-class property owners in the 1970s caused the average price of a single-family home in L.A. (and thus property taxes) to jump 120 percent, making the “prospect of losing one’s home, particularly for the elderly and others on fixed incomes...very real.” The “allure of Proposition 13 lay in its simplicity” and was easily misunderstood. It promised to revert property assessments to 1975 levels and freeze them. Increases would be limited to two-percent per year. Most importantly, Proposition 13 “prohibited any government body-local or state-from raising any new taxes without a two-thirds vote of

³⁴ Bell, *California Crucible*, 273.

³⁵ Molly C. Michelmore, *Tax and Spend: The Welfare State, Tax Politics, and the Limits of American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 14.

³⁶ Robert Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 319.

³⁷ See Isaac William Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt: How the Property Tax Transformed American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

the governing body.”³⁸ This threatened municipal revenue-generating capacity and conflated “tax reform with antiliberalism” in an all-out attack on the welfare state. Throughout the campaign, Jarvis and his allies decried “welfare bums” and labeled social programs wasteful.³⁹ Some conservatives criticized public officials for wasting money on useless programs, like the GCSC. Why, some asked, were “millions of dollars of public funds being channeled into the Gay Community?”⁴⁰ It was easy to exploit the notion that social minorities were gaining ground “at the expense of the *majority* and its welfare.”⁴¹ Since county operations received scant attention, voters indulged in fantastical understandings of waste and fraud.

Liberals saw the strategy and mounted a late, unsuccessful challenge. Supervisor Edelman came out strongly against Proposition 13 and declared it “a \$5 billion giveaway to commercial, industrial and multiple-unit property owners.” Since “only \$2 billion of the total property tax reduction [was] targeted for homeowners,” he argued, “property owners [were] the secret beneficiaries.” He was right. It was “commercial, industrial and apartment interests” which would be the main beneficiaries.⁴² This message was difficult to disseminate to voters, however. One Edelman aide recalled frustration in trying to reveal “what [Jarvis’] actual job *was*. Forget what his political position; *this was his job*.”⁴³ Explaining the crippling effects of Proposition 13 on county resources was equally difficult. The loss of \$7 billion would result in “the destruction of vital local services which people depend on daily for their well-being,” Edelman argued.⁴⁴ Public libraries would lose \$12 million; the Health Department \$123 million; the CDC \$2 million; and County staffing \$1 million. Thousands of jobs would be eliminated overnight.⁴⁵ At the GCSC, nearly every program was tied to the county and would be cut. These statistics proved accurate, but conservatives

³⁸ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 237-240.

³⁹ Michelmore, *Tax and Spend*, 135.

⁴⁰ Letter to Ed Edelman, 9 January 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

⁴¹ Letter to Tom Bradley, 22 June 1977. TBP, box 171, folder 1.

⁴² Ed Edelman news-bulletin, 24 March 1978. EDE, box 910, folder 16.

⁴³ Jim Gilson OH.

⁴⁴ Ed Edelman news-bulletin, 24 March 1978. EDE, box 910, folder 16.

⁴⁵ Ed Edelman, Impact of Proposition 13, 14 April 1978. EDE, box 910, folder 16.

had a more attractive argument. Jarvis promised to deliver “something for nothing” while liberals struggled to justify taxation.⁴⁶

When voters went to the polls in June, they overwhelmingly passed Proposition 13. In the immediate aftermath, “local governments saw more than \$6 billion in funding evaporate.”⁴⁷ The success signaled an end of an “epochal bargain with the federal state, industrial capital, and local officials.” Middle-class Californians would no longer “hold corporate capital responsible” for their plight. Instead they endorsed “a counterrevolution against the liberal state” and “poor and low-income people.”⁴⁸ In L.A. a profound transformation occurred. One Edelman aide viewed “Proposition 13 as a sea change, particularly for the county because it was the *county* that set the tax rate” and “decided how taxes would be spent.” For decades supervisors relied on generous budgets. Now they faced a loss of authority and control.⁴⁹ Angelenos were “going down this road where life would be so much more difficult,” an observer lamented. “Even the people who got it intellectually, they *didn't really get it*. We were moving to this anti-tax, anti-government era.” On the Board of Supervisors, “that certainly became clearer every day, and it became incumbent on smart people to figure out how to work within constraints.” Edelman found this difficult. He remained in “a ‘we're-still-building-things’” mentality despite the new climate and “never totally gave in to the new reality.” Moreover, the costs of Proposition 13 remained hidden from voters. An Edelman aide ironically noted that “we went overboard in our campaign [against Proposition 13], saying things like, ‘Proposition 13 will mean all children die,’ and in fact, they didn't. We kind of cobbled it together... Yes, the streets in Los Angeles [began to] suck, but people still got to work. We did *just a good enough job*. We actually did *too good a job*.”⁵⁰ The effects would be protracted and harmful, but not immediately apparent. Queers had little time to digest, for they immediately shifted gears to combat Proposition 6.

⁴⁶ See David O. Sears, *Tax Revolt: Something for Nothing in California* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

⁴⁷ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 241.

⁴⁸ Self, *American Babylon*, 325.

⁴⁹ Jim Gilson OH.

⁵⁰ Rich Llewellyn oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 25 April 2014 (Hereafter Llewellyn OH).

The Briggs Initiative emerged from the Anita Bryant movement. In the twilight of Carter's presidency, the politics of family became tense. An evangelical and conservative activist, Bryant was convinced that "militant homosexuals" were destroying the American family and worked to roll back gay rights ordinances. Her first victory came in the summer of 1977 (just days after the HUD decision). In Dade County, Florida, voters decisively repealed an anti-discrimination ordinance. The campaign earned national attention and was supported by Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson. Bryant also received support from California State Senator John Briggs, who travelled to Miami in support. He viewed gay rights not as "a civil rights issue," but as a crusade against families. Victory in Florida emboldened Briggs, who returned to California to launch Proposition 6 (which he hoped might propel him to the Governor's Mansion).⁵¹ His California Defend Our Children Committee "trafficked in parental front porch rhetoric" and soon focused on teachers in public schools.⁵² His efforts tapped into a strong undercurrent of homegrown homophobia. The forces which propelled anti-queer campaigns in the 1960s had not dissipated and Southern California proved to be Briggs' bastion of support. In Pasadena, Stop Gay Power, an offshoot of Robert G. Grant's Christian Voice, advocated for Proposition 6 and "on behalf of America's children and families." Briggs believed that conservatives could "make an historic difference in the perilous days we face" through the classroom. Prominent supporters included LAPD Chief Edward M. Davis, who "commended" Stop Gay Power and "prayed for victory" in November. "An aroused community," he crowed, "can do much toward protecting itself from predators in its midst." Stop Gay Power also touted national supporters, including singer Pat Boone who called "upon all Christian citizens to join together in love and concerned action."⁵³ In the *Los Angeles Times*, a supporter argued that queers were a grave "interference with liberty." From his perspective, "When a measure interferes with the rights of the majority, it interferes with freedom."⁵⁴ Proposition 6 would protect heterosexuals from militants.

⁵¹ Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 243.

⁵² Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 90.

⁵³ "STOP GAY POWER" newsletter, undated. MKC, box 21, folder "Homosexuals."

⁵⁴ Letters, *Los Angeles Times*, 16 June 1977. BBP, box 1, folder 3.

National religious leaders also chimed in. In a newsletter for his *Old-Time Gospel Hour*, Jerry Falwell declared “war against the evils threatening America.” This would not be “a war with guns and bullets,” he surmised (although he did promote gun ownership). Instead it would be “fought with the Bible, prayer and Christian involvement.”⁵⁵ Queer rights were “special rights,” he insisted, and the Briggs Initiative would “restore the will of the majority.” Of course, Falwell sought “financial support” in this effort. Alongside his endorsement, he asked followers to send “at least \$25, but hopefully \$50 or more” to his own organization.⁵⁶ In a *Christian Voice* newsletter, Robert G. Grant emphasized the importance of the Briggs Initiative. “The truth about militant gays, liberal educators, cruel atheists, and godless politicians,” he wrote, would make “God-loving Americans angry.” Activists ought to ask their neighbors how they would “feel if tomorrow your child was taught by a practicing homosexual?” Queer teachers would “*openly advocate their ‘lifestyle’*” and “recruit” many children. A vote for Proposition 6 was a vote to rescue children. If activists lost, then “godless militant gays, liberal educators and vicious atheists will tell you how your children will be educated.”⁵⁷ On the heels of Proposition 13, liberals mobilized.

The anti-Briggs effort has been mostly told from a Bay-Area perspective. After all, San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk spearheaded the “No on 6” effort and forcefully debated John Briggs. In popular accounts, such as the documentary *The Times of Harvey Milk*, the battle of Proposition 6 occurred in San Francisco.⁵⁸ In fact the effort was statewide and Milk relied upon Southern California activists for financial assistance. David Goodstein, a wealthy queer Angeleno, financed the campaign and political consultant Don Bradley designed a publicity onslaught. Additionally, Milk reached out to David Glascock and Don Amador.⁵⁹ Together they built political support against Briggs. One result was the New Alliance for Gay

⁵⁵ Old-Time Gospel Hour newsletter, 1980. BBP, box 1, folder 1.

⁵⁶ Moral Majority newsletter, 1980. BBP, box 1, folder 1.

⁵⁷ Christian Voice newsletter, 1978. MKC, box 21, folder “Homosexuals.”

⁵⁸ Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1982); Robert Epstein (dir.) *The Times of Harvey Milk* (New Yorker Films, 1984); John D’Emilio, “Gay Politics, Gay Community: San Francisco’s Experience” in D’Emilio, *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics, and the University* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Armstrong, *Forging Gay Identities*, 129-132; and Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 88-89.

⁵⁹ Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, 250.

Equality, which “excelled at fundraising” and anchored efforts around “the right to privacy.”⁶⁰ Fundraisers featured national figures, like George McGovern, who blistered Proposition 6 as “un-American” and “unconstitutional.” The Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles (MECLA), the Stonewall Democratic Club (SDC), the National Organization for Women (NOW), and the National Gay Rights Lobby all worked against Proposition 6.⁶¹

Behind the scenes, Glascock convinced Edelman to take a leading role in the campaign.⁶² This was not a difficult sell, for Edelman supported queers and personally disliked John Briggs. The SDC encouraged the supervisor to chastise any Democrat who supported Proposition 6. At a San Gabriel forum, Democratic State Assemblyman Joe Montoya shocked the audience when he “came out *in favor* of the Briggs Initiative.” Montoya went further and stated that “he did not consider gays a minority” and insisted that they “should not be included in any ‘human rights’ category.” The SDC argued that “if Montoya wins, the Gay Community has lost a friend and gained an enemy.”⁶³ Glascock felt Montoya’s answer was “stupid and inconsistent” and advised Edelman to intervene. “Discuss this matter with Montoya,” he recommended, “because it is going to continue to be an issue and could come back to haunt us.”⁶⁴ After a closed-door meeting with the Supervisor, Montoya announced that he had changed his mind. He was now in the “No on 6” camp. Endorsements mattered and the SDC “mapped out an intensive, and successful, strategy to secure resolutions against Proposition 6 from the Democratic State Central Committee, the California Democratic Council (CDC), and Democratic Committees from all over the state.”⁶⁵ By November a majority of California politicians had come out against Briggs, including Edelman, Tom Bradley, Peggy Stevenson, Jerry Brown, and Ronald Reagan. President Jimmy Carter also voiced his opposition. Voters agreed and decisively voted no.

⁶⁰ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 91.

⁶¹ New Alliance for Gay Equality letter, 3 February 1978. TCOF, box 28, folder 6.

⁶² David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 26 January 1978. EDE, box 909, folder 1.

⁶³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 12 May 1978. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

⁶⁴ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 16 May 1978. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

⁶⁵ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 226-227.

The victory was a stunning achievement. Randy Shilts revealed that, during the election night festivities, Supervisor Milk made a celebratory phone call to Don Amador in L.A. The Mayor's liaison was "celebrating the victory with a gay teen" who "a year before, was ready to kill himself." After his parents threatened to institutionalize him, he "boarded a bus for Los Angeles, registered to vote, and that day cast his first ballot against Proposition 6."⁶⁶ How ironic that Milk called Amador. He had been a passionate fighter in two ballot initiatives in 1978. On this night, he was celebrating a grand victory. But five months earlier he had been dealt a hefty blow. The defeat of Proposition 6 empowered Amador as an activist; but the passage of Proposition 13 would cost him his job. As a CETA employee, the loss of city and county revenue would phase out his position. That was not readily apparent in 1978 as activists worked to expand their political reach in L.A.

Fighting Back: City Politics after Briggs

Before his untimely departure, Don Amador utilized his role as liaison to advance queer rights within the Mayor's office, efforts which complemented the work of David Glascock. Amador's mission was more complicated as Bradley was more cautious than Edelman. The recent experience of Proposition 6, however, created an unexpected moment for progress. As had happened in the 1960s, conservative attacks earned queers political support.

Shortly after his appointment, Amador reported that the most important "gay issues" were a lack of affordable housing, outreach with racial minorities, and law enforcement harassment. He "found over 15 [non-GCSC] Gay people working on housing [issues]," but few "working with each other." Amador hoped that Bradley's office could "organize all 15 as one board, so as a group they can work on grant proposals and other projects together." Alongside Galscock, Amador lobbied Bradley to support the GCSC within the Hollywood Revitalization Committee, which was established to combat homelessness.⁶⁷ Since these funds were controlled by the city, Amador's lobbying was important. In 1979, the GCSC submitted a grant and

⁶⁶ Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, 250.

⁶⁷ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 27 April 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

noted that the Hollywood Human Services Project had found “376 people during a two-week period in need of emergency shelter.” The “largest groups in need of temporary housing,” the GCSC maintained, “are young, single men and women (many of whom are gay).” A grant would allow the GCSC to “feed and house up to 40 persons per night.”⁶⁸ The proposal was endorsed by Edelman and Helene Cohen, who administered the Hollywood Human Services Project. She stressed that “emergency shelter is perhaps Hollywood’s most visible human need,” and lauded the GCSC’s “long-standing and respected reputation for providing quality services to gays and non-gays alike.”⁶⁹ Funds also allowed activists to open a new GCSC location on Wilshire Boulevard. Upon its opening Amador arranged for Bradley to take a tour and be photographed alongside Morris Kight.⁷⁰ This illustrated the benefits of having a pro-GCSC advocate in the Mayor’s office. Like Glascock, Amador could identify funding opportunities and Bradley’s appearance signaled newfound political support.⁷¹

Amador worked to insure queer racial diversity. He established ties with other mayoral liaisons to illustrate the point and began “working closely with A. Lee, the Mayor’s Native American Liaison.” This gave him a “greater knowledge, understanding and action of government programs to help our respective minority communities.” There was significant common ground, Amador explained, as “Native American peoples were once the most accepting toward their own Gay individuals.” When he arranged meetings between Bradley and activists, he included “Gay Blacks, senior citizens, Latinos, youth and women.”⁷² This strategy reflected the diversity of queer life and stressed political alliances. It also reflected Amador’s political worldview. In an interview with the *Hollywood Independent*, he bemoaned “white, wealthy, upper middle class homosexuals” who were too often the face of the movement. “If I sponsor some event,” he explained, “I will see that invitations are given out to every type of gay from every part of the community.” This was an important way to fight “discrimination within the gay community towards the elderly and

⁶⁸ Hollywood Interim Housing Project proposal, 1979. GLCSC, box 6, folder 7.

⁶⁹ Helene Cohen to Hollywood Revitalization Committee, 30 November 1978. GLCSC, box 6, folder 7.

⁷⁰ Photograph: Mayor Tom Bradley at the GCSC, 1979. PRP, box 64, folder 7.

⁷¹ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 27 April 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁷² Ibid.

blacks.” The latter were “almost separated with their own bars and own areas. Black gays come to me,” Amador confessed, “and say, ‘Yes, we’ll become involved, when we are *included*.’” This response encouraged him to work towards “cleaning up discrimination within our own community.”⁷³

Establishing political and financial bridges with Los Angeles’ first African American Mayor helped. It was important to have Bradley’s support go public. Before it was clear that the CETA program would be eliminated, the Mayor’s office arranged for a small grant to be awarded to the Women’s Resources Unit of the GCSC. It funded “on-site sensitivity training for staff members of City and County agencies who serve the public, including members of the gay community.” It also called for racial, ethnic, and gender sensitivity training. Some GCSC organizers encountered “difficulty ‘getting in the door’ at some agencies,” so the new training program would “familiarize” racial minorities and city administrators “with [GCSC] programs.” All members of the Mayor’s staff were required to attend, either at City Hall or the GCSC.⁷⁴ Just a year after the Briggs Initiative, the City of Los Angeles was sponsoring a queer educational program to build bridges among social minorities. Advancements did not readily trickle down to law enforcement. While Edelman could intervene with the Sheriff’s Department, the LAPD answered to the Mayor. Homophobia had been stitched into the LAPD by Chief Edward M. Davis, an outspoken conservative with sights on higher office. At a Christian Business Men’s Committee meeting in 1976, Davis accused the powerful “homosexual lobby” of “getting away with murder.” Making no distinction between his public service and private faith, he pledged to rely on the Bible and “old fashioned morality laws” to clean up the city.⁷⁵ The Southern California Branch of the American Civil Liberties Union (SCACLU) relied on Davis’ controversial statements for recruitment and fundraising. Fliers depicted outrageous statements and asked “With crazy Ed in charge, how can you afford NOT to join the ACLU?”⁷⁶ Through Bradley, Amador battled for change.

⁷³ “Q and A with Don Amador,” *Hollywood Independent*, 6 May 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁷⁴ Grace Davis to Tom Bradley staff, 1 March 1979. TBP, box 753, folder 1.

⁷⁵ “Chief Davis Pleads for ‘Morality Laws,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 October 1976, 30.

⁷⁶ American Civil Liberties Union flier. ACLULGC, box 23, folder 5.

He reported that “problems with police [were] pouring in from numerous Gay people” who detailed “harassment in bars and public spaces.”⁷⁷ Davis’ venom could sometimes be especially unkind. When Christopher Street West President Sharon Cornelison invited him to participate in a parade, he declined, adding that he would happily participate in a “GAY CONVERSION” parade.⁷⁸ When his insensitive response went public, activists hanged him in effigy as Mayor Bradley looked on.⁷⁹ Luckily for queers, Davis held political ambitions. In the midst of Proposition 6, he resigned to run for Governor. In the primary for the Republican nomination, he ran against John Briggs. In fact, he cast himself as more conservative and condemned the *Los Angeles Times* “strong editorial support of homosexuality” by cancelling his subscription.⁸⁰ His primary campaign speeches became regular spectacles. At a meeting in Costa Mesa, Davis declared that he “always felt the government really was out to force me to hire 4-foot-11 transvestite morons.” Describing himself as an “average Californian,” he was proud to have also been “the lightning rod for Gay Liberation” in Los Angeles. He represented the vast majority of residents in the state who “don’t want to be pushed around by homosexuals.”⁸¹ His candidacy revealed a strong homophobic conservative discourse in 1978. Although he won the endorsement of several organizations and individuals (including John Briggs, who dropped out early after his campaign gained zero traction), he came in a close second in the June Republican primary.⁸² Years later he won a seat in the California State Senate. For activists his departure was welcomed.

The new Chief of Police, Daryl F. Gates, was no ally, but was an improvement. Upon announcement of his selection activists demanded an audience. Gates agreed and attended a meeting at the home of Sheldon Andelson. Amador appeared on behalf of Bradley. The “three hour reception included questions” pertaining to “inaccurate child molestation statistics,” harassment of queer LAPD officers, the

⁷⁷ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 27 April 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁷⁸ See <http://www.lettersofnote.com/2013/02/gay-conversion-week.html> (Web, last accessed 20 June 2015).

⁷⁹ “Davis Hanged in Effigy,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 April 1976, B1.

⁸⁰ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 216.

⁸¹ “Davis’ Focus on Unconventional Sex Worries Some GOP Leaders,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1977, C1.

⁸² “Conservative GOP Group Backs Davis,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 April 1978, 6; “Briggs Quits Governor’s Race, Backs Davis,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1978, 3.

establishment of a “Gay Studies” program within the LAPD, tactics of vice officers, and the legitimacy of the GCSC. This last issue was important. Activists asked Gates if he “would help policy personnel understand the Center’s purpose” and “a meeting at the Center was suggested.” Gates agreed, something that Davis would never have done. Since the meeting had been organized by Bradley’s office, Amador was angry that he did not receive recognition. Instead “Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson took most of the credit.” Amador surmised that she did so in order to appease “gays living in her district” who had “accused her of doing very little for Gay neighborhoods.”⁸³ Such was the nature of Bradley, who often preferred to remain in the background. Less than a month later Gates admitted that figures which showed that “most child molesters are homosexuals were misleading.” Admonishing those responsible, he offered an apology and promised transparency.⁸⁴ That he made this admission two months prior to the vote on Briggs was terribly significant. After all, Proposition 6 rested on such bogus assumptions.

In other ways, Gates remained disconnected and uninterested in gay community concerns. When Amador urged Gates to address “the recent killing of two Gay men” in Silver Lake, the LAPD did nothing. “The majority of Gay constituents,” Amador informed Mayor Bradley, “call this office asking for help and direction. Some have information that may give the police clues” but “there is a lack of response from [the LAPD].”⁸⁵ Amid the assassination of San Francisco Supervisor Harvey Milk and the paltry sentence handed to Dan White, his murderer, Amador warned that violence could escalate. When the White Night Riots rocked San Francisco, he pleaded for the Mayor Bradley to “offer support, help and guidance to prevent greater violence.”⁸⁶ Bradley publicly condemned the Dan White verdict.⁸⁷ While Gates proved insensitive to the needs of many social minorities (and was compelled to resign after the 1992 Rodney King Riots after his use of paramilitary force was widely criticized), still, he worked with the GCSC on many of its youth programs in the 1980s. Through Don Amador, Bradley helped to secure this limited but important reform.

⁸³ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 14 June 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁸⁴ “Molester Data Erroneous, Gates Claims,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 July 1978, 1.

⁸⁵ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 13 March 1979. TBP, box 753, folder 1.

⁸⁶ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 22 May 1979. TBP, box 753, folder 1.

⁸⁷ “Bradley Reacts Angrily to White Release,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1984, 1.

“I honestly get the feeling,” Amador wrote, “that Chief Gates is willing to communicate and to learn.” Most importantly, “it is refreshing to be viewed as a minority ‘with problems’ rather than a minority that *IS* a problem.”⁸⁸ This limited breakthrough paled in comparison to the 1979 citywide gay rights ordinance.

San Francisco activists secured passage of an ordinance prohibiting sexual discrimination in 1978. Similar ordinances appeared in Eugene, Oregon; Wichita, Kansas; and Miami, Florida. But, with the exception of San Francisco, all of these efforts had been rolled back. Los Angeles became the first major city to approve a gay rights ordinance *after* the Anita Bryant backlash. Once again conservative activism strengthened queer rights. Activists were supported by the SCACLU, which had “several attorneys working on the Ordinance with the help of the City Attorney.”⁸⁹ The ordinance also presented a political opportunity for Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson, whose relationship with queers was in need of assistance. Along with Councilman Joel Wachs, she agreed to sponsor the measure and presented it to the City Council in May of 1979. Largely modeled after San Francisco’s measure, the ordinance forbade discrimination in both public and private housing and employment. During the preliminary hearing, only one council member, John S. Gibson, Jr., cast a dissenting vote.⁹⁰ One week later, the matter was opened for public debate. In the “sometimes emotional” deliberations, the City Council found themselves outnumbered by an oppositional audience, many of whom traveled from the San Fernando Valley. A man from Northridge condemned the “attack on Judeo-Christian traditions.” The legislative chairwoman of the Women’s City Club brought her Bible, quoted verses, and labeled homosexuality an “abomination.” The ordinance would protect “immorality, degeneracy, and depravity,” she charged. Another feared that the “gay movement was eroding the family unit.” These views were supported by councilmen Gibson and Robert M. Wilkinson, both of whom voted against the ordinance. In rebuttal, Joel Wachs argued that “discrimination against gays is harmful to the city. When we deny one group of people rights to be productive citizens, we deny the very

⁸⁸ “Chief Gates Interview,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 April 1978, 4.

⁸⁹ Don Amador to Tom Bradley, 13 March 1979. TBP, box 753, folder 1.

⁹⁰ “City Gay Rights Measure Wins Tentative Approval,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 May 1979, 3.

root of our democratic principle.” As a compromise, the ordinance included a religious exceptions policy.⁹¹ Approved thirteen to two, the measure was sent to Mayor Bradley, who signed it quietly.⁹²

Like Carter, Bradley avoided loud embraces of gay rights. Asked if the Mayor thought his life “immoral,” Don Amador hesitated. “Well, I think it’s not whether he considers it moral or immoral. The mayor wouldn’t have me here if he was not concerned about gay people.”⁹³ Whether or not he approved, Bradley was convinced that queers represented a legitimate minority. In the years to come, he became more visible. Like Edelman, he visited the GCSC regularly, attended SDC meetings, and spoke at MECLA events. At one speech in 1984, Bradley was proud to have “improved the quality of gay life in Los Angeles.” In addition to signing the gay rights ordinance, he supported GCSC programs and later became strong ally in the fight against AIDS.⁹⁴ When he ran for governor, Bradley praised the quest for “gay public recognition of basic human rights, personal integrity, and dignity for everyone.” He was proud to earn endorsements from the SDC and *The Advocate*.⁹⁵ In the immediate aftermath of Propositions 6 and 13, activists continued to make important political inroads, but below the surface austerity measures limited their impact.

Social Service Activism in Hard Times

In his study of race in postwar Oakland, Robert Self argued that the fiscal impact of Proposition 13 was devastating for African Americans. The structural limitations of the Tax Revolt meant that “black power had no real chance of instantiation at the city level.” Instead, power could only be demonstrated through boycotts and the election of African Americans to city council seats. While these were “epochal in importance,” they did little to alter economic inequalities.⁹⁶ Scholars have not yet connected gay liberation

⁹¹ “Council OKs Gay Rights Measure,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 May 1979, 20.

⁹² “Bradley Signs Gay Rights Law Without Fanfare,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1979, 1.

⁹³ “Q and A with Don Amador,” *Hollywood Independent*, 6 May 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁹⁴ Tom Bradley speech to MECLA, 29 January 1984. TBP, box 4896, folder 4.

⁹⁵ “Statement on the Gay and Lesbian Community,” Tom Bradley for Governor Campaign, 1982. TBP, box 612, folder 2.

⁹⁶ Self, *American Babylon*, 326-327.

with the Tax Revolt, but in L.A. Proposition 13 had a deleterious effect on queer activism. As CDBG and CETA programs were curtailed, activists struggled to provide social services.

During the summer of 1978 queers fought alongside others against Proposition 13.⁹⁷ Much of the gay rights plank required a strong and inclusive welfare state. So did the GCSC. One month before Californians went to the polls, David Glascock estimated potential effects of the measure. His findings were foreboding. Proposition 13 would “drastically affect the Gay Community Services Center,” he concluded. Since the County funded several programs with CDBG monies, these would be eliminated. These included the Prisoner, Probation, and Parole (PPP), housing, drug counseling, and lesbian resources programs. The GCSC staff would face certain catastrophe. There are “80 positions in the GCSC funded through the CETA Program,” Glascock noted. These “will be eliminated with the passage of Proposition 13.”⁹⁸ While Proposition 13 did not apparently target CETA, it slit the program’s throat by forcing a shuffling of county resources. CETA programs provided jobs and security from the marketplace which nurtured a professional class of activists. At the GCSC most program directors were partially or fully CETA-funded. In the Mayor’s office Don Amador was hired through a CETA grant. Realizing that the county now faced tough budget calls, supervisors were informed that CETA would be suspended in 1980. By that point, the program was under heavy assault. Some alleged that it was corrupt, since politicians used funds for “overt political purposes” (Bradley was a clear example).⁹⁹ While this was true, social services agencies could also be classified as “political.” It was impossible to expect objectivity. Moreover, CETA mandated funds serve low-income individuals and neighborhoods. “Political” jobs could accomplish both. Bradley made this argument as he tried to save CETA. “I see nothing wrong with employing someone who meets the guidelines. Whether that person worked in a campaign, or [not]...they must be unemployed, live in the city, and meet the qualifications,” he told reporters.¹⁰⁰ His was a losing battle, as the termination of his own gay liaison demonstrated.

⁹⁷ Bell, *California Crucible*, 276.

⁹⁸ David Glascock to Ed Edelman, 5 May 1978. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

⁹⁹ “County Asked to Suspend CETA Program,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 February 1980, D1.

¹⁰⁰ “Bradley Defends City Hiring Under CETA Program,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 December 1978, B1.

Unlike David Glascock, Amador's position was fully-funded through CETA. As his fate became clear he came under great stress. Although he usually got along with Edelman's staff, he suddenly proved "quite hostile." One aide found his behavior quixotic until she grasped Amador's predicament. "After Don and I spoke for a while," she concluded, "his hostility seemed to disappear." The root of "the problem is that his job with the Mayor is being phased out since he is a CETA employee."¹⁰¹ The SDC lobbied for Amador, but it was impossible. "We share your concern," the Mayor wrote. "The entire City is faced with some difficult decisions both as a result of CETA and the drastic loss of revenue following the passage of Proposition 13." Amador was one among 50 members of the Mayor's staff who would be terminated. The "severe budget cuts" were unavoidable, but Bradley promised to work against "the possible breakdown of communication between government and various segments of the community."¹⁰² Towards the end Amador made appeals to Edelman's office. "As a representative within the Gay Community," he explained, "my concerns are those of the late Supervisor Harvey Milk: to build bridges everywhere." He hoped to help Edelman on "a number of issues" in "any way possible."¹⁰³ Unfortunately, the supervisor wasn't hiring. Proposition 13 had frozen his budget. These terminations isolated queer activists from their government.

While Edelman and Bradley remained allies, the Tax Revolt crippled their power. The final death of CETA dragged out for four years. Even with the termination of eighty staff members in 1979, the GCSC was collecting close to \$400,000 in CETA funds in 1981. This provided salaries for nearly half of the remaining staff. But the election of Ronald Reagan assured that CETA would end. Even before he assumed the presidency, Reagan promised to eliminate the program. His urban task force, led by future California Governor Pete Wilson, considered CETA a "failure" which had "squandered precious resources" on "useless programs" and the Job Training Partnership Act of 1982 eliminated it.¹⁰⁴ This was transformational. The first CETA grant in 1976 for \$96,000 swelled to over \$500,000 by 1980. This budget

¹⁰¹ Letter, 9 March 1979. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

¹⁰² Letter, 12 April 1979. SDC, box 2, folder 2.

¹⁰³ Letter, 2 March 1979. EDE, box 248, folder 1.

¹⁰⁴ "Reagan Group Opposes CETA Jobs Program," *Los Angeles Times*, 21 November 1980, B1.

was cut to \$52,000 in 1982, and to \$0 in 1983 as CETA collapsed.¹⁰⁵ As had been predicted, the marginalized suffered the most. The PPP Program was the first to close. Activists encouraged members of the community to write to queer prisoners and parolees, but could no longer assist with housing, employment, or emotional counseling. Housing programs were also hard hit. Of the six liberation houses, only one survived the initial round of cuts, but it too would be forced to close in 1979.

When the CETA budget was cut, some organizers charged sexual discrimination. A rumor was circling through the GCSC that the County was reserving all funds for “so-called ‘intact families’ only.” Activists demanded that funding “opportunities be available to *all* residents of the County, regardless of their family living arrangements.”¹⁰⁶ But they were wrong. Edelman replied that no such policy existed. Instead, the Reagan Administration had terminated the program; queer and straight social service agencies were equally sharing in the pain.¹⁰⁷ In light of new limits, some activists felt betrayed. Instead of fighting against Reagan, they cursed CETA. In the weeks that followed the program’s end, some GCSC employees sported “Declare our Independence from Bureaucracy!” buttons.¹⁰⁸ Don Kilhefner was disillusioned. When “the County got strapped for money,” he recalled, “everything just got cut.” As this happened, it seemed like “the political consciousness of the community began to change.”¹⁰⁹ Relocated in the Bay Area, Jon Platania viewed the “drying up of social services” as ominous. We had been “sustained through general assistance grants, food stamps and other social welfare programs,” he explained. Without those funds, what would become of the GCSC? “Turning off social resources,” he reasoned, ensured that “promising social experiments” would face “periods of decline.”¹¹⁰

Activists fought bitterly to protect their programs. The youth-centered Boyle Home collapsed under the weight of the Tax Revolt, but only after a protracted struggle. Ed Boyle “doubted whether [he] could keep the homes going” without financial assistance and appealed to Edelman for help. Some constituents

¹⁰⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, Gay Community Services Center funding report, 6 October 1983. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹⁰⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 25 August 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, 8 September 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹⁰⁸ “Declare Our Independence from CETA” button, 1981. GLCSC, box 16, folder 8.

¹⁰⁹ Don Kilhefner OH.

¹¹⁰ Jon Platania OH.

blamed the Edelman for the bleak cuts. One woman demanded he “reconsider the order to close the Boyle Home” pointing out that “this is the only place a gay child has to go to! In the Year of the Child,” she wrote, “our priority should be the wellbeing of all our children.” Another urged Edelman to “use [his] influence” to prevent the closure. “As a parent, I’ve seen the desperate need in this city for a place like this,” another opined. “Please don’t close it.” “The future of our productive citizens is at stake,” one man pleaded. A school counselor explained that “most of these young people are rejected by their families and have no place to go.” Without Boyle Home, they faced “degradation” and “hopelessness.” How could the county “spend billions of dollars on vagrants, abortions, drug and alcohol addicts, and wards of the courts,” one woman asked, “yet turn a deaf, dumb, and blind eye to homosexual issues”? Powerful appeals also came from queer youths. “Nothing is worse than being made unwelcome in your own home by parents who do not approve,” one young man explained. Since “gays also pay for the funding of public schools through taxes,” he wrote, they were entitled to public assistance. “During my teen years and early twenties,” another confessed, “I was forced into prostitution...It is just as ugly and devastating to young men as it is to women.” Boyle Home offered him a “refuge.” Its closure “condemns young men to the street where they are not only easy prey, but also victims of very limited economic opportunity.” He understood that Edelman was “under pressure to spend less,” but warned that he would “only save short term cash. The long term loss of manpower and welfare is going to be staggering.”¹¹¹ The rage was justified but not the target.

Edelman could not control the fate of Boyle Home. “I am afraid you are incorrect about my position,” he wrote to one constituent. “I have always given strong support to the Ed Boyle Home.”¹¹² She wrote back appreciating Edelman’s “humanistic view,” but was frustrated.¹¹³ In several exchanges with constituents Edelman unsuccessfully attempted to explain. In the end the sharp cuts imposed by Proposition 13 aided the conservative counterrevolution. At his inauguration in 1980, Ronald Reagan famously told Americans that “government is not the solution to our problems, government *is* the problem.” A self-

¹¹¹ Letters to Ed Edelman, 6 July 1979; 11-14 September 1979; 22 September 1979; 25 September 1979; 3 October 1979; EDE, box 250, folder 5.

¹¹² Letter, 4 October 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

¹¹³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 15 October 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

fulfilling prophecy, Proposition 13 strengthened that argument. Elected officials like Edelman were now blamed for their failure to prevent the mandates that the Tax Revolt imposed. To his credit, Edelman did attempt to save Boyle Home. He was angry that Ed Boyle did not ask for his assistance earlier, since the “program is very popular in the gay community and doing some good.”¹¹⁴ He managed to locate funds from his shrinking discretionary budget for Boyle. In announcing these, he took a swipe at Proposition 13. “One of the critical problems with Proposition 13,” he explained, “was the freeze on foster care and children’s institutions.” Boyle Home was a “very special program” that was now in danger. Was this the intent of the Tax Revolt? His assistance increased the Boyle Home budget from \$916 to \$1,239 per resident and kept it open, temporarily.¹¹⁵ Boyle publically lauded Edelman, a “a very special supervisor” who proved “very sensitive to the needs of these kids”¹¹⁶ Ironically, when the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* reported the story, Boyle Home came under fire.

Because the *Herald* article was supportive, it solicited anger from conservatives. The writer received “many angry calls resenting the fact that [he] wrote an article on the subject.” Several found the “toleration” of homosexuality “distasteful.” There was even pushback from *Herald* editors, who reprimanded the story.¹¹⁷ Edelman wrote a letter of support and praised the “well-presented piece” which “offered a realistic yet sensitive look at a difficult contemporary problem.” He chastised those who would “prefer to believe the problem [of queer homelessness and prostitution] does not exist” and personally responded to angry constituents.¹¹⁸ But even he could not prevent the closure of the program in late 1980. The immediate cause was Ed Boyle’s total exhaustion. Earlier in the year, he hoped to expand the program through additional funding.¹¹⁹ That was unlikely, since the county instituted stern cuts that year and Boyle ran out of steam. “Although people continue to be interested in the program,” he wrote, it was too costly

¹¹⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 6 July 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

¹¹⁵ Ed Edelman motion to Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, 30 August 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

¹¹⁶ Louis Brandon, “A Counselor Tells the Reality Face by Boy Prostitutes,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, March 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹¹⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 24 March 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹¹⁸ Letter, 14 April 1980; Aide to Ed Edelman, 8 April 1980. EDE, box 248, folder 2

¹¹⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 18 January 1980. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

and stressful to remain open. He thanked Edelman for his “tremendous support” which had “earned the necessary increases and operating costs” that kept the doors open for nearly four years.¹²⁰ But the fiscal landscape was too unpredictable. Could Boyle count on a dip into Edelman’s discretionary budget every year in order to remain open? The writing was on the wall. Five years earlier, Boyle Home might have had a better chance. Its closure showed how deeply the Tax Revolt cut.

In late 1981 GCSC organizers fought back and located “an extremely suitable building” for a new youth home. The L.A. City Council pledged \$60,000 to assist in property acquisition, and organizers hoped Edelman could cover the remaining balance.¹²¹ He wrote in full support of the proposal. “There is a critical shortage of facilities for gay and lesbian adolescents,” he stressed.¹²² In another letter he assured that he had “personally toured the [GCSC]” which had “a proud record of serving the Los Angeles community for many years.”¹²³ The GCSC won funds, but not nearly enough.¹²⁴ By the fall of 1983 activists were still \$20,000 short. As had been the case with Boyle Home, they relied on Edelman’s discretionary spending. He followed through, terming the allocation a “worthy investment.”¹²⁵ Now called Project Confrontation Youth, the program managed to survive the Tax Revolt, but its multiple near-death encounters did not bode well for the future. In the 1970s, the GCSC won contractual grants, which guaranteed annual incomes. Now activists were reliant on the goodwill of Edelman, who shared money when he had it. In 1983 the supervisor funded the GCSC almost exclusively through discretionary spending.¹²⁶ Organizer Rand Schrader praised his support, which made “the [GCSC] literally *look* different” and purchased a full-page advertisement in a MECLA newsletter to thank him.¹²⁷ The overreliance on Edelman revealed a new weakness. Without a stable budget the GCSC could not engage in the same type of activism as it had in the 1970s. The organization was living month-to-month, award-to-award. While the ambitions of activists remained

¹²⁰ Aide to Ed Edelman, 12 August 1980. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

¹²¹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 10 September 1981. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹²² Ed Edelman to E. Helfeld, 8 June 1982. EDE, box 248, folder 2.

¹²³ Ed Edelman to Don Galloway, 4 August 1983. EDE, box 248, folder 3.

¹²⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 14 November 1983. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Letter, 15 September 1983. EDE, box 248, folder 3.

¹²⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 20 April 1984; Aide to Ed Edelman, 30 April 1984. EDE, box 249, folder 5.

unchanged, new austerity policies prevented them from being fully realized. This was clearest with Hudson House, an ill-fated housing program of the 1980s.

“Gratuitous Destruction”: The Demise of Hudson House

Queers remained committed to economic justice after the Tax Revolt. Ironically, one of the strongest efforts to house the homeless emerged at the same time as Proposition 13. Separate from the GCSC, Hudson House built upon the liberation house model. It housed low-income and homeless men and women, provided employment counseling, and offered family atmospheres. Unlike earlier programs however, Hudson House was hobbled by the attack on the welfare state. It did not share similar levels of public financing, which resulted in the program’s downfall. It demonstrated how the curtailment of public spending in L.A. County exacerbated social problems such as homelessness rather than solve them.

Hudson House was the vision of Pat Rocco who had used *SPREE*, his own erotic publication, to advertise for liberation houses and the GCSC. As the latter came under attack, Rocco developed his own autonomous housing program. Born in Brooklyn, New York in 1934, he moved to California with his large Italian family in the mid-1940s and discovered a love for photography and filmmaking. He insisted his films were “gay love stories,” not pornography. Indeed they did possess political meaning. “The films made me a gay liberationist,” he explained. “The fact they were up front, that they were really overt...and that they had something to say that was positive” supported cored aims of gay liberation. Soon he was publishing *SPREE*, which consisted of nude pictures and political editorials. Involved with most gay organization in the 1970s, Rocco used his camera to document the movement in L.A.¹²⁸ He was particularly concerned with homelessness. As liberation houses began to close, he reached out to Robert Humphries of the United States Mission (USM) and they decided to raise funds for a new housing program. Initial funds were raised through the “Greasy Guy Contest,” a 1950s-themed party.¹²⁹ The strategy mirrored early liberation house

¹²⁸ Pat Rocco oral history, interviewed by Morris Kight, Los Angeles, California, 27 April 1983. UCLA Film and Television Library, Los Angeles, California (Hereafter Pat Rocco OH).

¹²⁹ United States Mission flier, 1978. USM, box 1, folder 3.

fundraising. Startup funds allowed activists to rent a large house on Hudson Avenue in Hollywood (hence the name, Hudson House). Rocco advertised it as a direct descendent of liberation houses and established a link with the GCSC. “DO YOU NEED LOW-COST HOUSING WITH MEALS? CLOTHING? SHOWERS?” one flier queried. “INQUIRE ABOUT *HUDSON HOUSE* AT THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY SERVICES CENTER, ROOM 105.”¹³⁰ Technically, there was no official relationship between Hudson House and the GCSC, but the latter provided necessary referrals.

Like earlier programs, residents had to be at least eighteen and demonstrate financial need to enter Hudson House. Managers were not to accept “residents who have been evicted from, owe back rent to, or have caused problems or disturbances in” former liberation houses.¹³¹ This policy stemmed from Rocco’s belief that houses closed because “they had problems with management, with rules, or lack of them, with liquor, with sex, and with dope.”¹³² In fact, a lack of funds and staff had spelled their demise. Like its predecessor, Hudson House was not free: residents could pay by the day but were recommended to pay the weekly rate of \$65. Rents were negotiated at lower rates for those without necessary funds.¹³³ Organizers insisted that every resident “pay something,” but also that money not be “a barrier to admission.”¹³⁴ At its height, the program consisted of four homes in Greater Hollywood which could house between sixty and seventy residents. Three locations were within walking distance to the GCSC and most residents were “homeless men and women from the Hollywood, Silverlake, [and] Echo Park areas.”¹³⁵ Each house held mandatory weekly meetings where residents could raise issues and complaints.¹³⁶ A van was acquired and shared between locations for transportation needs.¹³⁷ Records and photographs indicate that Hudson House was more diverse than liberation houses. Overall, the resident population broke down as 55% white, 25%

¹³⁰ Hudson House flier, 1981. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹³¹ Hudson House memo, 24 September 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹³² Pat Rocco oral history, interviewed by Morris Kight, Los Angeles, California, 27 April 1983. UCLA Film and Television Library, Los Angeles, California (Hereafter Pat Rocco OH).

¹³³ Hudson House rent intake forms, 1980-1982. HHR, box 1, folder 3.

¹³⁴ Morris Kight memo, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹³⁵ Hudson House proposal to Los Angeles Emergency Food and Shelter Program, 1 June 1983. HHR, box 2, folder 3.

¹³⁶ Hudson House meeting minutes, 1982. HHR, box 1, folder 3.

¹³⁷ Morris Kight memo, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

black, and 20% Asian, Latino, or “other” and photographs depicted diverse and integrated settings. The program shared a gender disparity with its predecessor, however. Men outnumbered woman by a whopping seventy to twenty percent (ten percent were listed as “transsexuals” who did not identify as exclusively “male” or “female”). Around 80% of residents were under the age of thirty.¹³⁸ Organizers sought strong relationships with racial minorities in the area. “We do not overlook other groups,” Rocco explained. “We are in communication with them, and they with us.” Together they declared that “all minorities and all people [were] entitled to equal access to jobs, housing, dignity, and equality.” The program was designed for queers, but also housed “non-gays in some numbers.”¹³⁹ Associating with social service agencies in East L.A. and Watts helped Hudson House earn support from liberals who publicly commended Rocco and his efforts at a gay parade in 1983.¹⁴⁰ Like the GCSC, the program was multi-layered.

Residents were given “food, bed space, clothing and a supportive, non-threatening environment” in order to undergo “re-socialization.” Substance abuse and emotional counseling were provided via the GCSC.¹⁴¹ There was a glaring difference, however, when it came to employment counseling. Without CETA funds, organizers developed a controversial employment program to stay afloat. Most residents were sent to the USM, where they went door-to-door soliciting donations. USM employees were “required to maintain a quota of \$25.01 average collection per day” during their first month of employment and “\$35.01 thereafter.” House managers informed residents that, “if you are unwilling to help yourselves, we are unable to help you, and we are unable to keep you.”¹⁴² For those with no other options, USM jobs were mandatory. Moreover, house managers intrusively kept track of salaries. “It is your responsibility to meet minimum payments through your work,” residents were told. Therefore, “we will request a computer readout from the Mission every Wednesday in order to determine what wages Hudson House residents have earned for

¹³⁸ Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹³⁹ Hudson House proposal to Los Angeles Emergency Food and Shelter Program, 1 June 1983. HHR, box 2, folder 3.

¹⁴⁰ Hudson House news release, 1983. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁴¹ Hudson House Articles of Incorporation, September 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁴² U.S. Mission Employment Program flier, 1983. USM, box 1, folder 3.

their minimum payments.”¹⁴³ This information was used to calculate rents, but was gathered in draconian fashion. USM jobs were highly undesirable, and many sought alternative opportunities. One avenue was a gay thrift shop opened by Rocco in 1983. “In these days of Reaganomics,” he explained, “with prices so high and money so tight, a THRIFT SHOP is just what is needed in our community.” Reliant on private donations, the store sold products “at ‘yard-sale’ prices” and created a handful of jobs for residents.¹⁴⁴ Sometimes local politicians would seek staff through Hudson House. When Wallace Albertson ran for the California State Assembly, he sought dedicated staff members. Those interested were reminded to “dress neatly and comfortably” for the interview and to “tell them you were recommended by Pat Rocco.”¹⁴⁵ These opportunities appeared infrequently. Most residents became door-to-door USM fundraisers.

As GCSC programs closed, Hudson House attempted to fill gaps. The defunct PPP Program was partially reconstituted by Rocco and many incarcerated queers began writing for help. One man hoped to “return to California upon release,” but lacked resources. Incarcerated since 1972, he knew of “no one on the outside to turn to” and “had no contact with family in over five years,” yet word had reached him about Hudson House. “From what I have heard,” he wrote, it “seems to be the place where I can find the help and understanding I will need when I’m first released. I hope you can aid me with housing, and help me get back on my feet.” He also expected sexual opportunities, and described himself as “40 years old, Gay, mainly butch,” and “very straight appearing.”¹⁴⁶ Avowed bisexual, straight, and questioning inmates also wrote Rocco. A man from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania heard about Hudson House from a friend. “I am very interested in your facility,” he wrote, “because I am due for parole and I do not have a place to stay.” He had “no relatives in California or any surrounding states,” which caused him great anxiety. “I’m not ‘Gay,’” he admitted, but qualified that “I have no hang ups. I’m a 25 year old black divorcee [*sic*]; I am a body builder and student of average intelligence. Please consider my request. I need help.”¹⁴⁷ This may have

¹⁴³ Notice to Hudson House residents, 1983. Box 2, folder 1.

¹⁴⁴ Hudson House thrift shop flier, 1983. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁴⁵ Hudson House job posting, 1983. HHR, box 2, folder 1.

¹⁴⁶ Letter to Pat Rocco, 4 December 1980. PRP, box 15, folder 2.

¹⁴⁷ Letter to Pat Rocco, 2 October 1980. PRP, box 15, folder 2.

relayed sexual curiosity. Either way, he had no qualms about moving into a queer space. For some, Hudson House promised to satisfy economic and emotional desires.

A twenty-two year-old inmate from Carson City, Nevada was delighted to hear of his acceptance into Hudson House. He hoped to find work “through the CETA program” upon his release (likely unaware of the program’s demise), and had been advised by “a black friend named Henry” that Hudson House provided decent housing. He experienced “a lot of problems in prison” and was anxious to get out. “There is a great mistreatment of gays here,” he revealed. “As a result, I’ve been through much abuse.” Including a picture of himself, he requested a brochure and further information. A few months later, the inmate sent another letter to Rocco. His parole had been delayed and he feared he was deteriorating behind bars. He revealed “something very private” to Rocco: “All of my family, except my grandpa, have disavowed me due to my homosexuality, so I don’t have anywhere but the streets I can turn to. I am really on my own.” This “lonely experience” caused him much distress and he attempted suicide. “Gay, lonely, and emotional,” he was “a misfit in prison.” The only thing that kept him going was the promise of Hudson House. While he waited to hear from the parole board, he asked Rocco to have residents “write me letters of friendship to help combat my loneliness” and offered to send stamps if needed. A month later he secured release. “I cannot tell you how grateful I am,” he wrote. “When I arrive at Hudson House, I will do everything to express my appreciation.” While he had recently been suicidal, now he was “very excited about arriving in Hollywood, meeting new gay friends, and becoming involved in [Hudson House].”¹⁴⁸ Family-building and emotional needs connected Hudson House with earlier efforts. Residents were given both economic and emotional assistance. When it came to funding Hudson House, however, the similarities ended.

Hudson House was never able to obtain significant public financing, which impacted its effectiveness. Morris Kight worked alongside Rocco for funds and attempted to qualify Hudson House in city programs. Including Hudson House within the Hollywood Neighborhood Strategy Area program, they argued that Hudson House would be “part of the solution” to the crisis of “rising rents, scarcity of housing,

¹⁴⁸ Letters to Pat Rocco, 31 August 1980; 3 October 1980; 26 October 1980. PRP, box 15, folder 2.

rising enforcement standards, the decline of older housing, and the constant influx on new residents seeking a better life.” Within the program, “housing, jobs, and the search for dignity” were core goals. While “no community in Los Angeles County” was without queers, “distinct pockets of gays” had emerged in West Hollywood. Low-income migrants lacked “complete educations,” were “alienated from their home communities,” hailed from “racial minority communities,” and often emerged from “poverty families.” This left many new arrivals with the “serious disadvantage of not being able to compete in the job market.”¹⁴⁹ The LAGLF had “taken the responsibility of finding housing in the homes of friendly members of the community.” Unfortunately, this turned into a “Dance of Death,” as “close quarters, inadequate washroom facilities, and overcrowding caused stress and strains.” The arrival of the GCSC ushered in more sophisticated social services approach. Hudson House would complement these efforts and provide a “residential facility for gay and non-gay women and men” which was “light, airy, and homelike.” Activists were awarded a measly \$65,000, the only grant they would receive.¹⁵⁰

To safeguard it from attacks, Hudson House was framed in conservative ways. Over and over activists assured that it would not create welfare reliance. “We have as a stated policy to not create dependency,” one activist maintained. Residents were “urged to put their lives in order, to seek and hold jobs, to open bank accounts, learn to manage their monies, and then move on.”¹⁵¹ They would need to “quickly develop survival skills.”¹⁵² Notions of sex and pleasure were downplayed. “We have striven to live so quietly that our neighbors have total respect for our activities,” organizers explained. While certain activities, such as library trips, beach parties, and community service were necessary to produce “socialization skills,” residents would prioritize their finances. “All incoming residents are commenced on a systematic program the very first day of their residency to put their financial affairs in order. They must commence a search immediately for a job.”¹⁵³ On paper, Hudson House prioritized responsibility over fun.

¹⁴⁹ Morris Kight to Tom Bradley, Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁵⁰ Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁵¹ Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁵² Unidentified Hudson House Proposal, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵³ Hudson House proposal, 29 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

To emphasize the point, Rocco developed draconian house rules. Residents were expected to “leave the premises and seek employment between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. on weekdays, and 9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. on Saturdays.” Drugs and alcohol were forbidden. Meals would be served at specific times only and nightly curfews enforced. Most alarmingly, sexuality would be patrolled. “No resident will be allowed guests at any time unless special arrangements have been made,” one rule read. “Approved guests will be allowed only in the living and dining room areas.” These rules gave Hudson House a monastic appearance, but it was largely a façade. Most “rules” were not followed in practice. Reflecting both Propositions 6 and 13, Rocco promised no “free rides” to deflect attacks on social welfare, and desexualized the program to safeguard it from homophobia. This was a pragmatic and keen strategy which activists sometimes revealed. For instance, one rule teasingly promised that “no one will be pressured into sexual activities,” adding in an amendment that “bisexual and non-gay proclivities will be overlooked unless they are excessive.”¹⁵⁴

The mastery of bureaucratic language would have helped Hudson House a few years earlier, but after Proposition 13 securing public financing became untenable. In 1980 activists hoped to win funds through the Los Angeles Law Enforcement Assistance Administration, which bestowed grants to local programs to fight crime. Hudson House had “reached the point [in which] the level of present services cannot be operated without external funding.”¹⁵⁵ The director lauded the initiative and welcomed the proposal, but had no funds to spare. Hudson House was “meritorious,” she wrote. However “as you may be aware, LEAA monies have been drastically reduced; therefore, it is highly unlikely that this office will be entertaining *any* new program areas. If I become aware of monies, I will certainly advise you of same.”¹⁵⁶ Activists submitted a winning proposal, but there were no funds to award. This became a trend. When organizers sought funds to purchase a house in 1980 they appeared disconnected from reality. Requesting an additional \$300,000 (to the \$65,000 already issued), they reported that the house was “an important piece of real estate located in a unique area” and was “in the spirit of the HUD Plan of private ownership.”¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Hudson House Rules and Regulations, undated. HHR, box 1, folder 2.

¹⁵⁵ Letter, 14 August 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵⁶ Letter, 4 September 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵⁷ Letter, 16 July 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

That might be so, officials wrote back, but with continuing budget constraints, such strategies were “no longer germane to project development.” For the foreseeable future, no grants would be forthcoming to any social service agency.¹⁵⁸ Activists were not the only ones who were frustrated. An exasperated Supervisor Edelman condemned city and county budget cuts. “The supply of affordable housing,” he reminded, “can only be described as too little for too many.” Austerity measures exacerbated ongoing problems.¹⁵⁹

In such a climate frustrations mounted between activists and state representatives. When they secured their \$65,000 grant, activists were in technical violation of an important guideline. Unlike the GCSC, Hudson House had not achieved non-profit status. Activists argued that this was unnecessary, since Hudson House was associated with the USM. The idea of incorporating outside of their parent organization, they argued, “offended friends at the Mission who felt that their assistance had been total and loving and more than honorable.”¹⁶⁰ Funds had not been awarded to the USM, however, and Hudson House was skirting regulations. Unless it incorporated, the funding contract would be delayed, perhaps even canceled.¹⁶¹ The matter was resolved when activists created Crossroads Employment and Job Services, a non-profit entity, to collect the funds. But their bureaucratic patience was running thin. When the target area was revised in late 1980, Kight hit a breaking point. In a letter to a county agency, he rejected the new boundaries. “The Hudson Houses are just a bit out of the actual geographic lines,” he argued. “Frankly we do not think anything should be required of us” since the program reached clients from throughout the county. How could officials rationalize any delay in *helping people* over arbitrary boundary? “The government,” Kight crowed, needed to “show the kind of imagination and compassion in this matter which should be the hallmark of a creative social service delivery mechanism.”¹⁶² Activists were attempting to play by the rules for few rewards.

¹⁵⁸ Letter, 14 October 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 5.

¹⁵⁹ Ed Edelman Motion to Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, 28 January 1980. EDE, box 331, folder 11.

¹⁶⁰ Letter, 2 June 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁶¹ Letter, 19 June 1980. HHR, box 2, folder 2.

¹⁶² Letter, 14 August 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

Additionally, Hudson House was beset by urban transformations and hostile neighbors. By 1982 West Hollywood was showing signs of gentrification. “The bulldozers are claiming two of our houses to make way for a new apartment complex!” Rocco informed supporters. Centrally located, Hudson House occupied desirable real estate. As developers began to eradicate “blight” and raise property values in the neighborhood, the program felt the effects. Rising rental costs in the area portended structural problems for any grassroots housing program.¹⁶³ At some locations, neighbors were also hostile. One man registered several complaints with Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson. He charged that there had been “a stabbing at Hudson House,” that residents were “vandals,” and that “dope was being sold.” When Stevenson followed up, Rocco categorically denied the charges. “Does [he] mean those who are in need of services are ‘undesirable’?” he queried.¹⁶⁴ False charges masked homophobic hostility. An apartment manager tried to remove one house from his neighborhood in March of 1981 and showed up at Supervisor Edelman’s office. Aides noted that he was “anti-gay and upset about halfway houses for gays.” Edelman elected not to follow up with him.¹⁶⁵ A few months later, he went to Stevenson. Rocco explained the nature of his hostility. “From the day we moved in,” he revealed, “we’ve been having considerable difficulty.” The apartment manager indicated that “he didn’t want a ‘fag halfway house’ on *his* block, and that he would do everything possible to ‘get us out of there.’” He had also “accosted residents on numerous occasions” and “called the fire department” to disrupt a house barbeque. Stevenson contacted the owner of the apartment complex to inform him that his manager was “causing undue distress” in the neighborhood.¹⁶⁶

Compared to the program’s funding dilemma, homophobic neighbors were a minor concern. The majority of Rocco’s time and energy went into fundraising. The hemorrhaging of county programs necessitated that Hudson House be reliant on private donors. This was the initial, and unsuccessful, strategy of the GCSC. Through fliers and publications, Rocco sought money continuously. The program was

¹⁶³ Hudson House flier, 1982. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁶⁴ Letter, 13 November 1980. HHR, box 1, folder 6.

¹⁶⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 25 March 1971. EDE, box 825.

¹⁶⁶ Letter, 29 October 1981. HHR, box 1, folder 3.

“working well,” one read, but in “need of a refrigerator, beds, silverware, chairs, and large cans of food.”¹⁶⁷ When a new house opened in 1982, it was “up to the gay community” to “help furnish it!” Reliance on private donations was unpredictable and unsustainable. The task of fundraising also exhausted Rocco, who sometimes was compelled to grovel. “THANK YOU for your help in making [Hudson House] possible,” one appeal read. “Now comes the task of furnishing to make it ready for the gay men and lesbians who will move in as soon as it’s ready. CAN YOU HELP US AGAIN?” In this case, the most important items needed included a refrigerator, dressers, a coffee table, linens, towels, pillows, and an air conditioner. Rocco appealed to wealthy queers, and argued that “your own gay and lesbian brothers and sisters need you.”¹⁶⁸ While private donations allowed the program to function, they did not offer a viable long-term solution. Under enormous financial stress, Rocco relied on creatively destructive solutions. As a result the program was engulfed in a welfare scandal that involved the FBI.

The first report of illegality came from an “anonymous former resident” who wrote a blistering expose to Mayor Bradley. Entitled “Lazy Man’s Way to Riches,” the informant claimed to have entered Hudson House after a GCSC referral. Upon his arrival, he found “hustlers, transvestites, jailbirds, impaired sanies [*sic*], racial bigots, adamant heterosexuals, thieves, sexual lunatics, insecure psychopaths, selfish introverts and others.” Residents were “not allowed to cook for themselves and padlocks [were] placed on the refrigerators and the cupboards.” The letter attacked Rocco in deeply personal ways and sometimes appeared homophobic. Towards the end, a damning allegation was made. “Pat Rocco,” he claimed, “has fully encouraged all vulnerable newcomers with little or no cash or jobs to actively seek obtaining food stamps to pay their rents at Hudson House...[Rents] are payable either in food stamps or cash.” Anonymous wanted to know how “the Office of the Mayor could commend such an institution...Truly the wool has been pulled over someone’s eyes. Whose is it?” At certain places, the writer clearly lied. He claimed to have witnessed the “horrors of Hudson House” while “a resident for more than three years.” This would

¹⁶⁷ Pat Rocco, “Hudson House Hosts Needs Gays,” *Frontiers*, 1978. HHR, box 1, folder 5.

¹⁶⁸ Hudson House donation flier, 1982. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

have been impossible since the program had barely been open a year.¹⁶⁹ He also appeared homophobic (calling Rocco and others “sexual lunatics”), making his residency in the program odd. Some arguments were contradictory. If Rocco ran the house like a “dictator,” it seems unlikely “chaos [would] reign supreme.” The most suspicious charge, however, held validity. Rocco had indeed allowed residents to pay rent with food stamps, a violation of the law. Although Bradley does not appear to have paid much attention to the letter, a copy made its way to the FBI.

The details of the ensuing controversy remain murky. Pat Rocco has been understandably hesitant to discuss the details. Although the food stamp violation was a strategic move to keep Hudson House afloat, it was illegal. By 1982 the FBI was monitoring the program. According to his lawyer, late in the year an “undercover agent approached [Rocco]” and offered “to purchase [food] stamps” from him in a sting operation. Agents “approached him several more times” covertly to exchange food stamps for dollars. Hudson House officials believed that the timing of the sting was deliberate. When agents moved to entrap Rocco, they argued, “Hudson House was in an extremely precarious position” and was operating “on a hand to mouth basis.” The financial stress “put Pat Rocco under great pressure” leading him to make “an error, even though Hudson House would have been closed down had he not” done so. Rocco’s lawyer argued that his client “has always been associated with activities tending to relieve the suffering of his fellow citizens, in particular gay people.” His crime stemmed from a big heart.¹⁷⁰ He avoided charges, but still faced punishment. In order to maintain operations for Crossroads (the employment wing of Hudson House), authorities insisted upon the abrupt “termination of Pat Rocco.”¹⁷¹

That sad duty fell to Valerie Terrigno, an up-and-coming community activist and political leader (in a cruel irony, her involvement with Crossroads would come back to haunt her). After the dust settled, Rocco left Los Angeles and moved to Hawaii. Shortly before his departure, he sat down with Morris Kight for an interview. He avoided the controversy, but his voice revealed sadness. “I’m going to Hawaii with

¹⁶⁹ Anonymous letter Tom Bradley, 2 October 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 6.

¹⁷⁰ Letter, 27 April 1982. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

¹⁷¹ Letter, 13 May 1982. HHR, box 1, folder 6.

my other half,” he insisted. “I’m leaving my directorship of Hudson House. We’re making a very big change in both of our lives.” When asked for the reason, Rocco hesitated, then answered “it just seems time for a change, I guess.” He and his partner hoped to “kind of start brand-new with everything; with our entire lives, really.” Despite the forced exile, he remained proud and emotional about Hudson House. “I feel very good about the past,” he confessed. “We’re here for a purpose. [Hudson House fills] a great need in the community, and I’m really proud of the growth that it’s had and the number of people-up to now it’s more than four thousand-that Hudson House has helped. I’m *proud* of that.” When Kight asked if Rocco was “taking a vacation from the gay movement for a little while?” he responded, “I guess you could put it that way.”¹⁷² *Frontiers* announced that Rocco was “retiring...in favor of a business opportunity.”¹⁷³ In his absence Hudson House fell apart. In order to protect the original \$65,000 grant, USM organizers separated the housing program from Crossroads. To remain funded, however, they kept the namesake of Hudson House to avoid “the technical effect of placing Crossroads in the hazardous position of a *new* applicant for the grant, instead of an *ongoing* agency.” When Rocco protested, the USM threatened to resolve the matter in court, an avenue Rocco wisely avoided. One organizer lamented the “gratuitous destruction of a poor gay people’s program.”¹⁷⁴

What happened to Hudson House was not unprecedented. Donna Murch found that the Black Panthers were penetrated “through special FBI directives and the Counter Intelligence Program (COUNTELPRO).” These efforts “sought to cripple the Party through mass incarcerations, harassment, and infiltration.”¹⁷⁵ Queers often worried that FBI informants and saboteurs infiltrated their groups. Back in the early 1970s, Don Kilhefner believed that the LAGLF was penetrated by the LAPD and FBI.¹⁷⁶ In 1985, Valerie Terrigno believed that the FBI plotted her downfall as West Hollywood Mayor. In this instance, FBI entrapment facilitated the undoing of Hudson House and shrouded the program in controversy. Far

¹⁷² Pat Rocco OH.

¹⁷³ “Hudson House Sees Five Years,” *Frontiers*, May 1983. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁷⁴ United States Mission internal memo, undated. USM, box 1, folder 5.

¹⁷⁵ Murch, *Living for the City*, 168.

¹⁷⁶ Don Kilhefer OH.

removed from the action, Jon Platania regretted the course of events. Perhaps Rocco did allow “semi-illegal behavior,” Platania reasoned. “So what?” Rocco “participated in charitable efforts” which needed to be celebrated, not condemned. “Any man who contributes as he has must be good. I wasn’t close enough to Hudson House to know what happened or what didn’t happen,” he went on. “I do know that when you have a bunch of people living together, you’re going to have the potential for *scandal* if you’re looking for it.” In his final analysis, Platania couldn’t “imagine anything that horrible” which “blots out the good. It’s always good when you have some place to stay and rest your head. Shelter is *good*.”¹⁷⁷ Hudson House was a progressive program that helped many Angelenos. Rocco considered it a “real success story,” and claimed that “over 4,000 gay men and lesbians” had passed through the program. “Some stayed for days, others for years.” Most entered “without housing, food, jobs, and in [with] emotional trouble.”¹⁷⁸

In the end, the demise of Hudson House rested in its era: urban austerity politics doomed the program from the start. Like the GCSC, Hudson House earned political support from Edelman, Councilwoman Stevenson, and Mayor Bradley.¹⁷⁹ Even State Senator David Roberti applauded Rocco for his efforts.¹⁸⁰ “Everybody had nice things to say about [Hudson House],” Rocco remarked. “It was a love-in.”¹⁸¹ But it wasn’t enough. What the program needed was financing, not commendations. The example of Hudson House was illustrative. Activists gained access to the welfare state at a perilous historical moment and enjoyed a very brief moment in the sun. In a 1979 speech Mayor Bradley spoke of a “Post-Proposition 13 Era.” The “problems of unemployment, housing, and urban blight,” had not been resolved, he told a crowd. But “the challenge of the 1980s will be more complex and difficult to overcome,” since urban activism would need to “be accomplished in light of the public mandate issued with Proposition 13.” This threatened to “polarize the government itself from the very people it attempts to serve.” The next generation would need to find ways to work within or subvert new limits. He encouraged progressives to use their

¹⁷⁷ Jon Platania OH.

¹⁷⁸ U.S. Mission pamphlet, 9 April 1983. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁷⁹ Los Angeles Commendation to Hudson House, 30 June 1979. HHR, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁸⁰ State Commendation to Hudson House, 15 February 1978. HHR, box 2, folder 3.

¹⁸¹ Pat Rocco OH.

“spirit, creativity and intelligence to cope with [the] rapid changes.” We must “make sure that a city like Los Angeles maintains service to the public.”¹⁸² How would gay activists respond to Bradley’s call? As austerity tested the utility of state activism, queers plotted a new course in West Hollywood which compelled the political geography of gay liberation to change.

¹⁸² Tom Bradley speech, 1979. TBP, box 4896, folder 4.

Chapter Six: Incorporation and a New Political Geography in West Hollywood

“I am of two minds on Incorporation. On the one hand, I am supposed to advocate good government...On the other, I have always advocated self-determination, and it would be wonderful to have a government of gay and lesbian folks.”

-Morris Kight, 1984

“To be a city or not to be a city is one question, but perhaps the most important question is what *kind* of city would West Hollywood be?”

-Allen Chivens and Joyce Hundal,
West Hollywood Study Committee, 1984

Towards the end of November 1984, Supervisor Edelman sought advice from three aides. Two weeks earlier, voters overwhelmingly incorporated West Hollywood as an independent city. Now Edelman was asked to officiate the inauguration of the new government. This was a heavy favor considering his deep opposition to cityhood. One aide warned against bitterness: “Your only choice,” she explained, “is to be as positive and upbeat as possible. You can say that you did your best to [ensure] working harmony in West Hollywood.” Recognizing its importance, “stress that you fought to maintain [rent control] in spite of the conservative Board majority,” she urged. An openly-gay aide agreed. “Your central theme might be that you enjoyed representing West Hollywood,” he suggested. “You are proud of your role in molding [the] dynamic community.” While “it may seem out of place, you should point to your accomplishments...it is a positive story to tell.” But Edelman’s senior aide disagreed. “Keep your remarks brief,” he warned. “*Do not* remind everyone of your position in the election. *Do not* list your accomplishments. *Do not* dwell on the difficulties ahead. *Do not* respond to funding issues-the audience won’t like it.” Instead, he urged the supervisor to “focus on the ‘gay city’ aspect.” Edelman might describe the transition as “*a father who is seeing a child growing strong enough to strike out on its own.*” This was “somewhat patronizing” but also

“positive, human, and frank.” As soon as possible, “remove yourself from the celebration.”¹ Edelman heeded this advice. The political geography of gay liberation, he realized, had changed.

While Edelman sulked, others celebrated. The incorporation of West Hollywood marked a milestone and, in some ways, built upon the rich legacy of gay activism in L.A. Queers forged an “unlikely coalition” with seniors, immigrants, and racial minorities over the shared economic concern of rent control.² At the same time, however, queers dominated media narratives of incorporation. The real issue, the *Los Angeles Times* opined, was not housing but the creation of “America’s first gay city.” Incorporators encouraged this view, noting that, “for the first time, an openly gay City Council” would control queer destinies.³ In the fog of merriment a few dissenters could be heard. In the *L.A. Free Press*, one man was suspicious of the “strange bedfellows” and “bitter factions” which had emerged. Why had organizers “made overtures to business people and landlords”? By “playing the game of big city politics,” he mused, “the urban village of West Hollywood” might “never be the same.”⁴ Dana Cuff reminded urban historians that, for everything built, something is destroyed.⁵ Like most good stories, there was more to the creation of West Hollywood than met the eye. Scholars have mostly promulgated celebratory narratives. Queers needed this “city of their own,” a “sort of gay Israel,” some argued.⁶ Urban independence was arguably a natural outgrowth of gay liberation. Moreover, there were clear economic incentives to incorporate. Proposition 13 weakened the county and curtailed opportunities for activists. Worse yet, conservatives wrestled control of the Board from liberals in 1980. Metropolitan planning was now controlled by a less-than-friendly political body. Queers understandably sought to resist these transformations, but how they did so mattered. Placed

¹ Aides to Edelman, 27 November 1984. EDE, box 528, folder 1.

² Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at Thirty: Steve Martin Looks Back at the 1984 Election,” Weherville, 6 February 2015 (Web: <http://www.weherville.com/2015/02/06/west-hollywood-30-steve-martin-looks-back-1984-election/>; last accessed: 20 July 2015).

³ “West Hollywood Residents Approve Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1984, 3.

⁴ “West Hollywood: Birth Pangs of a City,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 10 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

⁵ See Dana Cuff, *The Provisional City: Los Angeles Stories of Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2000).

⁶ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 35; Benjamin Forest, “West Hollywood as Symbol: The Significance of Place in the Construction of Gay Identity,” *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 13 (1995); Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 277.

alongside the long history of queer activism, cityhood was a bold reimaging. In the 1970s queers gained metropolitan political power through the county. They joined existing social movements and carried the War on Poverty forward in queer directions. This strategy became unhinged as the political geography of gay liberation shifted to narrower boundaries.

The Conservative Takeover of L.A. County

The relationship between queers and the county was unique. Elsewhere in the nation, activists established ties to city councils, which resulted in protective ordinances and political alliances.⁷ In L.A., queers broke through first at the county level. Many rightly viewed it as the most stable and supportive political outlet, but that changed dramatically in 1980. While Edelman remained a staunch ally, an unexpected political restructuring imposed new limits. When conservatives won control of the Board, liberal gains were threatened. The fates of a countywide gay rights ordinance, the West Hollywood Community Plan (WHCP), rent control, and AIDS activism became controlled by the New Right. This encouraged many to doubt metropolitan political frameworks.

Some were already questioning their liberal allegiance. The 1980 Presidential Election was especially divisive. In a lengthy letter to Carter, one man reminded the President that supporting him in the 1976 primary was difficult. Although Governor Brown was popular, Angelenos had “led the fight for securing gay votes for Carter.” They did so, he assured, because of “your promise that you would issue an Executive Order extending the Civil Rights act to cover Gay men and women.” While “it is now politically difficult for you,” he implored Carter to “present a *Profile in Courage*, and issue it as you promised!”⁸ This anger was misguided. In the first place, the President lacked the authority to amend the Civil Rights Act; only Congress could do that. Secondly, Carter had never promised to issue an executive order. Lesbians associated with the the Los Angeles Wages for Housework Committee assailed Carter from another front.

⁷ See Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁸ Letter to Jimmy Carter, 9 September 1977. SDC, Box 1, Folder 22.

Welfare provided the “power to leave marriages and jobs,” which were “silent nightmares” for many lesbians, and the “independence [to] get out from under the man to start getting what *we* want for a change.” Rather than cut, Carter ought to increase welfare spending. “Use federal funds for gay rights!” they implored.⁹ By the time he ran for reelection, many feminists had indeed broken with Carter.¹⁰ As the economy worsened amid stagflation, moreover, Carter cast himself as a fiscal conservative and recklessly searched for balanced budgets.¹¹ But, in actuality, Carter’s first term saw welfare gains. He authorized an expansion of CETA and HUD permitted queers access to housing subsidies. The White House Conference on American Families endorsed a majority of the issues these lesbians demanded. Still, they were unsatisfied by quiet progress. When Senator Edward Kennedy challenged Carter for the nomination, many jumped ship.¹² When Kennedy failed to overtake Carter, however, most returned to the President. But not all. One SDC leader resigned, admitting that he was “not a suitable person to be doing heavy Club work at this time because my own feelings about the direction of our Party are not good.”¹³ To the surprise of many Angelenos, national events were overshadowed in 1980 by a local political earthquake.

The unexpected conservative takeover of the County Board of Supervisors occurred as activists and Edelman worked to secure a countywide gay rights ordinance. While the city passed an ordinance in 1979, activists placed greater importance on county action since “the population of L.A. County comprises over 7 million people (one third of the total population in California).”¹⁴ Most importantly, a county ordinance would include unincorporated areas like West Hollywood, which were untouched by city ordinances. One Gay Community Services Center (GCSC) representative reported that “gay women and men [were] routinely and systematically discriminated against in the County” and lobbied for protection.

⁹ “Coming Out Against Carter,” *The Welfare Penny Press*, October 1977. EDE, box 909, folder 10.

¹⁰ Susan Hartmann, “Feminism, Public Policy, and the Carter Administration,” in Gary Fink & Hugh Graham (eds.) *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices in the Post-New Deal Era* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 225.

¹¹ Timothy Stanley, “Going Beyond the New Deal: Socialists and the Democratic Party in the 1970s” in Stanley and Jonathan Bell (eds.), *Making Sense of American Liberalism* (University Of Illinois Press, Urbana: 2012), 72.

¹² Stonewall Democratic Club announcement, 9 May 1980. SDC, box 2, folder 3.

¹³ Letter, 10 July 1980. SDC, box 2, folder 3.

¹⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 19 July 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 10.

Believing it “now an appropriate time,” queers encouraged Edelman to introduce an ordinance banning discrimination “on the basis of ‘sexual orientation’ and ‘marital status.’” This “policy would have a beneficial effect on *all single persons*, separated or divorced individuals, widows, and co-habitors.”¹⁵ The slow process, however, frustrated activists. One man implored Edelman to move fast. The passage of the city ordinance, combined with the “overwhelming defeat of the anti-gay Proposition 6,” indicated that the majority favored “basic human rights to all gay and lesbian citizens of Los Angeles County.”¹⁶ But Edelman struggled to secure the three needed votes. “The best way of ensuring passage,” he advised, would be “to have the votes lined up in advance.” Once introduced, the ordinance would “become an attractive target for the Gay-baiters.”¹⁷ The source of the delay was Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, “a mainstream Democrat” who was weary of gay rights.¹⁸ Newly-appointed Supervisor Yvonne Burke was a different story.

Her arrival was unexpected. When moderate Republican James Hayes announced his abrupt resignation, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Burke, a rising political star who had been elected to Congress and served as a University of California Regent. “I grew up poor in the ghettos of Los Angeles,” Burke told reporters. “I wear it as a badge of great pride.” An outspoken liberal, she celebrated her female and black identities and believed the county should do more to promote diversity and social welfare. She believed the limits of Proposition 13 could be overcome, but Burke was selected to represent a district that clashed with her priorities. The Fourth District included Malibu and was, according to the *Los Angeles Times*, “predominantly white” and “politically conservative.”¹⁹ Her presence offered a unique opportunity, and gay activists swiftly won her support.²⁰ Still, Hahn worried about “possible negative fallout” from a countywide ordinance.²¹ Activists hoped “a call from [Edelman] would be ‘very effective’” in changing his

¹⁵ Gay Community Services Center to Ed Edelman, 26 March 1975. EES, folder 1.

¹⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 28 June 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 10.

¹⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 2 July 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 10.

¹⁸ Rich Llewellyn oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 25 April 2014 (Hereafter Llewellyn OH).

¹⁹ “Mrs. Burke Becomes First Black, Woman Supervisor,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 June 1979, 1.

²⁰ Letter to Yvonne Burke, 6 August 1979. SDC, box 2, folder 2.

²¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 17 October 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 10.

mind.²² As lobbying continued, popular support for the ordinance grew. Lawyers for Human Rights, a well-respected non-profit organization, offered a strong endorsement. “I doubt if there is one attorney in our organization,” a representative wrote, “who has not seen cases of discrimination in housing, immigration, employment-the list is endless.”²³ Constituents also encouraged action. “Support a County Gay Rights Ordinance NOW, not later,” one man wrote.²⁴ Another charged that “total support of gay rights” was impossible without “a COUNTY ordinance.”²⁵ “It’s long overdue for us,” a woman from West Hollywood opined.²⁶ After several meetings, Edelman believed Hahn was ready and drafted the ordinance.²⁷ At the last moment, however, Hahn sent mixed signals, resulting in “a strategy night session with some 10 MECLA and ACLU representatives.” All pressured Hahn while Edelman reached out to conservative Supervisor Pete Schabarum. An unlikely supporter, Edelman was willing to play all cards.²⁸ In the midst of their efforts, Edelman and activists were not blindsided by conservative victories that November.

Coinciding with the Presidential Election, supervisorial races became unusually competitive in 1980. Schabarum, long the sole conservative on the Board, correctly believed a takeover possible and targeted Burke and Baxter Ward. Republican Michael Antonovich was recruited to take on the latter. He ran in opposition to Détente and demanded the nation’s withdrawal from the United Nations. No fans of Ward, Edelman and Hahn focused on protecting Burke. Initially she seemed safe: in December of 1979 she had “no opposition in sight” and had “impressed groups with her grasp of local concerns.” As a token of moderation, she even permitted a Hayes-appointed regional coast commissioner to remain on the job despite his “pro-developer” views.²⁹ Her luck changed when Schabarum convinced Deane Dana, a George Deukmejian staffer, to enter the race. Schabarum openly longed to “take the Board in a more conservative direction” and motivated development interests to rally behind Republican challengers. Dana also relied on

²² Aide to Ed Edelman, 1 November 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 10.

²³ Letter to Jack Jones, 4 October 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

²⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 11 December 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

²⁵ E. Vehling to Ed Edelman, 11 December 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

²⁶ Letter to Ed Edelman, 11 December 1979. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

²⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 11 February 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 9.

²⁸ Aide to Ed Edelman, 2 February 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 9.

²⁹ “Yvonne Burke-No Opposition in Sight,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 December 1979, C1.

race-baiting. In the predominantly white Fourth District, he “blasted [Burke] as a supporter of forced busing,” a charge that lacked accuracy and relevancy. On Election Day, Ward was declared a loser as soon as the polls closed. While he “blamed Schabarum,” the *Los Angeles Times* noted he had “made enemies among his colleagues.” Burke’s race was much closer. At her campaign headquarters aboard the Queen Mary in Long Beach, she worried that President Carter’s early concession speech “discouraged many Democrats from going to the polls.” In the end she fell short by less than 8,000 votes. Schabarum celebrated the “smashing conservative triumph.” Antonovich believed the returns signaled a “rejection of liberalism.”³⁰ For Edelman, the strategy of “finding one vote” suddenly became a quest for “two or three votes.”³¹ In the immediate aftermath the countywide ordinance was doomed.

As that became clear, homophobic attitudes of the new Board were also revealed. Antonovich had supported Proposition 6 while Dana voiced a clear distaste for “special gay rights.” They were both lost causes. Schabarum ironically became the moderate Republican. Edelman tried to lobby him through a “Republican ‘Log Cabin’ Club” and considered “rewriting the ordinance so as not to emphasize sexual preference but rather human rights.”³² Assuming Hahn voted yes, Schabarum’s conversion might be the “key vote.”³³ While Edelman gave “it a good shot,” Schabarum was “a ‘NO.’”³⁴ Worse yet, after months of waffling, Hahn stunned all when he indicated that was “a definite NO” as well.³⁵ To activists, the county suddenly appeared hostile. At one gathering, an aide reported to Edelman, “there [were] elements of the gay community who question not only your judgment but also credibility in supporting you.”³⁶ Disillusionment continued as activists faced setbacks in urban planning, rent control, and the battle against AIDS.

³⁰ “Conservatives Win Control of County Supervisors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1980, 3.

³¹ Jim Gilson oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Los Angeles, California, 20 December 2013 (Hereafter Gilson OH).

³² Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 November 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 9.

³³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 3 December 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 9.

³⁴ Ed Edelman note to staff, 6 December 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

³⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, 6 December 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

³⁶ Aide to Ed Edelman, 3 December 1980. EDE, box 249, folder 11.

Ungovernable Space: The Demise of the West Hollywood Community Plan

Planning decisions contributed greatly to the cityhood campaign. As an unincorporated area, West Hollywood lacked a clear development plan. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, it became a haven for renters (who sought cheap housing) and developers (who sought refuge from regulations). As a result, its urban identity was decidedly mixed. Edelman sought clarity and called for a coherent plan. Tenants, developers, and urban planners established a blueprint in the West Hollywood Community Plan (WHCP). While it sought urban identity, the WHCP revealed neighborhood divisions between renters, landlords, and developers. While Edelman portrayed himself as a mediator, behind-the-scenes he frustrated developers. If supported, the WHCP might have solved many planning issues which plagued West Hollywood. Instead, its failure exacerbated conflicts between renters and developers and stoked talks of separation.

The WHCP stressed inclusivity and included diverse segments of the community.³⁷ Renters and small-property owners worked alongside developers. The first public meeting was held at Plummer Park in 1976, where Edelman bemoaned that West Hollywood had “been allowed to grow for so many years unguided.” The WHCP would monitor the future.³⁸ To developers, his language seemed antagonistic. “Monitoring” surely implied regulations, the lack of which made West Hollywood appealing. Indeed, they took advantage of lax codes and zoning regulations which allowed “speculative developers” to construct “hastily built ‘dingbat’ apartments.”³⁹ As the housing crisis worsened, developers exploited the situation. Proposition 13 provided relief to developers (including Howard Jarvis) by radically lowering tax burdens. As “more and more people competed for rental units,” moreover, owners “pushed rents to new heights.”⁴⁰ Low-income queers, seniors, immigrants, racial minorities, and others flocked to West Hollywood for relief. As it was, West Hollywood consisted of an unwieldy mixture of commercial and residential zones. The latter were fiercely contested by renters, homeowners, and developers. R-1 and R-2 zones limited

³⁷ “Master Plan for Area in West Hollywood Revisited,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 March 1975, 7.

³⁸ “Public Will Discuss West Hollywood Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 August 1976, 2.

³⁹ Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 46.

⁴⁰ Michael Stewart Foley, *Front Porch Politics: The Forgotten Heyday of American Activism in the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 245.

development to “one-family” and “two-family” residences and comprised 13% of West Hollywood space. R-3 zones, which permitted “moderately-sized apartments” and public housing projects, comprised 16%. “Great density” housing, or R-4 zones, outweighed both, and accounted for 71% of overall West Hollywood space.⁴¹ Their abundance made the area a development paradise.⁴² Furthermore, the R-4 category unnaturally collapsed homeless shelters, like the GCSC, with large-scale condominiums and hotels.

The WHCP committee consisted of developers, but was outweighed by small-property owners, renters, and community activists. Its composition accurately represented the community, which was predominantly renter-based and low-income. Architects Margaret and Bud Siegel were recruited by Edelman for their “community activism” and “advocacy of affordable housing.” Norma Grody, the President of the Beverly Hills Young Democrats, was appointed because she was a “feminist” and “very sharp...in community outreach.” Betty Berzon, a West Hollywood “property owner,” was also a GCSC Board member and “very knowledgeable on gay sociological problems.” Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) and a West Hollywood renter, was appointed, as was Chris Cox, a 27-year-old gay renter who was “well informed on young gay persons’ problems” and an Edelman campaign supporter. Attorney, businessman, and developer Sheldon Andelson rounded out the committee.⁴³ While they worked alongside developers, progressive members heavily influenced the WHCP. The director of the Whip Poverty Program encouraged the committee to tackle “widespread condominium conversion projects.” These caused “displacement of renters and decreased housing opportunities for senior citizens, the handicapped, and low-income families.”⁴⁴ By the late 1970s, in fact, condominium development was epidemic in L.A. County. From 1970 through 1979, over 366,000 units of housing were converted.⁴⁵ The *Los Angeles Times* believed this “wave of the future” was “irreversible” and predicted that “within the next 10 years, condominiums will dominate the Southland’s residential tracts just as the compact car has taken

⁴¹ Data on West Hollywood Housing, 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁴² United States Census, Census Tracts-Los Angeles and Long Beach (PHC 80-2-226), United States Bureau of the Census, 1980. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

⁴³ Aide to Ed Edelman, West Hollywood Planning Committee, 10 February 1976. EDE, box 743, folder 1.

⁴⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 4 June 1981. EDE, box 742, folder 8.

⁴⁵ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 247.

over the region's freeways."⁴⁶ In one two-month span, over forty applications for conversions were filed in West Hollywood, totaling over one thousand housing units.⁴⁷ Neighborhood fliers demanded officials "Stop the Evictions!!!" which stemmed from these projects.⁴⁸ Renters were not the only ones upset.

Middle-class homeowners also resented conversion projects and some warned that the "suburban lifestyle" would be wiped out by condominiums.⁴⁹ In their critiques, homeowners called upon privileged suburban fantasies, many of which never existed.⁵⁰ Nonetheless, middle-class unhappiness abetted renter resistance. When the Norma Triangle area of West Hollywood was targeted for conversion, homeowners revolted. "Ours is a community of unique qualities!" one homeowner charged. "In many ways, it is like a small town-it simply does not lend itself well to expansion. Multiple dwellings, with their greatly increased density of population, could only be a detriment."⁵¹ Another desperately wanted to "preserve the uniqueness of [West Hollywood]." He was "not interested in selling property" but "only in having [his] HOME remain in a nice area." Multi-family units brought "concrete slab condominiums, increased crime, traffic, and congested living."⁵² In October of 1979, renters and homeowners descended upon a Board of Supervisors demanding a conversion moratorium and "chased board members from the hearing room." Edelman explained he was seeking votes for an ordinance, but renters insisted they could not wait. "Thousands of us will be evicted before the board acts," an elderly man explained. One week later, Edelman introduced the ordinance.⁵³ Protestors returned to assure its passage. When Schabarum moved to postpone the matter, they began shouting. "It is readily apparent," he crowed, "that we have some professional agitators. I'm not

⁴⁶ "Condos-Wave of the Future?" *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1979, 1.

⁴⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 30 October 1979. EDE, box 325, folder 1.

⁴⁸ Condominium conversion flier, 1979. EDE, box 325, folder 1.

⁴⁹ "Condos-Wave of the Future?" *Los Angeles Times*, 20 August 1979, 1.

⁵⁰ Among others, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2004), and Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009).

⁵¹ Owners and Renters of West Hollywood to Ed Edelman, May 1981. EDE, box 1059, folder 4.

⁵² Letter to Ed Edelman, 24 May 1981. EDE, box 1059, folder 4.

⁵³ "Supervisors Forced to Flee Condo Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 October 1979, 1.

going to sit here and listen to outcries and disorderly conduct.” An elderly man shot back that Schabarum served “the most powerful lobby in California, the real estate and developers’ lobby.” Another decried that “supervisors should be put in jail” for inaction.⁵⁴ At the next meeting, Edelman and Burke introduced a compromise halting evictions. Renters celebrated with shouts of “People Power!” but Edelman warned that it was only a temporary fix. “We stopped evictions,” he explained, “but we didn’t stop conversions.”⁵⁵ To accomplish the latter, he borrowed a trick from the city. Earlier that year, officials mandated developers contribute \$500 per each converted unit to assist displaced renters.⁵⁶ Since “conversions create significant problems,” Edelman charged, developers owed renters something.⁵⁷ This did not halt conversions, but curbed their speed. It also made conversion projects reliant on support of individual supervisors.

By 1981 the WHCP was finalized. It offered protections to renters and incentives to developers. “West Hollywood was originally developed as a single family community,” the committee explained. However, “during the past thirty years it has been redeveloped [into] mixed neighborhoods.” Neighborhood expansion required affordability. Developers were required to “minimize displacement, ensure that units meet minimum standards, and promote the retention of rental units.” Financial incentives would be provided to “encourage an increased supply of affordable rental units.” Proposed “density bonuses” would be awarded to developers who constructed large-scale, affordable housing complexes which “provided for the needs of special groups, such as senior citizens, handicapped, and other socially marginalized individuals.”⁵⁸ Historically significant buildings and neighborhoods would be protected, appeasing homeowners. Incentives were even offered to large-scale entities, including Playboy Enterprises, which relocated from Chicago to West Hollywood.⁵⁹ Edelman and allies celebrated the “blueprint for development” and it was praised as a *community*-based approach to planning.⁶⁰ A County Regional

⁵⁴ “Renters Fail Again to Win Condo Conversions Freeze,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 October 1979, 1.

⁵⁵ “L.A. Supervisors Freeze Condo-Related Evictions,” *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1979, 1.

⁵⁶ Aide to Ed Edelman, 28 September 1979. EDE, box 325, folder 2.

⁵⁷ Ed Edelman motion to Board of Supervisors, 9 November 1979. EDE, box 325, folder 1.

⁵⁸ West Hollywood Community Plan, March 1981. EDE, box 1059, folder 1.

⁵⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, November 1979. EDE, box 742, folder 8.

⁶⁰ Aide to Ed Edelman, 27 May 81. EDE, box 1059, folder 2.

Planning employee argued that business and tenant interests were well-balanced. To an evenhanded observer, there was “nothing controversial” about the WHCP.⁶¹ Or was there?

On the left, some felt that the plan did not do enough for renters. One disappointed activist argued that the WHCP offered “no proposals for concrete programs to *insure housing*; in fact, the plan merely urges the development and acquisition of housing, without providing specific plans.” He feared this would force “residents to become subject to bureaucratic entanglement.”⁶² The WHCP committee retorted that renters would receive subsidies, but could not fight the charge of bureaucratic entanglement. That would certainly be the case. Criticism from the left was overshadowed by louder grumbles on the right. Developers went along with the WHCP under the assumption that large-scale hotels would be permitted in R-4 zones, but planners classified these projects as commercial, and excluded them. This spoiled plans for the L’Ermitage North, a sister hotel of the Beverly Hills L’Ermitage. The company purchased land for the expansion and demanded that the definition of R-4 zones be changed. Edelman’s office refused. “Throughout the planning process,” he explained, “it has been the consistent position that hotels belong in commercial areas, not residential. Hotels attract strangers into a community. Other than those who stand to profit, not one person supports this.”⁶³ If an exception were granted, the WHCP would seem to favor developers. On the other hand, if developers abandoned the plan, it might collapse. One committee member urged L’Ermitage to “join civic-minded citizens” and “learn to accept the sometimes discouraging realities of County-wide politics.”⁶⁴ No exception was given. Stymied, the hotel requested that land be rezoned and took their case to conservative supervisors. When the WHCP came up for final approval, they attacked. After “two hours of intense discussion,” Edelman called for a vote, but no one seconded the motion. After speaking to Antonivich in recess, Edelman was assured a vote. When it came, Schabarum was the first called upon. He abstained, at which point an angry Edelman “chided him, reminding him of his criticism of former supervisor Yvonne Burke’s abstentions.” The testy Schabarum sniped back, “All right. Then I’ll

⁶¹ “Increased Density Asked for W. Hollywood Housing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1980, WS1.

⁶² Letter to Edelman, 4 June 1981. EDE, box 742, folder 8.

⁶³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 18 May 1981. EDE, box 742, folder 8.

⁶⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 2 December 1981. EDE, box 724, folder 8.

vote no.” Of the remaining votes, Dana abstained and Antonivich supported, leaving the measure one vote short. Observers noted that Edelman was “obviously angry,” but “vowed not to give up.” Asked to justify their votes, Schabarum and Dana “criticized the plan because of the restrictions it placed on the L’Ermitage hotel project and similar proposed developments.” WHCP committee member Joyce Hundal called the defeat “outrageous” and criticized the “excessive testimony” from developers.⁶⁵

The defeat was another embarrassing setback. Once again the County failed to satisfy community demands, disillusioning supporters. After all, the WHCP was a moderate plan to curb dangerous growth. Larry Gross, leader of the Coalition for Economic Survival (CES) warned that “if the [housing] crisis is not dealt with properly, people will have to sleep in tents. Our elected officials have to stop looking at housing as a business and start regarding it as a necessity.”⁶⁶ Implicit in his warning was a lack of confidence in county government. Loyalty eroded further when conservatives eliminated countywide rent control in 1983.

The Rise and Fall of Rent Control in L.A. County

In addition to condominium conversions, low-income renters fought against unscrupulous gouging in West Hollywood. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s they mobilized for relief. As in the past, queers joined a mosaic. Racial minorities, senior citizens, single women, the disabled, and immigrants all advocated for rent control. This coalition successfully lobbied for countywide rent control, an important but fragile prize. Subject to reauthorizations, it fell victim to the new conservative majority. Its loss strengthened distrust in the county and triggered incorporation.

In the 1970s and 1980s, renters were a growing political constituency and organized to protect their homes amidst a discourse of property rights that disparaged them.⁶⁷ Tenants’ rights movements emerged throughout the United States, especially in Southern California, where affordable housing was fast

⁶⁵ “Supervisors Reject West Hollywood Plan Over Hotel Conflict,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 June 1981, WS1.

⁶⁶ “Increased Density Asked for W. Hollywood Housing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 July 1980, WS1.

⁶⁷ See Ronald Lawson (ed.) *The Tenant Movement in New York City, 1904-1984* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1986), Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, and Quintin Bradley, *The Tenants’ Movement: Resident Involvement, Community Action, and the Contentious Politics of Housing* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

becoming an oxymoron. As Michael Stewart Foley observed, “by the 1970s, the independent ‘mom and pop’ landlord had given way to absentee professional landlords who bought apartment buildings as tax shelters.” Rent struggles in L.A. and Santa Monica produced dedicated activists.⁶⁸ Like many neighborhoods, rents rose steadily in West Hollywood after Proposition 13. This came as a shock to those who believed that tax savings would enable landlords to lower rents. This trickle-down promise never came to pass. Mayor Bradley’s office was flooded with “calls regarding rent increases” after Proposition 13.⁶⁹ Despite conservative promises, the Tax Revolt further eroded housing affordability. The problem was so severe that Howard Jarvis joined Governor Jerry Brown at a press conference to “implore landlords to pass on some of the Prop 13 windfall.”⁷⁰ Located between Santa Monica and West Hollywood, the Westside Fair Housing Council mobilized renters for action.⁷¹ So did Santa Monicans for Renters’ Rights and the Jane Fonda- and Tom Hayden-backed CES.

Activists attempted to secure rent control in 1978 through Proposition P, which appeared on the same ballot as Proposition 13. The rent control measure drew widespread criticism from landlords, who claimed it would “disrupt the free market, pit tenants against landlords, and [reduce] available housing.”⁷² The results of the Tax Revolt, however, weakened this argument. In 1979 renters lobbied for Proposition A, which would “establish a rent control board elected by voters and ban the demolition of rental units for [condominium] conversions.” Activists registered renters and held public forums for the measure. Consumer-activist Ralph Nader offered his support, and urged the predominantly renter-based community of Santa Monica to “vote its interests.” A victory, he hoped, would “remove the stigmas applied to rent control by landlord propaganda.”⁷³ Opponents, including the Apartment Owners Association (AOA), worked feverishly against Proposition A and outspent tenant groups “\$217,257 to \$38,443.” They warned

⁶⁸ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 245-248.

⁶⁹ Letter to Tom Bradley, 24 July 1978. TBP, box 1212, folder 1.

⁷⁰ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 248.

⁷¹ Westside Fair Housing Council pamphlet, undated. EDE, box 322, folder 6.

⁷² “Sure, Rent Control Works, But at What Price?” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 August 1977, 5.

⁷³ “Nader Backs Rent Curb in Santa Monica,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 April 1979, 32.

that rent control would result in “abandoned buildings” full of “rapists, muggers, robbers, and murderers.”⁷⁴ These tactics failed and the measure carried by eight points.⁷⁵ It was a first round victory in a metropolitan struggle. That same year L.A. authorized moderate rent control. West Hollywood was the next target.

Many migrated to West Hollywood in search of low-cost housing and fiercely resisted rent gouging. One man complained that he was “being ‘RIPPED OFF’ again and again by the Apartment house Owners Association [*sic*].” Some were “being forced to live in unfit hovels-often three or four in one very small apartment” which was “not a pleasant or healthy thing.” He pointed out that, since “the Apartmenthouse Owners have a very strong, well paid lobby,” renters “depend on our elected representatives to see that we are protected.”⁷⁶ By the end of 1978, Edelman’s office received an avalanche of complaints about gouging. In one month alone, over 900 cases were reported.⁷⁷ The egregious assault prompted action. In addressing his fellow supervisors, Edelman warned that the situation was “a threat to the general public...In my own District, West Hollywood has reached a crisis.”⁷⁸ The situation was serious enough to convince moderate Republican James Hayes to support the measure, so long as it was limited to unincorporated areas.⁷⁹ The measure authorized a short-term rollback to be reassessed every six months and limited future increases to 7.5%.⁸⁰ Additionally, it included a clause prohibiting “evictions except for good cause,” which provided tenant protections.⁸¹ The breakthrough identified Edelman with rent control and he became a regular guest on Newt Dieter’s *Southern California Issues* radio show, where he discussed the subject.⁸² Rent control often overlapped with gay rights. In 1981, the National Gay Archives hosted a forum on rent control that

⁷⁴ Foley, *Front Porch Politics*, 249.

⁷⁵ “Pro-Tenant Group Sweeps Santa Monica Rent Election,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 1979, 2.

⁷⁶ Letter Ed Edelman, 12 December 1975. EDE, box 331, folder 6.

⁷⁷ Constituent complaints regarding rent increases, June-July, 1978. EDE, Box 821-826.

⁷⁸ Rent Control motion by Ed Edelman, 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁷⁹ “Rent Rollback Proposed for West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 October 1978, D1.

⁸⁰ Rent Control motion by Ed Edelman, 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁸¹ “County Rent-Freeze Plan Turned Down,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 March 1979, 28; “Board Votes 3-1 for Rent Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 1979, 12.

⁸² Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 November 1979. EDE, box 250, folder 5.

was opened by Edelman.⁸³ “Keep up the good work!” one renter wrote to him. “There are old people eating cat and dog food in West Hollywood to pay these gouging landlords.”⁸⁴

Even some landlords welcomed rent control. One apartment owner congratulated Edelman for “rising to the occasion.” He suspected his views came from “the Jewish drive to aid the unfortunate.” As he explained, Proposition 13 had made him a very rich man. The tax rate on his four-bedroom unit decreased from \$3,800 to \$1,600 and was falling still. “Sure, I can raise hell on the rentals,” he mused, “but in good conscience how can I?” After all, “Jarvis had to appeal to the tenant so as to secure the passage of [Proposition] 13...The minute 13 passed, the landlords [declared] ‘We must have rent raises.’” Rent control forced landlords to locate their consciences. “The trouble is with the landlords [who] are not satisfied with the windfall [and] want more and more,” he complained.⁸⁵ This was a minority opinion. Southern California had a long history of development lobbyism. In the 1950s the Californian Real Estate Association (CREA) united with anticommunists in a successful campaign against public housing.⁸⁶ In 1978 CREA boosted Proposition 13 alongside the AOA. Both came out in force against rent control, especially in unincorporated areas. A real estate broker and landlord was “absolutely opposed to the project of rent restriction” and argued that “Los Angeles [was] loosing [*sic*] population” because of it. With “several apartments vacant,” she did not “see a dangerous ‘crunch’ in the near futur [*sic*].” While it was “true that rents have been rising,” she claimed that they had not risen in “proportion [with] property tax, insurance premiums, and labor costs.”⁸⁷ Some landlords punished tenants for rent control. “Due to supervisor Ed Edelman,” one announced, “I am raising all rent to fair market value.” He admitted that this was a calculated act of political revenge. “I am sorry Edelman and the other members of the county board don’t think property owners are

⁸³ Schedule, A Forum on Rent Control, 1981. SCHM, box 1, folder, 1.

⁸⁴ Anonymous to Ed Edelman, 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁸⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 18 October 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁸⁶ See Cuff, *The Provisional City*, and Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

⁸⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 18 April 1977. EDE, box 331, folder 5.

capable of managing their own business.” While the increase would “mean a hardship,” he could not “sit still and allowe [*sic*] myself to be backed into a corner.” He sent a copy of this notice to Edelman.⁸⁸

While the supervisor often strove for balance, he held no love for large developers, who harmed the “physical evolution of the city.”⁸⁹ When he failed to support landlords, CREA and AOA activists took their case to voters. Conservatives had long utilized propositions to secure inequitable housing patterns.⁹⁰ Relying on a language of “privacy,” “freedom of choice,” and “property rights,” they rolled back progressive gains at the ballot box. In 1964, Proposition 14 nullified the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which outlawed racial discrimination in housing. Similarly, Proposition 13 masked itself in populist language to appeal to middle-class homeowners. This strategy stalled when conservatives badly miscalculated with Proposition 10, a measure which would have restricted the county’s authority to impose rent control. The AOA-backed Californians for Fair Rents (CFR) aimed to intentionally deceive, but renters were not so gullible. They had, after all, been dealt a bad hand with Proposition 13. In an editorial, KNX radio station admitted that it was “no fan of rent control” but was “even less fond of deceit.” In actuality, CFR was “a group of landlords who oppose rent control. *Californians for Higher Rents* is more like it.”⁹¹ Others piled on, including the *Los Angeles Times*, which attacked a CFR ad featuring a low-income, disabled, elderly renter in favor of Proposition 10.⁹² “Have you heard both sides of the Proposition 10 issue?” one renter asked in the *Times*. “Who do you believe? The landlords, real estate interests, mortgage bankers, and developers? Or the coalition of citizens for renters rights?” He blasted the “manipulation of the public in a slick and expensive media campaign” and urged “people to look past the media blitz.”⁹³ Actors Jack Lemmon and Peter Fonda came out strongly against CFR. In one ad, Lemmon argued that “Yes on 10 ads

⁸⁸ Letter to tenants, 1978. EDE, box 331, folder 2.

⁸⁹ Jim Gilson OH.

⁹⁰ See especially Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan’s First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2000); Daniel Martinez HoSang, *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2010); and Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941-1978* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁹¹ KNX editorial, 17 December 1979. EDE, box 331, folder 9.

⁹² “Proposition 10 Ads Misleading, Tenants Charge,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 March 1980, 25.

⁹³ “Proposition 10: Rent Control Initiative,” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 April 1980, 4.

are being paid for by big landlords and real estate speculators. They want yes votes so they can make more money.” In another, Fonda told voters: “You know what, it’s a big fraud.”⁹⁴

In West Hollywood the SDC registered voters and held public forums on the measure. As the vote neared, progressives earned a plethora of endorsements against Proposition 10. Governors Edmond (Pat) and Jerry Brown, Mayor Tom Bradley, State Senator David Roberti, and organizers Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta condemned the measure. Media outlets, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *Herald Examiner*, KABC, KNX, KFWB, and the *Santa Ana Register* opposed it as well. One activist bragged that “a variety of Minority, Women’s, [and] Gay community organizations are with us. Our labor support is also very strong.”⁹⁵ In a letter to the *Los Angeles Times*, one woman wrote that she had “finally gotten mad.” The “so-called ‘Fair Rent Initiative,’ which Howard Jarvis and the landlords are attempting to pass off as a ‘rent control’” had ground her gears. “I don’t like being lied to,” she wrote. To her delight, she discovered that she “could fight back, influence others, and make an impact on the electoral process. No longer will I fume in silence.” Channeling the populist rage behind Proposition 13, she sent “a message [to] Howard Jarvis and Co.: I’m mad as hell, and I’m not going to take it anymore!”⁹⁶ Voters routed Proposition 10 at the polls. Despite a “huge war chest,” developers could not deceive.⁹⁷ A celebratory renter declared the victory “an indication of the growing political clout of the tenant’s movement.”⁹⁸ The fate of Proposition 10 supports scholarly reassessments of the late 1970s: far from dead, progressives fought and sometimes won.⁹⁹ Unfortunately for renters in L.A. County, CREA and AOA activists were not done fighting.

Five months after Proposition 10 failed, the County Board of Supervisors shifted sharply to the right. While they could not fight rent control effectively in Santa Monica or Los Angeles, CREA and AOA sensed opportunity at the county level. As they had with public housing, landlords characterized rent

⁹⁴ “Huge War Chest Fails to Ensure Victory for Proposition 10,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 May 1980, 3.

⁹⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 1980. EDE, box 331, folder 9.

⁹⁶ C. Cox to *Los Angeles Times*, 26 December 1979. EDE, box 331, folder 9.

⁹⁷ “Huge War Chest Fails to Ensure Victory for Proposition 10,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 May 1980, 3.

⁹⁸ “Tenant’s Rights Group to Celebrate,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 June 1980, 4.

⁹⁹ This argument is heavily emphasized in Isaac William Martin, *The Permanent Tax Revolt: How Property Tax Transformed American Politics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

control as un-American and socialistic. Apartment Industry Digest newsletter President and landlord Daniel C. Faller urged property owners to “join the revolution against an economic system of redistributing wealth.” The “activists behind the rent control movement are nothing but Socialists parading under the fancy title of ‘Economic Democracy.’” He advised transforming rent control into an issue of free market democracy, an old but reliable trick. Organizers encouraged landlords to support “only those who believe in our current form of government” and back “AMERICAN officials” with “our money and time.” They took aim at “the liberal ‘welfare-crazy’ politicians who like to vote away the rights and money of others.” Along with California Attorney General George Deukmejian, Supervisors Antonivich, Dana, and Schabarum lambasted the “government poking its nose into areas it does not belong.”¹⁰⁰ At private meetings, landlords assaulted renters in ghastly ways. “Once upon a time,” a pamphlet explained, “there were three happy and independent hogs.” They slowly became “conditioned” to “only eat in certain fields” and were eventually trapped as they gorged. Lest the point be missed, this was “a story of SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM, and RENT CONTROL.” Renters were “FAT, LAZY, [and] DEPENDENT”; they went “around trying to extract as many freebies as possible.” The AOA took special aim at Edelman, who “feels it is his duty to make these people as comfortable as possible. Go right ahead, Mr. Edelman!” they wailed, “*but do it with your own paycheck and get your cotton picken [sic] hands out of the pockets of HARD WORKING AMERICANS.*” Even elderly renters felt the assault. “Good parents,” the AOA suggested, “worked and contributed until they [were] into their eighties.” In truth, “many of these fixed income seniors who beg for *more* welfare, could, instead, go back to work.”¹⁰¹ The AOA recast rent control as an issue of “makers” versus “takers,” which overlooked both the *working*-class background of rent control and the use of state subsidies by developers.

Religious arguments were also deployed. At one AOA meeting, a landlord declared that “the Bible states ‘IF ANY WOULD NOT WORK, NEITHER SHALL HE EAT!’” Why, he wondered, “should Housing Providers be coerced into *giving* these free loaders a \$400.00 apartment for only \$200.00?” Rent

¹⁰⁰ Apartment Industry Digest newsletter, November, 1981. EDE, box 331, folder 4.

¹⁰¹ Los Angeles Apartment Owners Association leaflet, 1983. EDE, box 331, folder 4.

control (like public housing) “*justified a socialistic economic system,*” and abetted godless communism. Or was it fascism? The AOA predicted a return to “the Nazi economic philosophy: ‘THE COMMONWEALTH RANKS ABOVE PRIVATE PROPERTY’” and exploited Jane Fonda’s involvement in the rent control movement. Steve Ross argued that she was a special target for conservatives.¹⁰² Sure enough, the AOA blasted “Hanoi Jane” and proclaimed that “The [Tom] Hayden-Fonda-Santa Monica brand of ‘Socialism’ did not work for Hitler, is not working in Poland, and will never work in the U.S.A.!” Landlords often portrayed themselves as working-class heroes. Apartment ownership in L.A. was “a ‘Mom and Pop’ business that supplied housing” for the majority. Rent control would “destroy the heart of the American dream—the right to truly own property.” The histrionics were too much for some. One landlord sent AOA literature (including the “hog fairytale”) to Edelman. “This is being passed out to landlords in West Hollywood,” he warned.¹⁰³ Dissent was the exception, not the rule. Red-baiting, antistatism, and religion, concocted a bitter anti-rent control stew.

As renewal of the ordinance neared, one landlord accused queers of abusing rent control. “As an owner” he was “most strongly opposed to any form of rent control,” but was “sensitive to the needs of the elderly and poor.” The “younger working people—some of whom are degenerates,” however, demanded “free rides.”¹⁰⁴ Queers fought these accusations. One man implored Edelman to “do everything [could]” to save his home.¹⁰⁵ Others organized a forum at the National Gay Archives on Hudson Avenue featuring speeches and testimonials from renters.¹⁰⁶ An elderly woman from another unincorporated area asked Edelman to sway her supervisor “to go along” with rent control.¹⁰⁷ After the 1980 takeover, Schabarum became Edelman’s targeted third vote. “He figured he had Kenny Hahn’s vote,” an aide remembered, “but he had to find a third. He tried to be strategic about it.”¹⁰⁸ Edelman played tennis regularly with Schabarum,

¹⁰² Steve Ross, *Hollywood Left and Right: How Movie Stars Shaped American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 229-229.

¹⁰³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 1983. EDE, box 331, folder 4.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to Ed Edelman, 16 November 1983. EDE, box 1005, folder 4.

¹⁰⁵ Letter to Ed Edelman, 1 July 1980. EDE, box 821.

¹⁰⁶ Forum to Save Rent Control flier, 21 April 1981. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁰⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 23 March 1981. EDE, box 821.

¹⁰⁸ Rich Llewellyn OH.

and got to know him on a personal level. In 1981, he convinced him to reauthorize rent control and hoped to do so again. In May of 1983, however, Schabaram switched sides. Instead of rent control, the county ought to fund an AOA study on rental housing he suggested. “That’s not worth a hill of beans,” Edelman shot back. Larry Gross promised to “fight on the ballot, in the courts, wherever we need to.”¹⁰⁹ Another man warned that, without rent control, West Hollywood might be annexed to L.A.¹¹⁰ One lesbian expressed her “gratitude and thanks” for Edelman’s efforts, but warned that “the DISASTER OF MAY 3, 1983 could not have come at a worse time.”¹¹¹ Another constituent was “appalled and dismayed by [Edelman’s] feeble and defeatist approach.” As a supervisor, “you should have been better armed. You should know where the ‘skeletons are hidden.’ You are the politician-you should know how to ‘wheel and deal’-that’s why you were elected.”¹¹² Edelman did his best to explain: “Organized opposition” to rent control was “large and influential,” he wrote back. “As a result, ‘behind-the-scenes’ negotiations are not always successful.”¹¹³

Renters were not in a patient mood, and rallied behind a badly miscalculated CES ballot initiative called Proposition M, which would have restored rent control by voter fiat. Unlike Proposition 10, which was put to a statewide vote, Proposition M was a county initiative. Moreover, *only residents of unincorporated areas* were eligible to vote. While West Hollywood was large, it was outweighed by predominantly middle-class unincorporated neighborhoods like Calabassas, El Monte, Hacienda Heights, Inglewood, Montebello and Newhall. The CES thus inadvertently constructed a voting constituency unsympathetic to rent control. They were also badly outmaneuvered by the AOA. At one meeting, developers and landlords displayed “an almost evangelical” fervor against Proposition M. One woman pledged \$10,000 to defeat it and hoped to “dance on the grave of rent control.” Many slammed West Hollywood’s “heavy populations of the elderly and gays” who drove the “radical agenda.” Some viewed Proposition M as the most radical rent control initiative yet. Limiting annual increases to 4%, the measure

¹⁰⁹ “County Rejects Extension of Rent Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, 4 May 1983, 1.

¹¹⁰ “Tenants Vow renewed Fight as County Ends Rent Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, 5 May 1983, 1.

¹¹¹ Letter to Ed Edelman, 5 May 19.83. EDE, box 1005, folder 4.

¹¹² Letter to Ed Edelman, 15 April 1983. EDE, box 1005, folder 4.

¹¹³ Letter, 23 April 1983. EDE, box 1005, folder 4.

improved on the city's 7% cap, and Santa Monica's 4.5% limit.¹¹⁴ The AOA devoted significant resources to defeat it while supporters of Proposition M relied on donations averaging \$10.

As the campaign unfolded, conservatives framed apartment owners as working-class families and victims. An owner of several properties in West Hollywood and Beverly Hills complained that "since the invention of rent control, real estate capital has left [West Hollywood]" resulting in less choice for tenants. "Why should property owners be singled out and punished?" he asked. "Who will be the next victim of government control?"¹¹⁵ Some resorted to race-baiting and targeted minorities in an effort to siphon away votes. In the heavily African American areas of Florence and Willowbrook, the AOA flooded residents with mailers. Predicting "neighborhood deterioration" and a rise in crime if the measure passed, activists encouraged black voters to "avoid another Watts." The AOA recruited an African American landlord to make the pitch. He framed Proposition M as a threat to the black middle-class. "Don't pass this thing," he warned, "it will kill me!" In East L.A., leaflets warned that Latino families would face evictions since Proposition M would "make it difficult to allow extended family members" to live in the same unit. These were effective appeals. Predominantly black Willowbrook voted 70-30% against Proposition M; East L.A. voters turned down the measure 65-35%.¹¹⁶ In predominantly suburban areas, Proposition M didn't have a chance. The AOA warned that "rent control creates slums, stops new construction, and costs too much money." It was a "giveaway" that homeowners would pay for. The AOA was not "educating the electorate," one renter charged. It was "buying an election."¹¹⁷

For many the collapse of rent control was disastrous. Gouging threatened low-income renters in West Hollywood. The vast majority of GCSC and SDC activists were renters who faced the possibility of being squeezed out of their neighborhoods. Some landlords could be especially cruel. When one man found himself in a heated battle with his landlord, he was informed that his "attitude will determine [his] rent. That's one good thing about being a property owner, I set the price." Apparently he didn't like the tenant's

¹¹⁴ "Landlords Quickly Build Up Funds to Battle Rent Control," *Los Angeles Times*, 12 September 1983, 1.

¹¹⁵ "Proposition M: Rent Control," *Los Angeles Times*, 5 November 1983, 2.

¹¹⁶ "Minority Areas Helped Defeat Rent Control," *Los Angeles Times*, 10 November 1983, 1.

¹¹⁷ "To Tenants, It's a Necessary Protection," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 November 1983, 5.

attitude: his rent was raised 40%, from \$372 to \$515. Believing that the increase was “excessive, especially in view of the fact that I am furnishing my own stove and refrigerator, living with a single kitchen sink without a garbage disposal, and have an investment in the carpeting which is depreciating annually,” he appealed for relief. But his landlord would have none of it. “After reading the *tone* of your letter,” he wrote, “I’ve decided to take my apartment to market price. The rent will be increased by one hundred dollars a month, which means \$515 to \$615...To show you that I mean business,” he threatened, “if I do not see cooperation you will force me to have you look for another apartment.” The powerless tenant appealed to Edelman and California State Senator David Roberti. His experience was “a prime example of the rent gouging going on by greedy landlords.” He had “contacted innumerable agencies regarding this matter,” but “the general consensus is that I, as a tenant, have no rights... Is there no equitable treatment for apartment dwellers?” he asked.¹¹⁸ His experience spoke to the desperation of many.

The demise of rent control was a powerful trigger for incorporation. Like with the WHCP, the county attempted to intervene in the urban transformations which were making West Hollywood unaffordable. Yet again, the county proved incapable of coming to the rescue. Things could hardly get worse, but then they did. The AIDS crisis, and the county’s perceived responses to it, was the final straw.

“We Used to Be Friends”: AIDS and Queer Antistatistism

Some narratives of West Hollywood incorporation overlook the importance of AIDS. Activist Steve Martin remembered that “AIDS hit with full force” only after incorporation. It “cut a swath of death through the community,” he explained, which caused “the euphoria of cityhood...to be fleeting.”¹¹⁹ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons similarly separate AIDS from the story. Once queers founded a “city of [their] own,” AIDS “hit like a bomb” and devastated the community.¹²⁰ In fact, the politics of AIDS impacted incorporation considerably. Activists and scholars have perpetuated antistatist AIDS narratives.

¹¹⁸ Letters, 12 April 1981; 1 May 1984; 15 June 1984; 2 July 1984. EDE, box 331, folder 5.

¹¹⁹ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at Thirty.”

¹²⁰ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 301.

Randy Shilts' powerful tome, *And the Band Played On*, established an enduring example. Writing as he suffered from AIDS-related complications, Shilts blasted the state for silence and inaction.¹²¹ Phil Tiemeyer found that Shilts twisted facts and in the process supported conservative attempts to blame queers for the disease.¹²² Moreover, Jennifer Brier found his antistatist narrative inaccurate. At the highest levels of government, the crisis was not ignored. On the contrary, it produced “fissures within the conservative movement” as Reagan Republicans debated sexuality.¹²³ In L.A. County the state was certainly not silent on AIDS either. Queer activists worked alongside liberal allies to fight the disease. Despite fiscal constraints, the county poured millions into these efforts. Still, an antistatist narrative emerged which encouraged queers to reject the county and seek urban independence.

One aide recalled that Edelman moved quickly on AIDS, a response was almost “natural.” He “felt comfortable with the gay community” and was known as the “healthcare for the poor guy.” AIDS fused the issues. “He became a leader whether he wanted to or not, [but] I think he took that job without any hesitation.” He secured grants for USC and UCLA medical centers and became “the face of the county” during the fight.¹²⁴ Indeed, it was UCLA medical researchers who “discovered” the disease.¹²⁵ Edelman also established an AIDS outreach commission in 1983 which raised revenue and political support. Grants and discretionary spending allowed queers to fight AIDS at the grassroots. In addition to the GCSC, the AIDS Project of Los Angeles (APLA) held the front line. Announcing a \$50,000 grant to APLA, Edelman commended activists for “facing the growing challenge” and pointed out that “many persons with AIDS need support” outside of healthcare.¹²⁶ Funds were also secured through Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grants. Despite the County’s weakened fiscal position, Edelman could allocate FEMA

¹²¹ Randy Shilts, *And the Band Played On: Politics, People, and the AIDS Epidemic* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1987).

¹²² See Phil Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer: Labor, Sexuality, and AIDS in the History of Male Flight Attendants* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 2013).

¹²³ Jennifer Brier, *Infectious Ideas: U.S. Political Responses to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel-Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 3-5.

¹²⁴ Rich Llewellyn OH.

¹²⁵ AIDS was “discovered” at UCLA Medical Center in 1981 thanks in part to a County research grant. See *UCLA AIDS Institute Insider*, Vol. 8, Issue 2 (2012).

¹²⁶ News-bulletin from Ed Edelman, 29 May 1984. EDE, box 249, folder 1.

funds with discretion. With one \$75,000 grant, organizers were able to “establish an emergency shelter to house persons with AIDS” and provide “emergency lodging in a hotel,” “emergency rent assistance for 40 persons,” and “emergency mortgage assistance for 15 persons.”¹²⁷ The battle against AIDS, activists stressed, required “government relief [in order] to survive.”¹²⁸ In the *L. A. Free Press*, APLA Director Bill Misenhimer “credited Supervisor Edelman for keeping the AIDS Project afloat. In the past year he has channeled funds, getting it ‘wherever he can.’”¹²⁹

The GCSC also fought against AIDS. In fact, the disease allowed Edelman to restore some funds which had been lost to Proposition 13. Although CETA and CDBG funds evaporated, emergency health and disaster monies became available. These were often “unrestricted” and could be used as activists saw fit to “assist persons with AIDS.” Funds were routed into healthcare, housing, employment, and social programs.¹³⁰ When activists encountered bureaucratic obstacles, Edelman often intervened. On one occasion, Don Kilhefner applied for an emergency grant to open an “AIDS prevention clinic.” County officials rejected the request, arguing that “there [was] no such thing as AIDS prevention.” When Edelman became involved, that position was altered and the grant issued.¹³¹ In speeches before MECLA and the SDC, Edelman maintained that a “special relationship” existed between queers and county government. “Clearly, the tremendous cost of AIDS research is beyond the County’s means alone,” he explained. “However, the County can be heavily involved in education and provision of social services.” He highlighted the impressive sums of money which had flowed from his office to grassroots organizations. “Virtually all funds,” he boasted, “have been secured thorough Third District block grants.”¹³² He promised

¹²⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 17 August 1983. EDE, box 249, folder 1.

¹²⁸ Letter to Ed Edelman, 28 March 1984. EDE, box 249, folder 1.

¹²⁹ “Urban Heroes: Behind the Scenes at AIDS Project/L.A.,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 15 June 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

¹³⁰ Letter, 15 May 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

¹³¹ Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

¹³² Aide to Ed Edelman, 5 July 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

that “if the rest of the Board of Supervisors can be influenced,” even “more County money will be awarded.”¹³³ “Influencing” them to join the fight, however, was not easy.

Supervisors Antonovich, Dana, and Schabarum often opposed intervention. Instead, they supported reactionary responses to AIDS, which were not hard to find. An editor for the *Los Angeles Daily News* supported a national plan (which was championed by conservative William F. Buckley) to quarantine queers and “curtail the spread of contamination.” The “national obsession with minority rights,” he wrote, needed to end.¹³⁴ A writer in the *Hollywood Independent* concluded that “AIDS and tolerance” could not “exist together.” Like nothing else AIDS was “killing the possibility of tolerance... the freedom to be friends is gone.”¹³⁵ This article appeared alongside a cartoon depicting a child boasting to his teacher “It wouldn’t be so bad having AIDS in school. At least you wouldn’t have to worry about being molested!”¹³⁶ On the Board, Antonovich and Schabarum were strongly opposed to sex education, the same issue that engulfed the Reagan Administration.¹³⁷ They took aim at L.A. Cares, an initiative launched by the APLA, the GCSC, and the local chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). With the celebrity endorsement of *Poltergeist* actress Zelda Rubenstein, L.A. Cares encouraged queers to “play safely” and use condoms.¹³⁸ Advertisements recast safe sex in clever and erotic ways. Conservatives charged that taxpayers were funding “pornography” and Antonovich demanded that money be returned. Edelman’s office shot back, accusing Antonovich of “focusing on a potential embarrassment rather than saving lives. Surely,” aides argued, “he can’t believe that anyone will actually become gay because of these brochures.”¹³⁹ Schabarum came to Antonovich’s defense and called for a “review of all county contracts with gay organizations.”¹⁴⁰ Edelman pointed out that L.A. Cares “targeted a very narrow audience-promiscuous gay

¹³³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 17 August 1984. EDE, box 250, folder 3.

¹³⁴ D.B. Wilson, “Health, Not Rights, is the AIDS Issue,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, 9 October 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 5.

¹³⁵ C. Marshner, “AIDS and Tolerance Together Can’t Exist,” *Hollywood Independent*, 2 October 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 5.

¹³⁶ *Hollywood Independent*, 2 October 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 5.

¹³⁷ See Brier, *Infectious Ideas*.

¹³⁸ Heather Murray, *Not in This Family: Gays and the Meaning of Kinship in Postwar North America* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 173-177.

¹³⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 22 August 1985. EDE, box 992, folder 4.

¹⁴⁰ “Anti-AIDS Forces Fire at Supervisors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1985, B1.

men who are at high risk.” Since “County funds were not *directly* involved in its publication,” a review was unnecessary. This was slightly disingenuous. Since the GCSC and the APLA received “unrestricted” funds, they could utilize resources for L.A. Cares. But Edelman also fought back substantively. The advertisements were “*not* pornography,” he maintained, but were “intended to educate [by] depicting gay men having safe sex in an appealing way. There is redeeming *social value* here.”¹⁴¹ His argument won the day but the specter of homophobia haunted the Board.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported that even “veteran Republican” and AIDS activist Bruce Decker could not abide conservative Supervisors. “I’ve worked hard privately to try and avoid this battle,” he confided, but Schabarum’s actions “bordered on criminal neglect.”¹⁴² In refusing to assist in the battle against AIDS, conservatives gave the Board a bad name. “The L.A. Supervisors are appalling, just appalling,” one woman observed. “They know nothing about health education. Nothing. It’s an embarrassment. You’ve got four bigots on the board.” The exception was Edelman, who represented “an oasis of liberal thinking.”¹⁴³ Schabarum attacked this characterization. The Board of Supervisors *did* care about AIDS, he shot back, but it objected to wasteful spending and partisanship. “I am concerned,” he explained, “that AIDS is being moved into politics.” Unbecomingly, he attacked Mayor Bradley. “I will say on Tom Bradley’s behalf, he has done an outstanding job of running around town and having his picture taken with gay leaders. I also know that he has a City checkbook, but he isn’t spending money on AIDS.” The Mayor shouldn’t “call upon the County to spend more.”¹⁴⁴ That was a cheap shot for two reasons. In the first place, the structure of government called upon the county to fund most health services. Moreover, the Mayor *had* provided economic resources. Joining forces with Edelman, he secured \$600,000 for activists around the same time that Schabarum threw his tantrum.¹⁴⁵ Conservatives despised spending in principle, and the crisis of AIDS required a commitment of resources that they resented.

¹⁴¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 27 August 1985. EDE, box 992, folder 4.

¹⁴² “Anti-AIDS Forces Fire at Supervisors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 September 1985, B1.

¹⁴³ H. Helquist, “AIDS in LA,” *Coming Up*, October 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 5.

¹⁴⁴ Letter, 10 October 1985. EDE, box 992, folder 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Coming Up*, October 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 5.

When they were lampooned as bigots, conservatives pushed back. In 1985, Antonovich was mocked in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* when an activist submitted an “open letter” purportedly written by the supervisor. It offered “a solution to the problem of AIDS” that required “homosexual men to start having sex with women, and homosexual women to have sex with men.” Queers ought to alter their behavior “in their own best interests, and in the interests of public health.” Once they realized “the extent of pain and suffering [and] precious tax dollars it can help save,” the solution was a no-brainer. The letter even offered dating advice. “For homosexual men, a good beginning would be smiling at a woman in a friendly, engaging way. One smile elicits another. Two smiles can lead to a conversation. A conversation can provoke a caress, even a kiss, and then in no time you could be experiencing the myriad delights that you’ve been missing.” The “vaccine [for AIDS],” he declared, “is heterosexuality.”¹⁴⁶ County offices were swamped with letters and calls. Even an Edelman aide was duped. These “ignorant statements about gay men,” he charged, “fuel homophobia... Taking Antonovich’s position to its extreme, won’t it follow that high-risk gay men will pursue sexual relations with heterosexual women, a heretofore safe population? How absurd!”¹⁴⁷ Antonovich was not amused. But in demanding an apology he announced his support for conversion therapy. “I think they can become straight or they can restrict themselves to a single partner,” he clarified. When this was published, the anonymous writer of the letter retorted, “What I wrote was a parody... Now that seems to be his actual belief!”¹⁴⁸ Public conflicts cast dispersions on the Board which encouraged queer mistrust.

As a result, the relationship between Edelman and activists was weakened. While many acknowledged his support (he was named *Frontiers* “Man of the Year” in 1985 and received a “Heart of Gold Award” from the AIDS Hospice Foundation in 1988), others took aim.¹⁴⁹ At an AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) demonstration at USC, Edelman was apoplectic. “He was the only one who

¹⁴⁶ J. Morgenstern, “An ‘Open Letter’ From Antonovich,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 5 November 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 4.

¹⁴⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 5 November 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 4.

¹⁴⁸ “Antonovich Lashes Parody Column,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 6 November 1985. EDE, box 248, folder 4.

¹⁴⁹ “Edelman Wins Heart of Gold Award,” *Frontiers*, 1988. EDE, box 993, folder 1.

went,” one aide recalled, “so they yelled at him. Instead of saying, ‘thank you for coming, we know you’re on our side,’ he represented ‘The Man.’ He was on the County Board of Supervisors, and they weren’t doing enough.” The rage of activists was justified, but misdirected. After the event, Edelman expressed “frustration with the gay community.” Queers “were yelling at him, when they used to be his friends. He mostly understood them [but] wished they would be a little more appreciative and recognize his limitations.” A queer charge against Edelman during the AIDS crisis was his pragmatism. “Could he have been more effective, or more radical, or more *something*, to get more than he did being a quiet insider?” some asked.¹⁵⁰ That’s a difficult hypothetical, but it is highly unlikely that conservatives would have responded to that approach.

Throughout the AIDS crisis, county government was not idle. The state responded in meaningful, but insufficient ways. In the end AIDS proved to be a final breaking point for many queers, however. Their anger was understandable. AIDS stole friends, lovers, and families. The generation that was out to “change the world,” Jon Platania explained, were now “dead from AIDS.”¹⁵¹ The epidemic was a communal trauma and altered gay political strategies. “As a result of AIDS,” one observed, “a generation of leaders was wiped out.”¹⁵² Low-income queers, who held core leadership posts in queer organizations, were hit hardest.¹⁵³ The loss of so many resulted in “a natural maturation process” that heightened desires of sovereignty. Alongside the other traumas which befell the county (Proposition 13, the failed gay rights ordinance, the conservative takeover of the Board of Supervisors, and the demise of rent control), AIDS nurtured mistrust of the state.

The Contours of the Incorporation Campaign

As incorporation efforts began, the SDC was eclipsed by a new political force. The Southern California Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club (SCHMC) took a leading role in West

¹⁵⁰ Rich Llewellyn OH.

¹⁵¹ Jon Platania oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Berkeley, California, 3 March 2014 (Hereafter Platania OH).

¹⁵² Kilhefner OH.

¹⁵³ See Brier, *Infectious Ideas* and Tiemeyer, *Plane Queer*.

Hollywood incorporation. While it was a Democratic club, the SCHMC associated more with the left. Its organizers established strong ties to the CES and utilized rent control to spark neighborhood activism. Strengthening bridges between diverse low-income communities, activists envisioned a sexually homogenous new city. This “gay city” spoke to elements within gay liberation, but also threatened long-standing political relationships.

In some ways the SCHMC was an improvement over the SDC. It was far more diverse in its membership. Founder Conrado Terrazas was active in the Chicano Freedom Movement and grew close to Cesar Chavez. He also cozied up to leftist celebrities, including Jane Fonda, who commended his ability “take the lead [in order] to make the impossible possible.”¹⁵⁴ Holding a degree in Chicano Studies, he brought the lessons of the Farm Workers Movement to the SCHMC. The inaugural meeting was held at the Silver Lake El Conquistador restaurant and featured Cesar Chavez who spoke “on the topic of coalition building.”¹⁵⁵ In 1982 organizers launched their first political fight over redistricting. The L.A. City Council was considering a new reapportionment map, and when the Thirteenth District was redrawn, organizers protested. Comprised of Hollywood and Silver Lake neighborhoods, the district had a high concentration of queers. Reapportionment threatened to split it in two and diffuse queer power. “Don’t Let Them Divide Us!” organizers argued. They promised to unveil their own reapportionment map which better served the interests of the community. In gerrymandering the district, they designed it “in order to be winnable by a qualified and open gay or lesbian or a candidate whose sympathies and actions are clearly in accord with the lesbian and gay community.”¹⁵⁶ Here was an interesting question: what exactly did the “lesbian and gay community” stand for? The SCHMC did not adhere to any single political document as the SDC had.

The challenge was a threat to Peggy Stevenson, who was not well-liked. Her steadfast resistance to the annual Gay Pride Parade annoyed activists. More importantly, Terrazas criticized “Stevenson’s lackluster support of rent control, a key issue for gays because many are renters.” This was a fair charge. A

¹⁵⁴ Letters of recommendation for Conrado Terrazas, 12 September 1977; 8 July 1980. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵⁵ Southern California Harvey Milk Club announcement, undated. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁵⁶ Southern California Harvey Milk Club pamphlet, 1982. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

moderate Democrat, she did not support Proposition M and established cozy relationships with developers. Yet when interviewed by the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, Terrazas played sexual, not economic, politics. He preferred “to see an ‘openly gay’ council member” in the seat, and hoped “keeping the city’s gay communities in the same district [would] make that achievable.”¹⁵⁷ In the end, the SCHMC scored an impressive victory and kept the Thirteenth District together. *Frontiers* celebrated the “grassroots lobbying effort” and believed that queers would soon “elect a qualified and open member of our community.” The article in *Frontiers* was unintentionally revealing, however. Terrazas’s efforts were supported by a wide variety of interests and individuals. These included MECLA, the SDC, the Canyon Oaks Neighborhood Watch, the Los Feliz Improvement Association, the Hollywood Merchants Association, and Sheldon Andelson.¹⁵⁸ What might Andelson and the Hollywood Merchants Association have in common with the SCHMC?¹⁵⁹ Organizers followed up with a voter registration drive which would create “a strong grassroots political base” in West Hollywood. Perhaps directed at MECLA and the SDC, activists promised to do this “with only a fraction of the money other political organizations have.” Turning out the queer vote ensured that “our community participates fully in decisions that affect us.” Queers had been building coalitions since the 1960s, but the SCHMC signaled a less ideological strategy. Coalitions could be built around “issues of joint concern, including” the election of openly gay candidates.¹⁶⁰ What if that candidate opposed rent control?

Relations between Edelman and the SCHMC were tense. Aides characterized the “relatively new Club” as “competition with the Stonewall Democratic Club, the more old-line activist organization.”¹⁶¹ When Terrazas invited the supervisor to a rent control rally in Plummer Park, he was suspicious. His orbit consisted of the SDC, the GCSC, and MECLA, but an aide warned that the SCHMC would “soon eclipse Stonewall in activity.”¹⁶² At the rally, Edelman was confronted. “We are a grass roots club,” they explained,

¹⁵⁷ “Gays Try to Stay on Political Map,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 14 June 1982. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

¹⁵⁸ “Hollywood and Silver Lake to Remain Together,” *Frontiers*, 2 September 1982. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

¹⁵⁹ “Council Districting Pleases Incumbents,” *Los Angeles Times*, 26 August 1982, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Southern California Harvey Milk Club brochure, 1982. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

¹⁶¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 April 1983. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹⁶² Aide to Ed Edelman, 15 March 1983. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

“concerned with rent control... You *need* to address this topic of vital concern to our community.”¹⁶³ In response the supervisor gave a speech on affordable housing and promised to continue fighting. When activists asked him for his thoughts on West Hollywood incorporation, he dodged the issue.¹⁶⁴ While they appreciated Edelman’s “firm support of rent control,” they pointed to his inability to save it.¹⁶⁵ Soon after they sent questionnaires to local elected officials querying them on rent control and West Hollywood cityhood.¹⁶⁶ They also announced partnership with the CES, which had earned a reputation for militant activism. While Edelman supported similar aims, he worried that CES and SCHMC lacked pragmatism. Before his appearance at one CES event, he was advised “be on the offensive.” “Knowing this group as we do,” an aide explained, “they [might] try to gain control of the discussion.”¹⁶⁷ Indeed CES leaders often failed to consult with other progressives.

In February of 1984 activists gathered again at Plummer Park. This time, Edelman was not invited. Attended by seniors, queers, and immigrants, it morphed from a rent control forum into an incorporation convention. Larry Gross proclaimed “a new campaign to save rent control *and* provide West Hollywood residents with *true* political representation.” He promised that by “incorporating West Hollywood as a separate city,” renters “would no longer have to worry about Schabarum, Dana, and Antonovich. We could enact our *own* rent control, improve services, and provide for a better community... Together, we can make West Hollywood a place where the needs of its people come first. We can win rent control and more.”¹⁶⁸ The SCHMC immediately joined the fight. This was “not terribly surprising,” since “the club [was] a more radical outgrowth of the older Stonewall Club.”¹⁶⁹ After this, SCHMC leaders were *persona non grata* to Edelman. Veteran queers were suspicious of the rally. “West Hollywood has done extremely well under the present system,” one argued. “I don’t see widespread support for [incorporation]. I know what we’ve

¹⁶³ Letter to Ed Edelman, 23 March 1982. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

¹⁶⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 April 1983. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹⁶⁵ Southern California Harvey Milk Club flier, April 1983. EDE, box 250, folder 2.

¹⁶⁶ Southern California Harvey Milk Club questionnaire, 1984. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁶⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 11 July 1980. EDE, box 743, folder 1.

¹⁶⁸ Coalition for Economic Survival mailer, February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁶⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 1 March 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

got now is working.” Within the SDC, leaders avoided the issue. “It’s kind of like the swallows coming back to Capistrano,” one member mused. “It surfaces periodically, then goes away.”¹⁷⁰ This time it would be different.

Ron Stone emerged as the leading incorporation spokesman. The 36-year-old queer corporate efficiency consultant “long believed that the best way for his community to take control of local planning is to become a city.” Also a renter, he accused the Board of Supervisors of “handing out zoning ordinances like some people hand out after-dinner mints.” He also charged political unfairness and claimed that incorporation was “an issue of democracy and of taxation without representation.” This last charge was inane. In the first place, West Hollywood residents did have political representation. Moreover, queers benefited from that representation. When asked to assess incorporation, L.A. City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky admitted as much. “I think these unincorporated islands,” he mused, “are anomalies these days. They find themselves smack in the middle of resources.” Yaroslavzky pointed to the power of the county that cities often lacked. When Edelman was forced to publically comment on incorporation, he disingenuously stated that he “had not taken a stand,” but agreed that it “would certainly diminish [his] influence in the area.” Despite the enthusiasm of the Plummer Park rally, Stone admitted that the incorporation movement was “small, [lacked] widespread support, and [had] no funding mechanism.” Independence would be difficult, especially since “Ed Edelman is popular with most members of the community.” Still, he believed it could “capture the imaginations” of the community. “All groups could support a move for cityhood,” he declared. “Gays, businessmen, seniors, and renters could be made to support it.”¹⁷¹ Muddled in his desire to incorporate, Stone failed to address a very important question: if West Hollywood became a city, who would it belong to?

¹⁷⁰ “Cityhood Sought for West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1983, WS 1.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Incorporation and Political Fragmentation

As the incorporation campaign unfolded, two significant political developments emerged. First, many queers found themselves at odds with Supervisor Edelman. While he rarely voiced opposition publically, his resistance was a known fact. Tension with the county frayed metropolitan alliances. Secondly, a new form of sexual identity politics began to emerge. West Hollywood had been identifiably queer for decades, but incorporation stoked fantasies of a “gay city” that were new. Activists continued to build bridges with diverse segments of the community, including with seniors, immigrants, and low-income renters, but they also worked to build a cross-class sexual alliance as well. This form of sexual identity politics deemphasized economic imperatives which had previously been foundational.

Ron Stone and Larry Gross worked together to qualify incorporation on the ballot. Stone utilized a MECLA voter registration drive in January to tout the issue.¹⁷² Advertised as a boon for local and national Democrats, the effort received support from Mayor Bradley and Edelman.¹⁷³ The latter rightly worried it would strengthen incorporators. “The gay voter registration drive,” an aide bluntly concluded, “will be targeted to areas where gays have a chance of maximizing their influence (i.e. West Hollywood)” and would be “single issue in orientation (i.e. pro-gay city government).”¹⁷⁴ Edelman’s opposition to incorporation was multifaceted. Ego certainly played a role. “He was a *county supervisor*,” an aide explained. “He was used to having *power* and exercising it as he thought best.” Edelman believed he could “benefit the people” through control. On another level, “he was very proud of being the supervisor of West Hollywood. He felt he had done a very good job.” Indeed he was a proactive supporter and allowed queers a place in his administration. There was a third reason behind his opposition that was important. Edelman believed incorporators were naïve and ill-prepared for city governance. He felt “he could keep West Hollywood, the community, from being overrun by developers. He didn’t need to be elected, he had power.” Edelman often flexed that power in pragmatic ways. Incorporators signaled an opposite approach. Paternalistically,

¹⁷² Municipal Elections Committee of Los Angeles voter registration plan, 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

¹⁷³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 25 February 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

¹⁷⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 8 March 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

Edelman maintained that he was best suited to protect West Hollywood from inequitable urban development. An inexperienced city council, he reasoned, would be “run over by business and development” interests.¹⁷⁵ He had a strong a case to make but mostly kept his views private.

Incorporators returned again to Plummer Park to formally announce the campaign. Edelman sent his West Hollywood Deputy to observe. Attended by “35 persons,” most of whom “were tenants and small property owners,” the rally featured impassioned speeches by Stone and Art Guerrero, an energetic incorporator. Stone “gave a resounding attack on County Government” filled with “half-truths [and] erroneous information.” He was outdone by Guerrero, who proved “vicious in his remarks.” When Edelman’s aide approached him, Guerrero “personally attacked” her and claimed she was “not a resident of West Hollywood” and was thus “incompetent.” That outburst solicited apologies from “everyone except Stone and Guerrero.” Former WHCP committee members Joyce and Jerry Hundal “expressed extreme concern” about incorporation. One renter declared that he would “fight the effort to the death” and walked out. An elderly woman asked why residents weren’t considering “annexation [with Los Angeles]” instead. She also criticized Stone, Guerrero, and the CES for impoliteness. Margot and Bud Siegel, also of the WHCP committee, sat “grinning but silent in the back” of the crowd. Stone claimed an independent city could “keep tax dollars in West Hollywood,” authorize rent control, provide responsible government, “secure new Federal grants,” and promote “full democracy.”¹⁷⁶ Pro-incorporators formed the West Hollywood Incorporation Committee (WHIC) to sway popular opinion.

The participation of CES in WHIC caused controversy. Its leaders had a radical reputation and did not always play well with others. In 1979 the group ruffled feathers when they claimed to have single-handedly halted condominium conversions. Larry Gross indicated that he could “dictate” policy to the county, which earned him a rebuke from Edelman who clarified that CES was not “leading or dictating anything.”¹⁷⁷ Within WHIC, Gross proved difficult to work with. One member claimed “her life had been

¹⁷⁵ Jim Gilson OH.

¹⁷⁶ Aide to Ed Edelman, 30 January 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁷⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 July 1979. EDE, box 325, folder 2.

threatened by Gross” after she questioned the CES. In response, several members cited “negative CES influence” and resigned.¹⁷⁸ Even passionate incorporators worried that the CES did “not adequately represent the best interests of the community.” Many property owners split with WHIC and worried that “rent control supporters were exercising too much power” on the committee.¹⁷⁹ Guerrero accused detractors of voter fraud and labeled them “stooges of the [AOA],” a common but often inaccurate charge.¹⁸⁰

As the campaign dragged on the politics of incorporation became confusing. The SCHMC and CES wed cityhood to rent control.¹⁸¹ Stone supported this connection and promised that a progressive city would “enact a rent freeze,” protect renters from “arbitrary eviction,” and halt all condominium conversions.¹⁸² When incorporators were pressed on funding and revenue programs, they offered vague promises which invited critique. WHCP committee members Allen Chivens and Joyce Hundal blasted the naiveté. While they were property owners, they were also critical of CREA and AOA. “A troubling aspect of cityhood” was that it was a “simple solution to complex problems.” They ridiculed Stone’s “glib promise to bring many of the things *we already have*.” When Stone promised to qualify West Hollywood for important housing grants, Chivens and Hundal retorted that “we already receive grant funding in greater measure than would be possible as a city of some 36,000 people.” They charged incorporators of being “misleading” and “disrespectful to Supervisor Ed Edelman, who has made sure that this area receives a large portion of grants.” The assertion that “a large portion of West Hollywood revenue disappeared into the County General Fund” was a “dangerous myth.” Instead, “the truth is that West Hollywood *costs* the county.” They were not opposed to “equitable rent control” for those “who live on fixed incomes,” but they did not trust Gross, Stone, or Guerrero to develop it. Along with others, they formed the West Hollywood Study Committee (WHSC) to oppose incorporation. Accused of supporting the AOA, members maintained they were “not a front” but “a group of concerned residents, business people and, yes, some small apartment

¹⁷⁸ Aide to Ed Edelman, 24 July 1984. EDE, box 908, folder 8.

¹⁷⁹ “Democratic Club Withdraws Endorsement of West Hollywood Incorporation Committee,” *Los Angeles Post*, 2 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

¹⁸⁰ Aide to Ed Edelman, 24 July 1984. EDE, box 908, folder 8.

¹⁸¹ Southern California Harvey Milk Club to C. Lawson, 1984. SCHM, box 1, folder 1.

¹⁸² Ron Stone, “Rights for Tenants,” September 1984. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

owners who are looking for answers about where West Hollywood is going.” Instead of a “panacea,” they wanted “informed community discussion.” While most fixated on the question “to be a city or not to be a city?” they thought “the more important question to ask is what *kind* of a city would West Hollywood be?”¹⁸³ The *L.A. Free Press* admitted that the WHSC asked good questions.¹⁸⁴ As the two groups battled, Edelman was lured into the conflict.

Incorporation was on his radar as early as 1981. Aides encouraged him to remind queers of his support in hopes of stopping the movement. “You have very good relationships with the gay community,” they explained, “but we should be more visible *because of the annexation issue in West Hollywood.*” In the past Edelman “counted on the fact that the gays would want to remain unincorporated,” but now sensed opposite desires.¹⁸⁵ He moved clandestinely to squash these efforts. In a meeting with activists, Edelman acknowledged that rent control was a major priority. He pointed out that “while rent control [was] temporary in the County,” city ordinances “were also fragile” and asked activists to give him time. He warned against the “division of political power” which would result from separation.¹⁸⁶ As the campaign heated up, aides advised Edelman to choose a strategy. “You need to decide how ‘hard-nosed’ you want to be,” one advised. “Make the policy judgment of how ‘behind-the-scenes’ you want to be. If you want an early, public fight, a hearing makes sense. If you want to stay behind the scenes, private negotiations are the place to fight.”¹⁸⁷ He opted to fight behind the scenes. This politically calculated decision was made as incorporation morphed into a “gay rights” issue.

As he warmed to the idea of cityhood, *Frontiers* editor Bob Craig predicted that West Hollywood would become a “Gay Camelot.” According to incorporator Steve Martin, this promise “electrified the gay community.” Across racial, class, and political lines “the sense that we were somehow making history was

¹⁸³ Allen Chivens and Joyce Hundal, “Informed Discussion Needed on West Hollywood City Issue,” *Los Angeles Post*, 19 July 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

¹⁸⁴ “West Hollywood: Birth Pangs of a City,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 10 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

¹⁸⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, 11 September 1981. EDE, box 24, folder 4.

¹⁸⁶ Aide to Ed Edelman, 1 October 1982. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

¹⁸⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 4 May 1983. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

palpable.”¹⁸⁸ Scholars have documented the myriad desires which animated queer desires for space.¹⁸⁹ Unlike activists in other locales, however, queer Angelenos already had access to power. The promise of cityhood thus offered a more imaginative kind of agency. Edelman recognized this transformation, which left him politically paralyzed. A memo explained that there was a “‘gay pride’ element in the incorporation effort” which Edelman needed to avoid criticizing. Queers were excited to see a “large number of gays and lesbians running for City Council” seats. If his opposition was too harsh, he “might be branded anti-gay.”¹⁹⁰ Identity politics now ironically worked against a powerful political supporter. Instead of publically debating incorporation, Edelman worked covertly which frustrated incorporators. “West Hollywood has the highest population density of any area in the western states,” Ron Stone fumed, “yet its residents are unable to elect their own city officials.” He charged residents had “suffered under county government” and faced “taxation without representation.” Was Edelman King George III?¹⁹¹ When it came to fiscal promises, incorporators could be dangerously deceptive.

Stone claimed that “taxes would go down” with incorporation. This was “*very misleading*,” a county aide charged, because it avoided costs of social services. He also claimed that “West Hollywood would bask in revenue and would qualify for grants” which would “bring millions of dollars to the area.” This was “*an important issue*,” the aide advised Edelman. “There are grants with greater flexibility with the County. You should stress the amount of dollars spent...*It is in the millions.*”¹⁹² This was the strongest front on which to fight. “You have left open the question about whether or not you would still be able to provide grant monies,” another aide confided. “My personal opinion is that, even if you could, it is going to be politically difficult for you to provide much if incorporation passes.” Since “most discretionary block grant money is allocated to the unincorporated areas by population...the funds that you receive will be

¹⁸⁸ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at Thirty.”

¹⁸⁹ See Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*; Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); and Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013).

¹⁹⁰ Aide to Ed Edelman, 17 August 1984. EDE, box 250, folder 3.

¹⁹¹ “West Hollywood Cityhood: Calling Their Own Shots?” *Frontiers*, 1 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁹² Aide to Ed Edelman, 20 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

adjusted to reflect the population of the areas of East Los Angeles.” West Hollywood would be expected to provide for itself. “If you were to take [East L.A.] funds and expend them in West Hollywood,” he explained, “you would leave yourself open to the charge that you were using monies that should be allocated to the poor people in East Los Angeles. We would be soundly criticized.”¹⁹³ A queer aide agreed. Since “an incorporated city will be able to raise revenue,” allotments would need to be curtailed. He warned that adjustments would negatively impact the GCSC, which was then receiving \$82,000 for food and shelter programs, \$50,000 for legal services, and \$100,000 for job training.¹⁹⁴ Incorporation thus threatened social service agencies and put activists in a tough spot.

At a MECLA meeting Edelman agreed that “incorporation could allow for the election of openly gay and lesbian city council members,” but warned that the GCSC might lose funding. Sheldon Andelson seemed “unalarmed,” but Morris Kight seemed “frantic” about this possibility.¹⁹⁵ Don Kilhefner also expressed concern. When he tried to get assurances that budgets would not be affected by incorporation, an aide demurred that he “could not estimate the availability of block grant funds, since the total may be affected by Cityhood.”¹⁹⁶ Stone believed Edelman was bluffing. At a lunch meeting with State Senator David Roberti’s gay liaison, his aides criticized incorporators, who had been repeatedly “rude” and naïve. “It seems all political staffs are perceived to be the enemy,” they complained. Roberti’s aide was frustrated that some mused about “how great it would be to have a ‘gay city,’” but never “addressed the difficulties in starting a city or the funding aspects of doing so.”¹⁹⁷ When Mary Thomas Beavers announced her candidacy for a city council seat, some were shocked. Beavers promised to have “sidewalks scrubbed,” “a code of decent dress established,” and “all pornographic material removed.”¹⁹⁸ “This is for real,” an aide reported to Edelman, “I thought you’d get a kick out of it.”¹⁹⁹ While humorous, she and Edelman worried

¹⁹³ Aide to Ed Edelman, 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁹⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 22 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁹⁵ Aide to Ed Edelman, 29 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁹⁶ Letter, 15 May 1984. EDE, box 24, folder 2.

¹⁹⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 28 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁹⁸ Mary Thomas Beavers campaign brochure, 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

¹⁹⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman staff, 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

that incorporators were ill-prepared for the task of establishing a city. Even some incorporators lamented the “delightfully disconnected” stew of candidates running for city office.²⁰⁰ To fight back, Edelman released his own estimates of projected city revenues and expenses. These caused tensions to rise.

Stone argued that “revenues for West Hollywood” would “exceed the cost of servicing the area by almost \$3 million.”²⁰¹ Yet he failed to factor in social services, including law enforcement. Stone’s budget billed the county at existing formulas, which incorporation would alter. Additionally, his budget neglected key expenditures such as a city engineer.²⁰² Whatever truce existed between incorporators and Edelman broke down. An enraged Stone accused the supervisor of “purposefully trying to mislead people for his own political purposes.” Edelman claimed he was “simply trying to bring out the facts so people can make a decision.”²⁰³ At one point, Stone demanded a public debate.²⁰⁴ In *Frontiers*, incorporators launched brutal attacks against the county. “Poor West Hollywood” was “worse off than the residents of Moscow” an incorporator charged. “At least in Moscow there is a city government (unelected as it might be). That’s better than nothing!” Another claimed he wanted “to live in a *democracy*” not “a monarchy with King Edelman at the throne.” One woman opined that the county had “no business running a town” since “it has no idea how to do it!” Guerrero engaged in histrionics: “I think the most important point regarding cityhood,” he crowed, “is that right now those of us who live in West Hollywood are ‘subjects,’ not real citizens.”²⁰⁵ Considering the long relationship between Edelman and activists, these charges must have come as quite a shock. Ironically, they resembled the conservative antistatist arguments of Proposition 13. Edelman did not respond, which must have been difficult. Behind-the-scenes, even Guerrero admitted they were unfair. While he likened Edelman to King George III in *Frontiers*, privately he called to “apologize for the remarks” and the tone of the campaign.²⁰⁶ After another outburst, he promised to “try very hard not

²⁰⁰ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at Thirty.”

²⁰¹ “Cityhood Sought for West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1983, 1.

²⁰² Letter to Ed Edelman, 21 February 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

²⁰³ “Edelman Turns Down Debate on Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 March 1984, WS1.

²⁰⁴ Telegram, Ron Stone to Ed Edelman, 17 March 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

²⁰⁵ D. Leone, K. Elders, Helyne Landres, and Art Guerrero to *Frontiers*, 22 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²⁰⁶ “West Hollywood: Birth Pangs of a City,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 10 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2; Letter to Ed Edelman, 23 April 1984. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

to make unkind statements” and thanked Edelman for his “outstanding responsiveness in addressing the needs of the gay community.”²⁰⁷ Which was it? Tyrannical king or devoted ally?

For GCSC and SDC organizers the political split was painful. Remarkably few veteran activists publically supported incorporation. Morris Kight resisted it for some time. When he began to warm to the idea he wrote Edelman for advice. When he professed neutrality, an unsatisfied Kight paid him a personal visit. After “a long meeting with the Supervisor,” he “was of two minds on” incorporation. “On the one hand,” he wrote, “I am supposed to advocate good government.” On the other, “I have always advocated self-determination (Woodrow Wilson’s Point of 1919) and it would be wonderful to have a government of Gay and Lesbian folks.” Kight confronted a paradox of gay liberation. He wanted to provide for his community, but also wanted independence. In better days the county nurtured gay liberation, but now the idea of a “gay city” was intoxicating. Kight supported incorporation but stressed its economic agenda. “Rental control,” he concluded, was “a powerful device to make [incorporation] supportable.”²⁰⁸ The SDC avoided cooperation with the SCHMC, CES, and Ron Stone. Organizers agreed that voters needed “a fair presentation” of incorporation, and invited opponents to make their case.²⁰⁹ When the SDC finally issued an endorsement, organizers proclaimed they were “in no way a [casting a] negative reflection on Ed Edelman” who had “done a superb job representing gay and lesbian people.”²¹⁰

In the final days before the election, Edelman threw an unexpected wrench in the works. Since its demise in 1983, he worked to find a third vote to restore countywide rent control (Hahn was the second). Ironically, incorporators helped him do this. Supervisor Dana expressed discomfort with the “idea of a gay city.” After some “softening,” he proved “amenable to rent control extension *only* in West Hollywood.” Even Schabarum seemed open.²¹¹ Aides agreed that even if he did not vote in favor of rent control, he would “at least agree not to oppose it.”²¹² When incorporators got wind of Edelman’s strategy, they accused him

²⁰⁷ Letter to Ed Edelman, 15 June 1984. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

²⁰⁸ Ed Edelman to Morris Kight; Kight, personal notes, 12 March 1984. EES, folder 2.

²⁰⁹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 14 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²¹⁰ “Stonewall Supports Rights to Choose,” *Frontiers*, 14 March 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²¹¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 18 July 1984. EDE, box 908, folder 8.

²¹² Aide to Ed Edelman, 31 July 1984. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

of sabotage. “This is his last attempt at trying to kill this,” Stone charged. Edelman fired back asking why, if he could “protect the tenants,” was incorporation necessary?²¹³ By this time, however, incorporation had moved beyond rent control. On Halloween, the Board of Supervisors extended rent control in West Hollywood “indefinitely.”²¹⁴ There was little celebration. “Three strange bedfellows,” incorporators crowed, “voted to extend rent control” in order to “remove an incentive to vote for incorporation... We doubt many voters will be fooled. Incorporation is an issue for West Hollywood *alone* to decide. Edelman should have kept hands off!”²¹⁵ What began as a rent control movement had morphed into something else. When the votes were cast, incorporators won a sizeable victory. They mobilized a diverse coalition of “gays, senior citizens, Jews, renters,” and Russian immigrants to support cityhood. These groups found common economic ground in the promise of rent control.²¹⁶ Election returns boded well for the future. Incorporator Steve Martin marveled that “the CES slate swept four of five seats.” Alan Viturbi, “an intense 21-year-old in Democratic circles,” and retired schoolteacher Helen Albert won thanks to strong CES backing. They represented the heterosexual minority. Valerie Terrigno, John Heilman, and Steve Schulte made up the queer majority. On election night, activists and observers focused on sexuality more so than rent control. The returns were a “seismic event,” one incorporator explained, which shook “the very foundation of the national conversation on gay rights.” The “political muscle of the gay community” had been flexed with force.²¹⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* reverberated these assessments. “America’s first gay city” had been born.²¹⁸

By the end of the campaign, a clear political rift existed between queers and the county; the political geography of gay liberation in L.A. had changed. “The ire of pro-city folks,” the *L.A. Free Press* observed, had “been reserved for liberal supervisor Ed Edelman,” who had “done everything he could to sabotage the cityhood effort.” Some believed Edelman feared an “erosion of power”; others thought him opposed to rent

²¹³ “Edelman Trying to ‘Kill’ Drive,” *Los Angeles Post*, 2 August 1984. EDE, box 528, folder 2.

²¹⁴ “Supervisors Extend Rent Control in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 31 October 1984, 1.

²¹⁵ “Meddling in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*, 1 November 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

²¹⁶ “West Hollywood Residents Approve Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1984, 1.

²¹⁷ Steve Martin, West Hollywood at 30.”

²¹⁸ “West Hollywood Residents Approve Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1984, 1.

control (some went so far to claim “that Edelman was actually fronting the landlords in an attempt to stall cityhood”); some even speculated that his opposition was homophobic.²¹⁹ Whether activists believed these charges or not, they caused political damage. After incorporation Edelman remained an ally, but a distant one. For him, the ordeal of incorporation wasn’t “wasn’t even bittersweet. It was just bitter.”²²⁰ As for the new city, it had high expectations to satisfy. Incorporation represented a dramatic restructuring of queer space and politics. In rejecting metropolitan strategies, activists reasoned that West Hollywood could better solve urban problems. City leaders would now be put to the test.

²¹⁹ “West Hollywood: Birth Pangs of a City,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 10 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

²²⁰ Jim Gilson OH.

Chapter Seven: “Not a Gay City, but a Good City”: Austerity and Queer Urban

Renewal

“West Hollywood has never had a clear identity. We want to promote it as the leading center for design and entertainment, as well as home to some of the finest restaurants, hotels, and retail stores in Los Angeles. *We want to put our best foot forward.*”

-Ron Kates and Steve Schulte, 1986

“We founded this city on the basis of individual rights, specifically those of renters, seniors, and gays. West Hollywood is not Anaheim, or Torrance, or Woodland Hills.”

-H. Simmons, 1986

“Gay City. Gay Camelot! That is how the media continues to describe the new city of West Hollywood,” John Rechy bemoaned in 1985. Despite the label of “America’s first gay city,” the activist and author insisted the city possessed a deeper purpose. “West Hollywood is not a gay city,” he explained, “West Hollywood is a *good* city.” In “one of the greatest opportunities in history,” queers could draw upon “their roots in oppression” in order to “show that a minority can use its first-hand knowledge of persecution to create a model for human dignity, respect, [and] economic justice.” Sexual and economic rights went hand in hand. If successful, West Hollywood would be “gay liberation’s greatest victory.”¹ Rechy was not alone. Incorporator Steve Martin trustingly predicted the birth of a progressive “city on a hill.” As urban crises worsened, West Hollywood would provide a blueprint for redemption.² To a certain degree, Rechy and Martin were correct. Queer pride and visibility did become synonymous with the new city, which assured that sexual discrimination would not be tolerated. When it came to economic rights, however, optimistic predictions proved dramatically off-the-mark. West Hollywood never became the paradise that some envisioned. Instead, it came to reflect and strengthen the austerity impulses which birthed it.

¹ John Rechy, “West Hollywood’s Identity: A Good City, Not a Gay City” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1985. C5.

² Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at 30: Steve Martin Looks Back at the 1984 Election,” WEHOville, 6 February 2015 (<http://www.wehoville.com/2015/02/06/west-hollywood-30-steve-martin-looks-back-1984-election/>; last accessed 10 December 2015).

Historians have shown how neoliberal urban transformations, particularly gentrification, have emerged from unlikely places. In Brooklyn, Suleiman Osman located the impulse in diverse political circles. Inspired by urban thinkers such as Jane Jacobs, a “new localism” emerged in the 1970s which united “progressive white-collar reformers” with “angry white ethnics, black power activists, small business owners, and other members of the slow-growth coalition.” These neighborhood activists espoused antistatist attitudes which ran the political gamut. Less a tale of “white flight” and the New Right, the gentrification of Brooklyn resulted from “dashed idealism.”³ Beginning with Manuel Castells, scholars connected the gay rights with gentrification as well. As neighborhoods transitioned from working-class to privileged enclaves, “gay pioneers” helped to speed along the process.⁴ Lawrence Knopp argued that “gay homeowners mobilized around homeowners’ issues, not gay issues” in order to “promote upper-middle-class gay in-migration” to the Marigny neighborhood of New Orleans.⁵ Both Castells and Knopp described queer gentrifiers in conservative terms, but it is more correct to view them alongside Osman’s Brooklyn activists. In both New York and San Francisco, Christina Hanhardt found that “the promotion and protection of gay neighborhoods” inadvertently “reinforced the race and class stratification of postwar urban space.”⁶ In similar fashion, Kwame Holmes concluded that the sexual diversification of the middle class worked against housing affordability in Washington, D.C.⁷ Instead of blaming gentrification on a handful of queer conservatives, new scholarship suggests it lay at the heart of modern liberation movements. West Hollywood strengthens these narratives. Queer development interests did not so much coopt the movement as overstay their welcome. In an effort to achieve incorporation, activists reached out to business leaders. On the one hand, incorporators highlighted the sexual character of the new city: surely establishing a gay

³ Suleiman Osman, *The Invention of Brownstown Brooklyn: Gentrification and the Search for Authenticity in Postwar New York* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 14-16.

⁴ Manuel Castells, “Cultural Identity, Sexual Liberation, and Urban Structure: The Gay Community in San Francisco,” in Castells, *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1985).

⁵ Lawrence Knopp, “Gentrification and Gay Neighborhood Formation in New Orleans,” in Amy Gluckman & Betsy Reed (eds.), *Homo-Economics: Capitalism, Community, and Lesbian and Gay Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997).

⁶ Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 9.

⁷ Kwame Holmes, “Chocolate to Rainbow City: The Dialects of Black and Gay Community Formation in Postwar Washington, D.C., 1946-1978 (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 2011).

city would be a point of pride for all queers. On the other, however, they carefully framed cityhood as an opportunity for developers. Freed from the county, West Hollywood could grow in new directions. Boosters marketed the city as the capital of high-end retail, dining, and housing while progressive urban policies, namely rent control, slowly eroded. This both reflected urban austerity politics and strengthened them. In West Hollywood, queer urban renewal resulted from a bipartisan attempt to make gay rights compatible with the marketplace. In the end, West Hollywood could not run away from larger problem. Metropolitan problems required metropolitan solutions.⁸ Thus, West Hollywood exacerbated the urban crisis.

Incorporation and the Rise of Queer Business Politics

Adequate appreciation of West Hollywood politics requires a return to the incorporation campaign. Activists often spoke of a David and Goliath struggle: “gay political activists” and “pro-rent control advocates,” the story went, fought against “well-entrenched opponents, including landlords.”⁹ Cityhood demonstrated that “grassroots democracy” could defeat establishment interests.¹⁰ Buoying this narrative, scholars characterized cityhood as “an imperative to create a place where gay visibility [was] the norm rather than a daily struggle.”¹¹ According to Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, West Hollywood became “a sort of promised land” for gays.¹² Yet, in an effort to secure victory, incorporators made cityhood amenable to both renter and business constituencies. This gay city was promised to more than one community. Sometimes inadvertently, progressive and business interests disassociated gay rights from progressive economics. This forgotten aspect of the cityhood campaign helps explain why West Hollywood developed the way it did.

⁸ Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 322-323.

⁹ “West Hollywood Residents Approve Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1984, 3.

¹⁰ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at 30.”

¹¹ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 35; Benjamin Forest, “West Hollywood as Symbol: The Significance of Place in the Construction of Gay Identity,” *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 13 (1995).

¹² Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 277.

At the outset, business and development interests decried the creation of “another Santa Monica.” Some even circulated deceptive petitions designed to squash the effort.¹³ At a strategy session at the West Hollywood Hyatt, landlords cast incorporation as harmful to renters. “If the affluent pockets of the city detach themselves,” one woman asked, “what will happen to the citizens who cannot live by themselves because their area does not provide economical resources to make them viable?” If incorporators imposed “stiff rent control measures,” they would create “another New York or Santa Monica” and “stop the upward mobility of poorer citizens, women, and minorities.”¹⁴ The AOA warned that rent control would “POLARIZE CONSTITUENTS ALONG ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL LINES.” If renters were wise, they would avoid “a situation where Renters fight against Owners, seniors fight against Tax Payors [*sic*],” and “the Haves are pitted against the Have-nots.”¹⁵ Unlike previous fights, however, incorporation introduced a new element. Appealing to sexual solidarity, some worked to win over queer business leaders. That strategy emerged mostly from Ron Stone, who crossed political lines for cityhood. He considered himself a progressive liberal, had recently worked on behalf of Senator Alan Cranston.¹⁶ He was also deeply supportive of the CES and SCHMC, but his passion for cityhood encouraged him to reach out to queer business interests. MECLA, long the club of choice for wealthy queers, provided him with a list of potential allies. Stone also hired Arthur James Advertising and utilized the pages of *Frontiers* to mute the issue of rent control in favor of “the idea of a gay city.”¹⁷ As Elizabeth Tandy Shermer argued, “municipal grassstops” redirected social movements and the welfare state throughout the twentieth century.¹⁸ Likewise, queer business leaders transformed the meaning of cityhood.

In both public and private forums, queer elites were recruited. In early 1984, Stone paid a visit to the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce, which was dominated by Sheldon Andelson. Chamber

¹³ West Hollywood Incorporation Committee flier, undated. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

¹⁴ Aide to Ed Edelman, 21 May 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2; Letter to Ed Edelman, 5 June 1984. EDE, box 331, folder 4.

¹⁵ Apartment Owners Association to Ed Edelman, 31 July 1984. EDE, box 331, folder 4.

¹⁶ “West Hollywood Cityhood: Calling Their Own Shots?” *Frontiers*, 1 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁷ Aide to Ed Edelman, 24 January 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Tandy Shermer, *Sunbelt Capitalism: Phoenix and the Transformation of American Politics* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 6.

President Kay McGraw admitted that “the business community [was] divided on [incorporation].”¹⁹ Specifically addressing business and landlord concerns, Stone admitted that he had “sold” incorporation “as a way to save rent control,” but promised balance. “Let’s look at cityhood in business terms,” he suggested. “Area merchants and businessmen stand to gain if the community has its own local government.” An independent West Hollywood would allow “money to be put to use to solve existing problems affecting the business community.” Swaying the conservative chamber was no easy task. Members displayed “degrees of skepticism” and expressed unease with “the involvement of the CES.” The “rent-control agenda,” one member charged, might give West Hollywood “a decidedly liberal bent” and did not reflect “most of the Chamber’s membership.” Stone retorted that “no government would seriously consider hurting its business community.” While members “took no official position on cityhood” at the meeting, some expressed optimism, especially Andelson.²⁰ Around the same time, Edelman’s office reported an avalanche of calls from realtors and brokers anxious to “buy property in West Hollywood.”²¹

Within the pages of *Frontiers*, cityhood was explained in pro-business terms. “Independence” was fundamental to “all gays,” Stone argued, since the county could not “guarantee the continued prosperity of gay lifestyles.” The “hostile county government,” he warned, “could destroy the flavor of the community.” Stone sometimes sounded like Howard Jarvis. “With a \$5 million anticipated surplus,” he predicted, “taxes should go down...Cityhood would enable [tax] dollars to stay” and “attract many new high-quality businesses to area.” Through cityhood, queer businesses had “a chance to make a profit.”²² In other words, cityhood could be viewed as a tax revolt. In another article, Stone envisioned the future city: “Over 100 neighborhood gay bars” were “filled with residents and tourists,” he foretold. “The peacefulness of residential neighborhoods” was “preserved by Cul-de-sac streets.”²³ The city was “fast becoming a major creative center with numerous cultural events such as festivals, design competitions, and sculpture contests.

¹⁹ “Cityhood Sought for West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 December 1983, 1.

²⁰ “Cityhood Organizer Gets down to Business,” *Los Angeles Post*, 23 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²¹ Aide to Ed Edelman, 14 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²² “West Hollywood: Calling Their Own Shots?” *Frontiers*, 1 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²³ “What Would a “City” of West Hollywood be Like?” *Frontiers*, 7 March 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

The annual gay parade will have a home for years to come.” Importantly, moderation ruled the day. “Amidst all this excitement,” he stressed, “the city will keep its financial and political balance. We will balance tenants’ demands with investment realities.” West Hollywood would not be “wild.” “We want to be where the action is,” he confessed, “but don’t want that action to be under our bedroom windows.”²⁴ In this incarnation, West Hollywood looked downright suburban.

Stone also commissioned a revenue study which directly appealed to development interests. Proudly announcing that “seven luxury hotels” were interested in moving to West Hollywood, he predicted “an even larger revenue surplus than previously expected.” In an irony that was lost, L’Ermitage mused about a West Hollywood expansion. Large-scale developers now gave incorporation a second look.²⁵ Members of MECLA seemed downright giddy as incorporation gained support. Home to the wealthiest queers (members paid annual dues of \$1,200), it included developers and business owners such as Andelson, who offered an endorsement and monetary support to Stone.²⁶ “The addition of key community leaders,” such as “businessowners [*sic*], advertising agents, attorneys, and property-owners” strengthened the incorporation coalition, *Frontiers* reported.²⁷ Sheldon Andelson was an important booster. The *Los Angeles Times* labeled him “the most prominent gay leader in the Democratic Party,” but his politics were decidedly pro-business and pro-development. His Bel-Air villa hosted “senators, governors, and would-be presidents,” while his “trendy Westside restaurant was “used for fundraisers.” If West Hollywood incorporated, “some of the most desirable land on the Westside of Los Angeles” would be under new management, and Andelson, “better known as the ‘godfather of West Hollywood,’ would become the city’s best-known and most powerful” advisor.²⁸

When he announced his support, Andelson was honest with his expectations. “I like development,” he explained. “I like tall buildings. I like the power and vibrancy they bring to me.” As chairman of the

²⁴ “Cityhood Should Make Plenty of Dreams Come True,” *Frontiers*, 14 March 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²⁵ “City Vote on Way to Reality?” *Frontiers*, 11 April 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²⁶ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 221.

²⁷ “Community Leaders Join Cityhood Drive,” *Frontiers*, 8 February 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 1.

²⁸ “A Powerful Voice Emerges in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, WS1.

West Hollywood-based Bank of Los Angeles, he hoped to finance “office buildings and condominiums” in the new city. During the 1960s, he made a small fortune on land grabs and felt no shame in speculation. On the contrary, he traced this to his Jewish roots in Boyle Heights when he watched his “grandmother buy a little piece of property, then sell it for [greater value].” In West Hollywood, he saw the potential for queer urban renewal. “I hope we’ll have good architecture here,” he opined, “I hope we’ll have good awareness of the arts, sculpture, landscape, design. God, if we don’t have it here we shouldn’t have it anywhere.” As a queer man, Andelson celebrated the idea of a *gay* city. As a developer, he expected it to enrich his bottom line. By the time of the election, “about a dozen of the [West Hollywood City Council] candidates” maintained “some connection to Andelson.”²⁹ Steve Schulte held the most.

Much like Valerie Terrigno, Schulte came to prominence through the GCSC and the SDC. His experiences, however, taught him different political lessons. Armed with a degree in political science from Yale, Schulte headed to L.A. in the early 1970s and quickly gained notoriety as a model for Colt Studios. Indeed, among many gay men, he was “eye candy.” From the beginning he harbored political ambitions. “In Schulte,” one observer gushed, “the gay community had a proven leader” who was “strikingly handsome,” radiated a “casual masculinity,” and exuded “quiet confidence.”³⁰ He established relationships with queer businessmen, including Andelson, while also working the activist circuit. In 1979, as the GCSC encountered post-Proposition 13 limitations, Schulte was appointed its Executive Director. He viewed the challenge of the Tax Revolt as an opportunity to “clean up” the GCSC and pivot towards private fundraising. In one memo to staff, Schulte promised to give the “ragtag” organization a “sense of structure, order, and credibility.” When one employee was caught working the front desk without a shirt, he was made an example of. “Casualness of dress,” Schulte explained, reflected “casualness of opinion [and] attitude,” which threatened the credibility of the organization. Schulte spent significant time at Andelson’s Trumps, a “fashionable West Hollywood restaurant,” where he courted wealthy donors. At the GCSC, “elite memberships” were established: Friends of the Center and the Silver Circle both required donations of

²⁹ Ibid; “A Powerful Voice Emerges in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, WS1.

³⁰ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at 30.”

\$1,000 or more. Soon the GCSC newsletter “read like the society page of a metropolitan newspaper.” Issues advertised to and for donors, a sweeping change from the days when it promoted classes in welfare rights.³¹

For veteran activists, the changes were glaring. Don Kilhefner believed that the “political consciousness changed” during this period. “Prisoners and homeless people were now seen as losers,” he explained. “Why are we spending money on losers?” donors would ask. “Why are we developing programs around *losers* rather than *winner*s?” He noticed that programs “with an emphasis on black gay men and women” were hidden or eliminated. Known for his radicalism, Kilhefner concluded that he “could no longer relate to the leadership” of the GCSC. “It was time to move on.”³² A similar fate befell David Glascock, who returned to the GCSC in 1980. Upon his arrival, he held high hopes for resuscitating languishing housing programs. This soon became untenable, as precious resources were steered in other directions. Frustrated, Glascock resigned and took a job with the SCACLU where he advocated on behalf of incarcerated queers with AIDS into the 1990s.³³ To GCSC worker Cosmo Bua, during Schulte’s tenure, “money was spent on administration” while “basic services...were eliminated.”³⁴ To a degree, these assessments were unfair to Schulte, who attempted to stabilize an organization in the midst of cataclysmic budget freefalls. At the same time, by appealing to the private marketplace, he strengthened the impulses which had launched the Tax Revolt in the first place. When it came to development, Schulte and Andelson were simpatico. In fact, their open talk of large-scale condominium development and high-end retail cultivation earned them a rebuke from fellow candidate Valerie Terrigno. There “is strong sentiment against such development,” Terrigno warned. Taking a swipe at Andelson’s residence in Beverly Hills, candidate John Heilman assured reporters that “people *who live in the city* will make development decisions.” Still, observers rightly noted that Andelson’s financial patronage earned him power. Gay developer, and avowed

³¹ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 208-210.

³² Don Kilhefner oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, West Hollywood, California, 2 February 2014 (hereafter Kilhefner OH).

³³ “Jailer Weeds Out Straight Inmates,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 December 1990. VCB 12.

³⁴ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 209.

Republican, Don Genhart wryly predicted that Andelson would be the largest “asset to the new City Council,” but noted that “whatever his role is, no one will ever detect it.”³⁵

As the incorporation campaign came to an end, a powerful coalition had been assembled. “For the vast majority of gays,” a writer for the *L.A. Free Press* observed, “the drive for cityhood is about one thing: rent control.” Why then, he wondered, had organizers “made overtures to business people and landlords, urging them to drop their opposition and join forces”? Ron Stone convinced many that West Hollywood would promote queer rights *and* business development. “Business people see themselves as disenfranchised,” one developer explained. “Now they see that [incorporation] is more than radical rent-control...It is also for us.” On election night, Stone continued to encourage these hopes. In West Hollywood, queer business leaders would “continue the entrepreneurial spirit and trendsetting image that came with living on the frontier,” he promised. Some progressives underestimated the strength of business interests. Heilman, for one, thought “the hotel and business lobby crazy if they think they can control the City Council.”³⁶ Despite this view, developers had been brought to the table of West Hollywood politics.

“City on the Hill”? West Hollywood’s Progressive Image

Upon incorporation, West Hollywood leaders appeared to embrace progressive urban policies. As promised, the council authorized rent control, promised to halt condominium conversions, and blazed new trails when it came to gay rights. This progressive image was carefully cultivated and has since been widely celebrated. Even before the city’s inauguration, incorporators promised to push the envelope.³⁷ The *Los Angeles Times* indicated that “America’s first gay city” might be radical, sometimes comparing it to Santa Monica.³⁸ Scholars have often doubled-down on the progressive image, labeling the city “a pioneer of civic empowerment and responsibility.”³⁹ These assessments only partially captured reality. Councilmembers,

³⁵ Ibid; “A Powerful Voice Emerges in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, WS1.

³⁶ “West Hollywood: Birth Pangs of a City,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 10 August 1984. EDE, box 1060, folder 2.

³⁷ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at 30.”

³⁸ “West Hollywood Residents Approve Cityhood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 November 1984, 1.

³⁹ Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A.*, 9.

many of whom were new to politics, often displayed a lack of planning knowledge. Solutions to urban problems, in hindsight, were temporary and fragile. Moreover, councilmembers always worked alongside business interests.

With the exception of Schulte, the five-person council appeared unmistakably left-of-center. Councilmembers Helen Albert, Alan Viterbi, Valerie Terrigno, and John Heilman were all supported by the CES. Shortly after the election, Viterbi declared that progressives had won “a position of strength” in L.A. County.⁴⁰ Terrigno’s election was especially exciting. The Bronx-native migrated to Los Angeles in 1972, enrolled at UCLA, and began taking classes in sociology. Desiring “a job where [she] could help people,” she quickly rose within establishment circles.⁴¹ By 1984 she had worked for the GCSC, the SDC, and Crossroads, the employment wing of Hudson House. Attorney John Heilman supported the GCSC and promised to fight for rent control. At the same time, he viewed West Hollywood a “unique urban village” in need of preservation. This sometimes allied him with homeowners, who resisted large developments, and against renters who sought projects in “historic neighborhoods.”⁴² Adopting a council-management government, councilmembers selected Terrigno as Mayor. Supporters described her as a “dynamically charismatic lesbian who attracted endorsements from across the Democratic establishment.”⁴³ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons considered her a political “golden girl.” As the first openly-lesbian mayor in the nation, she was something of a celebrity.⁴⁴ If there was one councilmember that did not quite fit, it was Steve Schulte, the only candidate not to receive CES support.

Beginning with their first meeting, councilmembers moved to tackle two important issues: sexual discrimination and rent control, arguably the most important issues. On the first front the council proved effective. The failure of the countywide non-discrimination ordinance remained fresh, a letdown leaders promised to make right. Borrowing from models in L.A. and San Francisco, officials authorized an

⁴⁰ “Rent Control, Gay Rights Lead New City’s Agenda,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 November 1984. E1.

⁴¹ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁴² “City that Works,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 December 1985. B16.

⁴³ Steve Martin, “West Hollywood at 30.”

⁴⁴ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 277.

ordinance which forbade sexual discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations. City administrators were instructed to “protect and safeguard the right and opportunity of all persons to be free from discrimination.”⁴⁵ Barney’s Beanery quickly became a test case. The local bar long displayed a sign reading “FAGOTTS [*sic*] STAY OUT” since the 1960s. The misspelled banner was even reproduced on matchbooks and shirts. Under the new ordinance, however, the City Attorney threatened Barney’s Beanery with a “\$500-a-day fine for as long as the violation continues.”⁴⁶ The owner argued that “the sign was a long-standing humorous tradition,” but, facing fines and bad publicity, allowed for its removal.⁴⁷ According to observers, “the gay community cheered on Mayor Terrigno as she invaded Barney’s Beanery with screwdriver in hand” to remove it.⁴⁸ Beyond the non-discrimination ordinance, the council authored progressive domestic partner legislation.

This extended the long quest for queer family rights in L.A. Indeed, GCSC and SDC organizers thought cityhood “an opportunity to take on domestic partnerships” and recognize “[queer] families.”⁴⁹ Terrigno spearheaded the effort and proposed an ordinance which emphasized pluralism. While Berkeley had recently allowed non-married couples to register as domestic partners, West Hollywood legislation was far bolder. “Our intention is to give recognition to caring relationships between two people,” Terrigno explained. She suggested that partnerships extended to elderly residents and other low-income renters who opted to live together for economic reasons. To qualify, individuals had to “share the common necessities of life” and be “responsible for each other’s welfare.” The broadness of the measure drew criticism from Schulte, who insisted that “domestic partners be required to live together for a period of time” in order to “show that they have some kind of commitment.” To this, Terrigno cleverly retorted that marriages were not subject to time limits. “Heterosexual couples have been known to get married on a whim,” she pointed out. “What does it matter whether people have known each other for six minutes or six months?”

⁴⁵ West Hollywood Ordinance No. 41, 1984. RSC, box 3, folder 14.

⁴⁶ “Matchbook Ignites West Hollywood Debate,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 January 1985. A10.

⁴⁷ “West Hollywood Bar Will Drop Slogan,” *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 1985. A2.

⁴⁸ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 278.

⁴⁹ Stonewall Democratic Club newsletter, 20 November 1984. SDC, box 2, folder 8.

Councilmember Viterbi acknowledged the double-standard, but insisted that residential cohabitation be a requirement for approval. “I would hate to see this used to provide benefits to anyone,” he maintained. The Mayor reasoned it would be “unwise for the City to mandate where its residents could and could not live.”⁵⁰

At a public hearing, the broadness of the measure was applauded. In fact, the only public complaint came from someone who felt that the qualifications should be stretched further. It was “unfair,” he reasoned, “to single people who do not wish to enter into *any* contract with another person.”⁵¹ With this criticism noted, councilmembers passed the measure. Observers noted it lacked “legal effect” since private companies could not be coerced to comply. Terrigno admitted the provision “would not have much value in court,” but that did not mean it was worthless.⁵² Within city administration, Terrigno implemented it immediately, thereby extending public employee benefits to partnerships. Moreover, as AIDS ravished the community, the law aided hospital visitations. This was a pressing concern for queers denied time with dying loved ones. Indeed, Terrigno reached out to Cedars-Sinai, the largest medical facility for AIDS patients in L.A., to ensure that the West Hollywood law would be recognized.⁵³ This arrangement spoke to the metropolitan possibilities of the measure. Since no residential requirements were established, those living outside West Hollywood could apply. Of the first five applications, two couples were from West Hollywood, two were from L.A., and one came from Culver City.⁵⁴

Domestic partnerships dovetailed with the quest for affordable housing. “Complaints about rents going up when a partner moves into an apartment” were common. Leaders hoped domestic partnerships would safeguard economic relationships and support rent stabilization.⁵⁵ A representative of Alternative Living for the Aged explained that “when seniors move in together landlords raise their rent.” Domestic partner benefits “might allow them to protect themselves.”⁵⁶ While landlords could raise rents if a

⁵⁰ “Unmarried Couples’ Rights May be Expanded,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 1985. A24.

⁵¹ “Living, Loving, and Legal in West Hollywood,” *Frontiers*, 27 February 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 15.

⁵² “Unmarried Couples’ Rights May be Expanded,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 1985. A24.

⁵³ “Law Lists Rights, Lacks Teeth,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1985. WS1.

⁵⁴ B.K. Stinshoff, “Domestic Partnership Law Goes into Effect,” unknown column, 28 March 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 15.

⁵⁵ “Law Lists Rights, Lacks Teeth,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 February 1985. WS1.

⁵⁶ “Unmarried Couples’ Rights May be Expanded,” *Los Angeles Times*, 10 February 1985. A24.

“roommate” moved into a unit, they could not do so for a “partner.” Thus the ordinance provided broad economic and emotional benefits. When a lesbian couple applied for a partnership license in 1985, they “hoped to pay less in rent.”⁵⁷ *Frontiers* celebrated the dual use value, which “allowed non-married adults—both gay and non-gay” to “afford some of the rights now exclusively given to heterosexually-married couples.”⁵⁸ An SDC leader rightly connected the move to a long history of activism. “During a decade of political leadership,” he claimed, “gay and lesbian issues [moved] from the streets to the halls of government.” Now, “West Hollywood [was] continuing a tradition of progressive issues and coalition building.”⁵⁹ Compared to rent control, securing queer rights legislation proved easy. Since the expiration of countywide rent control, the housing situation in West Hollywood had become “a matter of urgency.” The council was able to quickly authorize moratoriums on rent increases, evictions, condominium conversions, but it soon became clear that a rent control ordinance would become a battle.⁶⁰ Low-income renters made up 80% of the West Hollywood population, but landlords and developers were not prepared to concede anything. Apartment owner and AOA representative Sol Genuth organized opposition and packed council meetings with protestors who threatened retaliation and disinvestment. Debates on the ordinance dragged on for over six months, by which point the council was in the midst of a political crisis.

At the center of the storm was Mayor Terrigno. She had become the progressive face of the city government and was celebrated as a most “courageous elected official.”⁶¹ Ironically, however, her involvement in queer housing activism brought her down. Terrigno had worked for the GCSC, the SDC, and Crossroads, the employment wing of Hudson House. Unfortunately for her, she inherited the extralegal fiscal strategies of the organization. Indeed, Morris Kight hired Terrigno in hopes cleaning up the organization. Upon her appointment, she recalled “inheriting a financial mess” which she “tried desperately

⁵⁷ B.K. Stinshoff, “Domestic Partnership Law Goes into Effect,” unknown column, 28 March 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 15.

⁵⁸ “Living, Loving, and Legal in West Hollywood,” *Frontiers*, 27 February 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 15.

⁵⁹ Stonewall Democratic Club newsletter, 1 May 1985. SDC, box 2, folder 9.

⁶⁰ H. Hufford to Edmund Edelman, 4 December 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

⁶¹ Stonewall Democratic Club newsletter, 1 May 1985. SDC, box 2, folder 9.

in vain to straighten out.”⁶² The “financial shambles” necessitated a “juggling of funds.”⁶³ Often, she and others loaned Crossroads funds to stay afloat. When grants were secured, they were used to pay off these loans. As with the food stamp scandal, this was a survivalist strategy, but nonetheless illegal. The first signs of trouble emerged during the 1984 campaign, when “political foes” began “hinting at [Terrigno’s] mismanagement of Crossroads funds.”⁶⁴ Around the same time, she was “awakened at 3:00 A.M.” by her dog and witnessed “men in brown polyester three-piece suits going through her trash.”⁶⁵ These were likely FBI agents, who had launched an investigation on Terrigno. At issue was a missing \$10,000 from a 1983 Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) grant. The investigation grew throughout 1985, thanks in part to personal rivalries. The council had agreed to eight-month mayoral rotations, but Terrigno indicated a desire for a full year’s term. “Officials from other cities,” she explained, “are always surprised to hear that I’m not mayor for a full year. People are always asking: ‘What are you playing? Musical mayors?’” Supporters gathered a petition of 3,000 signatures to extend her term, which angered John Heilman, who was slated to replace her.⁶⁶ As the FBI investigation expanded, she suspected he was cooperating with investigators as a “vendetta.”⁶⁷ Councilmember Alan Viterbi agreed. “The fact that [news reports] appeared while the council was in the middle of trying to work out the differences between Valerie and John seem suspicious,” he speculated. In August the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Terrigno would face a “Grand Jury probe” and the scandal became public.⁶⁸

Considering her wide popularity, supporters turned on the Mayor with surprising speed. The “success symbol for gay strivers” became a pariah. Council foe Heilman rewrote her tenure: “She would always flake out from responsibility,” he charged. “She would never attend important meetings, she would fail to get her work done, she would conspire behind your back.” Considering their recent spat, his

⁶² Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 278-279.

⁶³ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 278.

⁶⁶ “Mayor’s Backers Hope to Keep Her in Office,” *Los Angeles Times*, 25 July 1985. WS 1.

⁶⁷ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁶⁸ “Terrigno Concedes Loss of Post,” *Los Angeles Times*, 8 August 1985. WS 1.

comments were predictable, and unreliable. Others were more surprising. Longtime friend and fellow activist Jeanne Córdova testified against Terrigno, claiming to have witnessed her mix Crossroads checks with her own. The most painful comments came from Terrigno’s former employer, Morris Kight. “The gay community is suffering,” he suggested, “because of her antics.” He went out of his way to exorcise Terrigno and urged supporters to look past the embarrassment.⁶⁹ The quick abandonment was curious. Kight was intimately involved with Hudson House and Crossroads; he must have known of financial shenanigans. Blaming Terrigno may have allowed him to absolve himself from the entire mess. Others piled on and suggested that Terrigno was ruining the reputation of West Hollywood. The editor of *Frontiers* threw her to the sharks: “She’s pulled the wool over all our eyes,” he wrote. “You’ll forgive us if we pass on the Terrigno defense fund.”⁷⁰ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” a *Los Angeles Times Magazine* writer suggested, was that she lived two lives: one as a “gay activist” and “rising political star,” the other as a “reckless embezzler.”⁷¹ Amid the chastisement, some remained true. The GCSC “quietly initiated efforts” to fund her defense while Sallie Fiske, the publisher of feminist newspaper, charged that Terrigno was “being signaled out” for punishment. “You can’t put your finger on it,” she said, “but you can feel the political climate...there is a quality of a witch hunt here.” Fiske believed that Terrigno’s politics were partly responsible. As the face of rent control and anti-discrimination, “those of us who believe in Valerie will have to emphasize how critical her defense is” she concluded.⁷²

In the early months of 1986, Terrigno went on trial for embezzlement and faced the ordeal largely alone. After “four hours of testimony,” she was able to account for most of the grant money, but not all of it. She insisted that funds were moved around haphazardly to keep Crossroads open. Under oath, she confessed that she “never intended to steal, convert, or embezzle” funds, although she did admit to having made “judgment” and “procedural” errors.⁷³ Her defense attorney maintained she had “tried to keep

⁶⁹ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁷⁰ “Gay Community Takes Sides on Terrigno Defense Fund,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 1985. WS 1.

⁷¹ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁷² “Gay Community Takes Sides on Terrigno Defense Fund,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 October 1985. WS 1.

⁷³ “Terrigno Takes Stand, Admits Judgment Errors,” *Los Angeles Times*, 14 March 1986. B 2.

Crossroads open the best she could, using methods she should not have used.” This included “using her own money to pay expenses” which she “later reimbursed with agency funds.”⁷⁴ Found guilty, she was sentenced to sixty days in a halfway house and fined for the missing funds. By the end of her mayoral tenure, she had become a ghost in West Hollywood. “Her office door was usually locked,” an observer recalled, “her window shades always drawn.” After her trial “she never returned to City Hall.”⁷⁵ A close friend believed the ordeal “destroyed” her.⁷⁶ The ordeal did bring one queer icon out of semi-retirement. Condemning the “wicked miscarriage of justice,” Mattachine founder Harry Hay marched in that year’s gay pride parade carrying a sign reading “anyplace I walk, Valerie walks with me.”⁷⁷

Image mattered to West Hollywood and the Terrigno scandal threatened to damage the reputation of “America’s first gay city.” Her identity as a lesbian and a progressive was important. In the face of controversy, some wondered if “the council knew what they were doing.”⁷⁸ The precarious position offered opportunities to others, especially Steve Schulte. As Terrigno fell, pro-growth business politics ascended. When it came to rent control, housing development, and community investment, West Hollywood supported urban austerity impulses.

The Erosion of Rent Control

In a fundamental way, rent control was the *raison d’être* of West Hollywood. It was the glue which bound communities together during the incorporation campaign and became a central part of the city’s identity. To many residents it was *the* political issue. According to one housing survey, 87% of the housing stock was comprised of rental apartments. Monthly rents ranged from \$120 to \$3,000, but the vast majority of units were inhabited by those with annual incomes of \$25,000 or less. The fate of rental housing, in other words, affected the lives of nearly 90% of West Hollywood constituents.⁷⁹ It was thus no surprise that the

⁷⁴ “Terrigno Convicted,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 March 1986. A 1.

⁷⁵ “The Trouble with Terrigno,” *Los Angeles Times Magazine*, 1 June 1986. PRP, box 15, folder 6.

⁷⁶ Faderman & Timmons, *Gay L.A.*, 279.

⁷⁷ Will Roscoe (ed.), *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 295.

⁷⁸ “The New City is Progressing at an Infant’s Pace,” *Los Angeles Times*, 1 December 1985, 3.

⁷⁹ Housing Survey of West Hollywood, April 1985. RSC, box 5, folder 15.

council authorized rent control. Despite charges from opponents, however, West Hollywood never became a renter's paradise. On the contrary, thanks to landlords, the city's rent control ordinance was shaped in moderate ways. West Hollywood would not be another Santa Monica. Moreover, while many closed the book on rent control after passage of the ordinance, it remained a contested issue. By the end of the 1980s, in fact, it had been slowly strangled to death.

Developers and landlords had a long history of activism in L.A. County. In West Hollywood, some opposed rent control during the incorporation campaign, but many more mobilized with force after the city was established. When the council promised to follow through with rent control, opponents organized a meeting in Plummer Park (the very place of the first incorporation rally). One woman warned of a "coming apocalypse" if "socialists" succeeded in "creating a state of war between landlords and tenants." It very well might "be the beginning of World War III," she predicted. The energetic gathering prompted a response from City Hall. Councilmembers Steve Schulte and Alan Viterbi attempted to calm hysteria, promising to avoid radical measures. "There's good potential for a middle ground," Viterbi assured. Although opponents "always bring up Santa Monica....this is West Hollywood," he proclaimed. "We're going to be able to fit rent control to our needs." Schulte guaranteed that "all sides" would be listened to.⁸⁰ Opponents were not convinced and rallied behind landlord and AOA insider Grafton Tanquary, who founded West Hollywood Concerned Citizens (WHCC), a group made up of landlords and developers. He vowed to fight rent control tooth and nail, often relying on strategies of the past.

In the spring of 1985, as the council debated the ordinance, WHCC activists staged a dramatic protest. "It might seem as though 'Red Dawn' [has] come to Sunset Boulevard," *Los Angeles Herald* writer Milton McGriff observed. "Landlords, frustrated with what they describe as 'punitive' rent control, are taking paint brushes and rollers to their apartment buildings [and] painting them fire engine red." The protest invoked Cold War fears. Since the "socialistic tendencies" of the council were obvious, activists explained, the buildings of West Hollywood might as well reflect it. Interestingly, some veered off message.

⁸⁰ "West Hollywood Wrangles Over Shape of Rent Law," *Los Angeles Times*, 17 February 1985. WS1.

Atop one apartment building, a large banner demanded “state or federal relief” in order to “support private property rights!” Another threatened to “paint hundreds of properties and signs” if owners did not receive assistance. City leaders chided the “visibly disturbing” protest. “If they paint their buildings,” one councilmember concluded, “that’s their choice, [but] it doesn’t show concern for the beautification of the city.”⁸¹ Indeed, many were confused by the protest, which led one organizer to pen a public letter of explanation. “Some wonder why I painted my building red,” he wrote. It was “not out of malice for the City,” which he “loved and supported.” Rather, it was a “much-needed social statement.” In West Hollywood, “property owners are a minority and our businesses have been singled out” for “discrimination by...the radical city council.” He warned renters that “investors will not build in a hostile, anti-free enterprise environment” and predicted that “money that could be spent on cleaning up our disgraceful median strip, or funding worthwhile social programs,” would be “wasted on a costly rent control bureaucracy.”⁸² He was not the only landlord to cast himself as a victim.

In a majority-renter city, the argument went, property owners needed protection. This interesting strategy dovetailed with the city’s commitment against sexual discrimination, but was highly misleading. In fact, landlords took an active role in the shaping of the rent control ordinance. Vacancy decontrol was one example. This policy allowed landlords to raise rents on newly vacated units, bringing them to market value. It was widely unpopular among renters, who warned that a wave of evictions might result. As it did repeatedly, the council sought moderation. Steve Schulte proposed authorizing vacancy decontrols, but limiting them to 10% increases. Councilmembers Heilman and Albert thought the concession egregious, but Schulte argued it would demonstrate goodwill towards landlords. This promise swayed enough councilmembers for authorization. In the end, however, the WHCC proved ungrateful. “Vacancy decontrol is just not acceptable if it does not allow rents to rise to full market levels,” Tanquary announced. “The council may be trying to find a middle ground, but what they’re proposing doesn’t give us any leeway...In an inflationary environment, 10% is nothing.” Larry Gross of the CES insisted that “total decontrol” would

⁸¹ “Paint Box,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 24 April 1985. EDE, box 528, folder 1.

⁸² John Parks, “Seeing Red,” *Los Angeles Post*, 2 May 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

create “a tremendous pressure to evict tenants.”⁸³ In the face of fierce lobbying efforts, he advised the council to punish landlords by lowering rent increases from 4.75% to 3%. This would show that the council “meant business” and “strengthen [the] base among renters.”⁸⁴ This advice was discarded in favor of moderation, as the final ordinance demonstrated.

Rents would be rolled back to the levels of May, 1984. From there, annual increases were “pegged to 75% of the consumer price index.” For the first time in West Hollywood, landlords were mandated to “provide stringent standards for apartment maintenance.” Vacancy decontrol remained set at 10% on a biennial basis. While the ordinance lacked the strength of its Santa Monica counterpart, Larry Gross nonetheless maintained that “the long fight of renters [was] paying off.” More accurately, Steve Schulte celebrated the restrained temperament of the law. Councilmembers had “resisted Santa Monica-style rent control,” he boasted. “We listened to everyone...All sides can find something they like.” Unsurprisingly, the WHCC and the AOA protested. “For every concession they made,” an AOA representative moaned, “they zapped us in another area...The law is clearly punitive and discriminatory.” Tanquary “threatened to sue because an environmental impact report” had not “been prepared.” Indeed, both sides considered the ordinance fragile. “I think we’ll see some fine-tuning,” the Mayor confessed. “Everyone on the council sees parts they’d like to change.” Budd Kopps, an owner of sixteen apartment complexes in West Hollywood, thought it “full of loopholes.” There were “plenty of things we [could] do to make it hard on [the council],” he threatened. When asked to elaborate, “Kopps smiled and declined to say.”⁸⁵ His smirk indicated how landlords would resist: legal harassment and haranguing.

For queers, the ordinance fulfilled a chief incentive of cityhood. “As many as 11,000 residents of the area are gay or lesbian tenants,” a writer in *Frontiers* opined. In the same article, Larry Gross noted that “a high proportion of the area’s gays favor strong rent control,” and credited them for the success. Rent control and gay rights seemed to be mutually supportive, but not to all. An interesting rebuttal came from

⁸³ “Landlords Protest Cap on Vacancy Decontrols,” *Los Angeles Times*, 9 May 1985. WS1.

⁸⁴ “West Hollywood Cuts First-Year Rent Increases in Surprise Vote,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 July 1985. WS1.

⁸⁵ “West Hollywood Adopts Rent Control,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 June 1985. B1.

John Parks, the Treasurer of WHCC. “Not all gays and lesbians are pro-rent control,” he told *Frontiers*. In fact, he disclosed that “a third of the 800 members of [WHCC] are gay.” These members worked quietly *against* rent control. Tanquary confirmed the existence of “many concerned gay citizens” who did not support the “Communist councilmembers” of West Hollywood.⁸⁶ *Frontiers* belittled these charges, insinuating they were lies. Perhaps, but they may have also revealed inconvenient truths. Upon the adoption of the ordinance, the battle over rent control continued to rage.

Opposing forces duked it out in the pages of the *Los Angeles Post*, where eleven landlords decided to “finally speak out.” West Hollywood was “an eclectic area with great diversity and personal freedom,” they explained. “We like that. That’s why we live here.” The “burgeoning bureaucracy” of City Hall, however, threatened the city’s character. Relying on “threats and coercion,” the council worked to “wipe out the equity of owners and severely reduce the value of everyone’s investment.” If leaders could “decide that the free market is a suspect enterprise,” then residents “should not be surprised if the Council continues to interfere with the rest of our lives.” The “days of freedom of choice in West Hollywood” were numbered. This specious argument seemed designed for queers, but seniors were also targeted. Rent control, landlords maintained, forced “retired older seniors to subsidize the working young, which is grossly unfair.”⁸⁷ At other times, landlords warned against ravenous outsiders. West Hollywood renters, one landlord claimed, paid “12 times as much as renters in Los Angeles” because there was “no vacancy decontrol.” Why should renters “pay to hold down rents to *new people* coming into the city”? The bamboozling council made them “pay for costly registration, computer systems, and Gestapo administrative procedures.”⁸⁸ While the WHCC warned about the divisiveness of rent control, landlords worked to pit residents against one another. Amid the backdrop of the renewed Cold War, many resorted to red-baiting. This was a tried-but-true strategy. The participation of the CES provided ample evidence of the council’s socialist tendencies. “I.M. Wise” concluded that “The West Hollywood City Council (also known as ‘CES groupies’) [would] dance to any

⁸⁶ “West Hollywood Near Adoption of Rent Control,” *Frontiers*, May 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁸⁷ “The Loyal Opposition Speaks Out,” *Los Angeles Post*, 19 September 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁸⁸ N. Williams, “Vacancy Decontrol,” *Los Angeles Post*, 7 November 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

CES tune!” After some digging, Wise reported that council meetings never overlapped with CES gatherings. The reason? Councilmembers needed to “get their latest instructions from their *leader*, Larry Gross!” Enjoying his “new power trip,” Gross “maligned and scape-goated apartment owners.” Indeed, “the name of the tune the master puppeteer whistles while he pulls the strings” was the “*The West Hollywood Funeral March!*”⁸⁹ Echoing Wise, one landlord thought it time to look “beneath the surface image” of the city. He had supported incorporation, believing it would “boost our exclusive shops and restaurants,” but now bemoaned the “CITY OF ETERNAL SOCIALISM.”⁹⁰

Supporters of rent control did not take these charges lying down. A seventy-six-year-old renter lambasted the relentless red-baiting. “The attacks on the CES personally offends me,” he wrote. “I know that without CES we would not have a city, and without a city we would not have rent control. Without rent control I would have been kicked out of my home.” He wanted no part in the ideological battles over “socialism and capitalism.” The existence of rent control meant he had a home. “When someone attacks CES, they attack me,” he concluded.⁹¹ One self-described “lesbian renter” thanked the *Post* for permitting critiques of landlords. “The Coalition for Economic Survival,” she argued, “is exactly what its name suggests: a broad spectrum of citizens trying desperately to survive rising prices, fixed incomes, and other economic hazards.” On the contrary, had “the West Hollywood Concerned Citizens ever said what *they* were *concerned* about?” Surely not renters, “whom they happily gouge and intimidate.” To those who whined about lost capital, she had no sympathy. “It is *because* of the lack of concern on the part of the landlords,” she explained, “that West Hollywood became a city.” Landlords reaped what they sowed.⁹² By protesting too much, WHCC activists earned the CES respect. A usually moderate editor at the *Post* surmised, “Larry Gross makes so many people angry, he must be doing *something* right.”⁹³ In the realm of

⁸⁹ I.M. Wise, “Rent Control Board a CES Tool,” *Los Angeles Post*, 17 October 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁰ “What Lies beneath the Surface Image,” *Los Angeles Post*, 13 February 1986. RSC, box 3, folder 16.

⁹¹ “Letters is Unfair,” *Los Angeles Post*, 7 November 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹² “Letters is Fair,” *Los Angeles Post*, 7 November 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹³ Editor’s note, “Rent Control Board a CES Tool,” *Los Angeles Post*, 17 October 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

public opinion, WHCC struggled to make the case for landlords. At the bureaucratic level, they were more successful.

To mitigate disputes between renters and landlords, the council established a rent stabilization committee. Ostensibly, the committee monitored rental increases, resolved disputes, and ensured fairness. Since it “accepted grievances from landlords and renters,” this “democratic process benefited the community and improved the quality of life for everyone,” one renter argued.⁹⁴ Yet, the commission’s openness was also its greatest flaw. In an effort to be fair, it accepted unlimited requests and complaints from *both* renters and landlords. This gave opponents the ability to swamp the commission. During a one-month period in 1985, 199 landlords filed complaints against tenants, 156 requested greater vacancy decontrol, and 95 sought legal protection for evictions.⁹⁵ “If 500 landlords wake up one morning and realize they can totally cripple the system,” one opponent wryly observed, they could “bring it down.”⁹⁶ The messy bureaucracy resulted in long waiting periods and poked legal loopholes in the rent control ordinance. Many landlords chose to stall, complain, and fight. Typical was one, who mocked the commission as a “government within a government” which had become “a zoo, a circus, a farce, [and] a mess.”⁹⁷ When he received a notice to decrease his rents, he promised trouble. “As soon as I figure out what [the letter] means,” he threatened, “I will be appealing several aspects of it.” The “people of West Hollywood have been denied the relief they thought they voted for,” he sniped.⁹⁸ Sure enough, he took his case through every possible appeal, and each time he lost. The experience, he wrote, “confirms everything I have always suspected about bureaucracies becoming self-perpetuating monsters” and ridiculed it for “bureaucratic buffoonery.”⁹⁹ He had a point: his experience with the commission lasted for over a year. During that time, renters in his buildings suffered. In attempting to work with, rather than against, landlords, the commission struggled.

⁹⁴ “Letters is Fair,” *Los Angeles Post*, 7 November 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁵ West Hollywood Rent Stabilization Department activity report, September 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁶ Robert Conrich to A. Moos, 4 January 1986. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁷ B.C. to Alan Viterbi, 7 November 1984. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁸ B.C. to West Hollywood Rent Commission, 9 December 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

⁹⁹ B.C. to West Hollywood Rent Commission, 4 January 1986. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

Landlords sometimes skirted regulations or relied on misinformation to evade the law. When one woman moved to West Hollywood, she was offered an apartment for \$450 a month. She later found out that the commission had ordered her landlord to charge no more than \$374. “Even though my landlord knew of the rent decrease,” she explained, “he took advantage of my being new to the area.” After a “bit of battle,” she was refunded the overcharged amount. “My story is not unique,” she wrote. “Many landlords in West Hollywood have owned their properties for decades...They’re all paid for and now they’re just bringing in the bacon.” While her landlord compared “what’s happening in West Hollywood [to] Nazi Germany,” she felt it “about time that these people were put in their place.”¹⁰⁰ Aside from complaint forms, moreover, the commission had few remedies for tenants who suffered retribution from bitter landlords. In one WHCC newsletter, organizers announced a “Voter Verification Program” aimed at “cracking down on false registrations.” The true aim, however, was tenant intimidation. “Owners know who live in their buildings,” an organizer explained, “so we will be verifying correct voter registrations.” This included asking tenants about their political affiliations. The proposal led one *Post* columnist to remark: “Landlords checking up on tenants may strike some as the kind of harassment that prompted the rent control movement in the first place.”¹⁰¹ The commission did not develop methods to assist those on the front lines of the rent control war.

In addition to stonewalling, opponents of rent control sought to derail the ordinance in court. In one WHCC newsletter, organizers were “looking for landlords...to file ‘test cases’ with the city, the idea being to test the willingness of the recently appointed Rent Stabilization Commission.”¹⁰² Real estate interests had a long history of utilizing the law to derail affordable housing, but in this instance landlords might have been inspired by conservative intellectual and *National Review* editor William F. Buckley, Jr. From his perch in the Bay Area, the contrarian ridiculed rent control efforts in West Hollywood, a “gay enclave with extra-economic and extra-sexual eccentricities.” Administered by an “Animal House government,” the

¹⁰⁰ “Letters,” Los Angeles Post, 21 August 1986. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

¹⁰¹ R.L.V., “Mean Streets,” Los Angeles Post, 7 November, 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

¹⁰² Ibid.

“kooks think rent control is a terrific idea,” Buckley cawed. “It is hard to think of any economic nostrum more comprehensively discredited.” He worried that “philosophical arguments” against rent control had “been neglected.” Instead of battling with bureaucrats, he suggested, “why doesn’t someone go to the courts pleading its unconstitutionality? Surely to limit the profit that can be made in one form of enterprise is to exercise a kind of discriminatory approach toward profit that the rule of law forbids.” Landlords could win a case against a “prudentially stupid [and] philosophically objectionable” law.¹⁰³

Locating a landlord to test the matter was a strategic matter. Often, they explained their situation in remarkably unsympathetic ways. For instance, one woman complained of a Downey “tenant who is disabled and is on Section 8 rental assistance.” She continued to raise his rent, which forced him to solicit greater subsidies from the state. While she received payment, she bemoaned the “rip-off to the L.A. taxpayer.” While this angered her, encounters with rent control made her “blood boil.” At her apartment complex in West Hollywood, elderly tenants who “lived there for 15 years” refused to accept increases above “1960s levels.” She could barely make a profit thanks to rent control, and wanted to “tear this building down” and sell it. “Where are our rights?” she pleaded.¹⁰⁴ Such whining did not engender popular sympathy. Luckily for landlords, they found a perfect test case in Mary Simonson. In her late eighties, the partially deaf landlord owned an apartment complex in West Hollywood for over 20 years. In 1985, she attempted to raise rents from \$72 to \$206, a whopping 280% increase. Claiming her “medical bills were spiraling out of control,” she insisted that the increase was necessary for her “survival.” When the commission rejected the request, WHCC and AOA activists rushed to her aid. “We have to look and see if the courts can provide Mrs. Simonson with the fair return this city has denied her,” her lawyer proclaimed.¹⁰⁵ In Simonson, landlords found a sympathetic figure. Her age and frailty gave landlords a powerful spokeswoman. Indeed, AOA representative Craig Mordohl, who was assigned the case, made a point of introducing her to State Senator David Roberti in order to “show that we’re not all ogres.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ William F. Buckley, “Rent Control Mess,” *San Francisco Examiner*, 17 December 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

¹⁰⁴ Letter to County Supervisor Deane Dana, 6 October 1989. EDE, box 323, folder 8.

¹⁰⁵ “Elderly Landlady Loses Rent Hike Bid,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 May 1986.

¹⁰⁶ “Landlords Rally to Unlikely Heroine’s Plea,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 May 1986.

Her defense team argued that Simonson had neglected to raise rents systematically for twenty years. As a result, rates in her building were far lower than those of comparable complexes. Rent control locked her into rates historically below the marketplace. In March of 1987, Judge David Rothman ruled in her favor. “When the commission is determining whether a landlord is making a fair return from a rental unit,” he explained, “it must take into account the rents of comparable units in the surrounding area.” The significance of the concession was not lost on landlords. Grafton Tanquary bragged that the “extraordinary decision could affect rent control laws throughout California...The City Council and the rent commission are finally learning that they are not a law unto themselves.” In West Hollywood, over 30% of the rental stock might be classified as “historically low,” and would now be helped by “comparisons with higher-rent apartments.”¹⁰⁷ The commission awkwardly fought the ruling. In July of 1987, they approved modest increases for Simonson, highlighting her personal circumstances. At the same time, however, they argued it was wrong to compare complexes.¹⁰⁸ In 1988, a second court ruled in Simonson’s favor, who died the following year. In 1990, a final ruling validated Simonson and permitted her estate to raise rents to full market value, nearly \$550 per unit. Representatives of WHCC and AOA predicted ordinances elsewhere were doomed. Mayor Heilman did not mask his frustrations. “I’m very troubled,” he told reporters, “that the court seems to be totally oblivious to what is going to happen to the tenants of that building, many of whom are old and will be devastated.”¹⁰⁹

Was rent control now dead in West Hollywood? Yes and no. The ordinance remained on the books, but the Simonson case punched a catastrophic hole in its exterior. If West Hollywood was a homogenously planned community, it might have avoided ruinous effects. But it wasn’t. Low-income apartments existed alongside condominiums and high-end rentals. The hodgepodge history of development in the area worked to benefit of landlords. More fatally, so did the pro-growth policies of the city council. Rent control eroded in West Hollywood as leaders sought an influx of private investment and high-end growth.

¹⁰⁷ “West Hollywood Landlords Hail Rent Case Ruling,” *Los Angeles Times*, 22 March 1987.

¹⁰⁸ “Rent Increase for Landlady Approved,” *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1987.

¹⁰⁹ “Appeals Court Rules in Rent Suit,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 September 1990.

“Putting Our Best Foot Forward”: Redevelopment and the Marketing of West Hollywood

As it developed after 1985, pro-growth austerity policies came to dominate urban planning in West Hollywood. To an extent, this was inevitable. The erosion of public investment in L.A. County necessitated alternative solutions to urban problems. In Watts, East L.A., and Skid Row, social activists were compelled to seek support from corporate entities instead of the state.¹¹⁰ Queers in West Hollywood followed suit. At the same time, however, they strengthened austerity politics by tying sexuality to the marketplace. Dissociating queer politics and progressive economics, business boosters encouraged policies which gentrified neighborhoods in the name of gay rights. Through an ambitious marketing plan, boosters reshaped the meaning of gay space and politics.

Although the WHCC condemned the “socialistic” policies of the council, in fact the business lobby was never far from power. Developers sought to influence planning decisions, demanding “pro-growth” and “pro-business” policies. In an open letter, one lobbyist shared results from a “recent survey.” Asked “how business persons view West Hollywood,” the survey indicated that it suffered from its progressive reputation. “We are perceived as anti-religious socialists who think making money is for the purpose solely of feeding the needs of homosexuals and senior citizens,” he argued. One developer believed the city was “a joke to the outside world.” Another warned that, since West Hollywood “land is too valuable to remain unimproved,” large-scale development was inevitable. The “small urban bedroom community” would be wise to “embrace growth.” Despite their attempts at moderation, councilmembers were seen as hostile to free enterprise. If they wanted to change course, they should follow some “sage advice.” In “all decisions, give some thought to the business community...In other words, THINK BUSINESS along with all other strata of this community. DO NOT FORGET BUSINESS!” Boosters assured that queer and commercial identifies could be fused. “We need to stress our strengths in the fields of design, entertainment, restaurants,

¹¹⁰ Robert Bauman, *Race and the War on Poverty: From Watts to East L.A.* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2008); Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

and retail,” one explained.¹¹¹ Queer developer Sheldon Adelson agreed, noting that West Hollywood was “naturally suited” for high-end retail and design. “My God,” he exclaimed, “if we can’t have it here we shouldn’t have it anywhere.”¹¹² The development of West Hollywood, in other words, did not threaten the queer character of the city. Moreover, it offered security. The “primary thing businesses look for,” one man explained, “is stability. We don’t have a surplus of that right now in our city. What we do have is tacky-looking streets” and “rent control. I can’t think of any single thing that could be worse, so far as harming investment.”¹¹³ This argument was appealing, especially considering the numerous public embarrassments the council had suffered since incorporation.

Indeed, when it came to administration, councilmembers stumbled. Since the first council meeting, they struggled to develop a sustainable stream of revenue. The windfall that Ron Stone promised never developed. Instead, leaders worked nonstop to avoid catastrophic cuts to social services. The GCSC was often in danger. When the county reduced the organization’s funding in early 1985, a meltdown seemed likely. The reductions were, of course, a result of incorporation: as was the case with other cities, West Hollywood now needed to contribute more for its services. The council appears to have done little in way of preparation. In light of the precarious position, Supervisor Edelman awarded \$143,000 in emergency funds.¹¹⁴ Around the same time, GCSC organizers were warned by county officials that they could “not undertake any new projects or programs in the incorporated limits of the City of West Hollywood.” Only the council could authorize those now.¹¹⁵ The reliance on “emergency funds” became routine. When asked to justify these awards, Edelman admitted bluntly that the council had “no solution to offset gaps in funding.” If he did not intervene, vital services would shut down.¹¹⁶ Still, a close aide accused his boss of

¹¹¹ Questionnaire, “How Do Business Persons View the Activities of West Hollywood,” unknown publisher, 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 16.

¹¹² “A Powerful Voice Emerges in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, WS1.

¹¹³ R.S. to Steve Schulte, 11 December 1985. RSC, box 3, folder 16.

¹¹⁴ “City Restores Some Funding,” *Los Angeles Post*, 14 November 1984. RSC, box 9, folder 12.

¹¹⁵ John F. Shirley to Community Development Commission division directors, 14 December 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹¹⁶ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 21 November 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

being “gratuitously generous.”¹¹⁷ With awards “in excess of \$800,000 per year,” he warned that other constituents might feel neglected.¹¹⁸ With “no anticipated revenue from [the] City,” Edelman countered, he had no choice but to intervene.¹¹⁹

In other ways, councilmembers seemed ill-equipped for governance. In March of 1985 they faced eviction from City Hall. Owned by the county, the building was part of a public park. Since “a temporary city hall is not a park purpose,” councilmembers were informed, “the county may be forced to follow through with an eviction.” Facing bureaucratic homelessness, they appealed to Edelman to “pull some strings” and forestall a decision.¹²⁰ He stalled until a new location could be found. Shortly after, however, councilmembers waded into another embarrassment when they refused to contribute to the funding of parks. An indefinite request that the county “maintain all West Hollywood parks,” one aide fumed, was “unfair,” especially since “we have gratuitously been spending several hundreds of thousands of dollars in West Hollywood since incorporation.” The county had assisted with “CDBG funding of community groups,” “road projects,” “space for a city hall,” and the “less-than-friendly Sheriff’s office.” This “latest request for park revenue [was] offensive.”¹²¹ City leaders had grown accustomed to relying on the county. Like newly emancipated teenagers, they sometimes resisted paying their bills. When questioned, moreover, they could become defensive. In response to “a rumor that [Edelman] was going to cut off CDBG funds to West Hollywood,” Steve Schulte angrily confronted his office and accused the supervisor of “reallocating funds to assist East Los Angeles projects.” In this instance, the rumor was unfounded, but annoyed aides elected to keep Schulte guessing. “Our office’s policy is to continue funding programs in West Hollywood,” they responded, “*while we inventory what we are providing on a case by case basis.*”¹²² One observer admitted

¹¹⁷ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 1 May 1985. EDE, box 528, folder 1.

¹¹⁸ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 29 October 1985. EDE, box 249, folder 5.

¹¹⁹ Third District budget sheet, 8 January 1985. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹²⁰ “County Gives City 30-Day Eviction Notice,” *Los Angeles Post*, 14 March 1985. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹²¹ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 26 April 1985. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹²² Aide to Edmund Edelman, 28 December 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

that the council “stumbled often, sometimes badly.”¹²³ To a prominent developer, it was clear that “the council [did] not know what they are doing.”¹²⁴ The business lobby exploited these views.

Unsurprisingly, Steve Schulte boosted pro-development interests. Close with Sheldon Andelson and MECLA, his mastery of sexual coalition-building helped to advance pro-business planning in queer ways. When he ran for a council seat in 1984, Schulte emphasized his identity as a gay man while muting his economic views (recall he was the only non-CES candidate to win a seat). In a serious blunder, Schulte opposed Councilwoman Peggy Stevenson in 1985. Already locked in a bitter race against Democrat Michael Woo, Schulte’s brief entry brought sexuality to the forefront of the race. While Stevenson reminded voters that she “led the fight to win adoption of the City’s gay and lesbian anti-discrimination law,” Woo worked to gain the endorsement of the SCHMC.¹²⁵ After he decried Stevenson as a power-hungry witch, Schulte dropped out to focus on reelection in West Hollywood.¹²⁶ In a final stab at Stevenson, however, he helped Woo secure endorsements from the local Log Cabin Republican Club and Don Slater.¹²⁷ His queer contacts were decidedly more conservative.

Back home, Schulte worked to expand his support in preparation of the 1986 elections. At a combined birthday party and campaign fundraiser at the Crystal Ballroom of the Beverly Hills Hotel, Schulte offered “gourmet cocktails” and “Birthday cakes created by West Hollywood’s finest restaurants” to donors in exchange for mandatory “gifts” of \$175.¹²⁸ His courting of developers earned him rebuke from Larry Gross. When Schulte had the nerve to seek CES support, Gross flatly denied, explaining that Schulte’s support of “political moderates, businessmen,” and “pro-development policies” was at odds with the organization. Recognizing his popularity in the community, however, Gross promised “not to tell people to vote against you,” but warned that it would be unwise to “turn back the clock to the days when special

¹²³ James Bonar oral history, interviewed by Ian M. Baldwin, Silver Lake, California, 10 September 2015 (hereafter Bonar OH).

¹²⁴ “A Powerful Voice Emerges in West Hollywood,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 October 1984, WS1.

¹²⁵ Peggy Stevenson to Southern California Harvey Milk Lesbian and Gay Democratic Club, 13 May 1985. PSS, folder 1.

¹²⁶ Steve Schulte campaign leaflet, 1985. PSS, folder 2.

¹²⁷ Friends of Mike Woo mailer, 1985. PSS, folder 3.

¹²⁸ Steve Schulte Fortieth Birthday Party invitation, January 1986. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

interests and landlords ruled West Hollywood.”¹²⁹ An anonymous election flier agreed, listing several “reasons not to vote for Schulte.” Among these, the councilman flaunted “questionable ethics,” sought the “backing of landlords,” appointed “right-wing and real estate” interests to city posts, and “voted against residents in favor of business.”¹³⁰ These charges had merit. While he sought CES backing, Schulte reached out to the WHCC, promising to represent “all segments of the community.”¹³¹ To queer voters, he touted endorsements from the West Hollywood Democratic and Republican clubs, the SDC, MECLA, the SCHMC, and Don Slater.¹³² Some were deviously achieved. For instance, in a case of “deft political hardball,” Schulte had “convinced more than a dozen” supporters to join the SDC days before it held a vote on endorsements. The influx of pro-Schulte votes pushed him over the edge, a result he was “gleefully coy” about.¹³³ His chameleon politics aided development interests.

Upon his selection as Mayor in 1986, Schulte lobbied for, and won support of, a publically-funded \$450,000 marketing campaign to shore up the city’s image. This became the West Hollywood Redevelopment Agency (WHRA). Business leaders explained that investment would promote growth and provide respect. Again, they ridiculed the city’s reputation. “Call it a municipal Rodney Dangerfield complex,” one elaborated. “It’s the little things that add up, like hearing about President Reagan dining at Chasen’s in Beverly Hills, when the restaurant is in West Hollywood.” The WHRA would give the city a second chance. Its chairman, realtor and CREA member Ron Kates, explained that “West Hollywood has never had a clear identity.” This effort would “establish the city as the contemporary, urban, cultural center that it is.” Along with “more than 20 of the community’s business leaders,” Kates would tout the city “as one of the West Coast’s leading centers for design and entertainment industries, as well as home to some of the finest restaurants, hotels and retail stores in the Los Angeles area.” The investment established a powerful public authority that was controlled by private development interests. For a city struggling to pay

¹²⁹ “Tenant Group Refuses to Back Schulte,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1986. WS 1.

¹³⁰ Flier, “Reasons Not to Vote for Schulte,” 1986. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

¹³¹ Grafton Tanquary to Steve Schulte, 18 March 1986. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

¹³² Steve Schulte campaign flier, 1986. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

¹³³ “Tenant Group Refuses to Back Schulte,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 March 1986. WS 1.

its bills, the \$450,000 price tag was not inconsequential, a fact Mayor Steve Schulte tried to justify. “There are some distinctive features of West Hollywood that we, in a positive sense, would like the world to know more about,” he explained. “This will allow us to put our best foot forward.”¹³⁴ The argument was specious: West Hollywood did possess urban identities prior to 1986. Kates and Schulte were not so much creating as rewriting.

In her examination of U.S. public authorities, Gail Radford concluded that such agencies were “guided by the logic of the market, an inevitability given that attending to their revenue flow is their only assured path to continued existence.”¹³⁵ With the primary goals of increased property values in mind, WHRA designers and developers utilized public resources to promote retail growth. An early project was the redevelopment of Santa Monica Boulevard. Prior to incorporation, residents complained of traffic congestion along the corridor, ye many were opposed to a widening project, which some likened to “building a freeway in the heart of our city.”¹³⁶ The county stonewalled widening plans with endless environmental hearings. The “loss of public space and parks,” Edelman argued, was too costly. Instead he began plans to publicly acquire land along the boulevard, where additional public parks could be built.¹³⁷ The scheme was interrupted by cityhood. In 1986, the council viewed Santa Monica Boulevard as an ideal stretch of the local tourist and retail economy.¹³⁸ Wrangling the land from the county became a priority. At a meeting with county officials, city leaders went on the attack. County aides thought them “way out of line,” especially considering Edelman’s promise to recognize city authority. When Councilman Viterbi suggested Edelman put that pledge in writing, an incensed aide asked: “You really don’t trust us, do you?” Hoping to avoid further conflict, Edelman withdrew his acquisition scheme. The city took possession of the land, which was sold to commercial interests. An Edelman aide surmised that the “bungling” council

¹³⁴ B.K. Stinshoff, “The City That ‘Don’t Get No Respect,” *Los Angeles Post*, 20 November 1986. RSC, box 3, folder 16.

¹³⁵ Gail Radford, *The Rise of the Public Authority: Statebuilding and Economic Development in Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 14.

¹³⁶ “Route 2 Takes a Backseat to Freeways,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 1985. WS1.

¹³⁷ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 28 December 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹³⁸ “Route 2 Takes a Backseat to Freeways,” *Los Angeles Times*, 28 November 1985. WS1.

had erred. “Had we condemned and acquired the land,” he pointed out, “at least it would have been public property... Through their distrust the new Council may have outsmarted themselves.”¹³⁹ But he was wrong. Commercial redevelopment was part of the plan. The WHRA redeveloped the boulevard with high-end retail shops, restaurants, and lofts.¹⁴⁰ The fate of the boulevard began a trend.

Neighborhood residents noticed the new direction, and many spoke out. “Something strange is happening,” a man remarked in *The Advocate*. “You can’t get much more Democratic than West Hollywood [but] the City has fallen prey to some sort of wishful thinking... they call it ‘image-building.’” He lamented that West Hollywood was “jointly run by the city and its business community.” While leaders claimed the WHRA was an “image-improvement program,” a “power grab” was more apt. “If it sounds like the consultants and developers are trying to have their cake and eat it too,” he shrewdly pointed out, “that’s their job.”¹⁴¹ “Image seems to be a favorite topic around town recently,” one woman complained. “I’m concerned that many people seem to equate ‘cleaning up our image’ with downplaying our population. We founded this city on the basis of individual rights, *specifically renters*, seniors and gays. Yet, suddenly people are worried that families will not want to come to West Hollywood with their children. *Why is this a concern?*” The city was “not Anaheim, Torrance, or Woodland Hills. We came to West Hollywood because it is a safe environment for us, the seniors, the immigrants, the young singles, the gays, the poor. This is what makes West Hollywood unique, and *that is the image we should be proud of*” she insisted.¹⁴²

Queers took special aim at Schulte. The “pompous pretty boy,” wrote one, had ceased being a “humble servant of the people” and had become a “ruthless opportunist.”¹⁴³ “Any gay or lesbian voter who votes for Steve Schulte,” warned another, “will get what they deserve: more of the same worthless, directionless posturing and probably a lot more out-and-out vote selling. When I hear gay men say they are voting for Schulte because he is ‘cute’ or because he goes to their gym, I get sick to my stomach,” he

¹³⁹ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 28 December 1984. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹⁴⁰ Jim Bonar Santa Monica Boulevard designs, undated. JBP, box 1.

¹⁴¹ G. Steele, “Just Happenstance,” *The Advocate*, 19 March 1986. RSC, box 3, folder 16.

¹⁴² H. Simmons, *Los Angeles Post*, 13 February 1986. RSC, box 3, folder 15.

¹⁴³ Robert S. Conrich to *The Advocate*, 20 May 1987. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

confessed. “If this is how gays will make their voting decisions, I pity the community...Isn’t it time we started using criteria like qualifications and honesty instead of who shows the biggest bulge?”¹⁴⁴ Likewise, West Hollywood Democratic Club member Marshal Philips suggested that “homosexuals, like Jews, do not form a single power base which is monolithic in its interests.” A “majority of homosexuals in West Hollywood are *renters*. Gays, like everyone else, should vote their economic interests.”¹⁴⁵ Despite complaints, business politics remained ascendant in 1980s West Hollywood. In *Frontiers*, an astute observer noted that business interests were deeply intertwined with the city’s leadership. “The voters of West Hollywood are liberal” and “most are renters,” he explained. Conservatives candidates “were not possible” unless they were queer. “In a gay constituency, *being gay* is a plus,” regardless of ideological views. Schulte “appealed heavily to gays” despite his “strong ties with the Westside vote and the business establishment.”¹⁴⁶ He was but one example. In the San Fernando Valley, the Valley Business Alliance advocated on behalf of queer business owners and “focused on *mainstream* problems like taxes...not Gay issues.”¹⁴⁷ In 1987, Steve Schulte told *The Advocate* it was time to accept that “gay Camelot [was] maturing.” The “idealism of the early years” had being replaced by the “realities and politics” of the present.¹⁴⁸ He had a good point. Throughout L.A. County, neighborhoods were redeveloping in the shadow of public disinvestment. From the Westside to Downton, L.A. had entered an era of “corporate modernism.”¹⁴⁹ West Hollywood reflected and strengthened this trend.

Alongside the WHRA, the council established another public authority to deal with housing. Composed of development and low-income advocates, the West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation (WHCHC) came to reinforce the mission of the WHRA by promoting high-end residential development. Prior it its establishment, councilmembers joined a HUD program for small cities. Through

¹⁴⁴ R. Boninger, “Making Gay Voting Decisions,” *Los Angeles Post*, 2 April 1986. RSC, box 9, folder 5.

¹⁴⁵ Marshal Philips, *Los Angeles Post*, 21 August 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 4.

¹⁴⁶ “Playing Political Hardball in West Hollywood,” *Frontiers*, 2 April 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 4.

¹⁴⁷ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 18 April 1988. EDE, box 250, folder 4.

¹⁴⁸ “Schulte Speaks,” *The Advocate*, 26 May 1987.

¹⁴⁹ Don Parson, *Making a Better World: Public Housing, the Red Scare, and the Direction of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

CDBG grants, it offered public resources for low-cost housing construction. A HUD representative, however, concluded that West Hollywood was “ineligible to become a participating city [because] it was incorporated after the [program] deadline.”¹⁵⁰ After an appeal with Edelman, \$600,000 in resources were offered to the city.¹⁵¹ These resources got the WHCHC off the ground. The council believed this “nine-member, non-profit corporation” would function “like any private developer.” Ideally, “all profits [would] be funneled back into the corporation to help finance new projects.” The operating budget for the WHCHC proved significant; administrative costs alone exceeded \$100,000 annually.¹⁵²

According to one WHCHC brochure, the agency aimed to be “the primary producer of subsidized, affordable housing” in West Hollywood. Through new construction and rehabilitations, it made “efficient use of scarce public and private financing by carefully controlling costs.” Indeed, the WHCHC did embark on affordable housing construction. Four years after its creation, it touted five housing projects in the neighborhood which served seniors, persons with AIDS, and other low-income renters. The combined number of units for these projects, however, was a paltry 106. While it celebrated low-income development, the WHCHC never came close to satisfying needs. It proved more successful in its second goal, promoting “architecturally distinguished buildings that reflect and complement the surrounding neighborhood.”¹⁵³ Attention to design was a costly priority. At one WHCHC board meeting, members were criticized by City Housing Manager Dan Cohen. “Not one of you has mentioned the term ‘affordable housing,’” he scolded. The “efforts to encourage better designed apartment buildings may lead to an unpleasant side effect: the construction of fewer affordable housing units,” he explained.¹⁵⁴

The prioritization of high-design emerged from corporate and grassroots activists. Architect and social activist Jim Bonar designed many projects, and considered his work progressive. A self-described “architect to the poor and disadvantaged,” his design philosophy was developed in contrast to the urban

¹⁵⁰ Jan Pollard to Fredericj Bien, 13 February 1985. EDE, box 1061, folder 1.

¹⁵¹ John F. Shirley to P. Brotzman, 14 May 1985. EDE, box 528, folder 1.

¹⁵² “Council Oks Non-Profit Corporation,” *Los Angeles Post*, 2 October 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 15.

¹⁵³ West Hollywood Community Housing Corporation brochure, undated. JBP, box 1.

¹⁵⁴ “Planners Warned on Designs,” *Los Angeles Post*, 11 December 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 15.

renewal efforts of the 1960s. He rejected traditional public housing projects, believing them to be “just awful” in design. In contrast, Bonar was “fascinated with the notion of people helping themselves through a democratic approach.” Working first through the Los Angeles Community Design Center, he launched his own architectural firm, Cavaedium, around the time he became a primary consultant in West Hollywood. A metropolitan activist, he worked to design attractive housing for low-income Angelenos in Downtown, East L.A., and West Hollywood.¹⁵⁵ “Non-profit housing corporations,” an officials explained, “can rehabilitate and build more economically and efficiently than both municipalities and county agencies.” Cooperation with private developers made the WHCHC “more thoughtful and detailed” in housing construction. In a progressive city like West Hollywood, moreover, developments were opened to “disadvantaged people,” especially seniors, low-income families, and persons with AIDS.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, this was one area in which AIDS activists praised the council. “As citizens, we must show as great a level of commitment toward affordable housing and people living with AIDS,” one advocate wrote. “West Hollywood and WHCHC should be proud of the innovative projects being built in our city.”¹⁵⁷ The AIDS Healthcare Foundation became a visible partner in the endeavor. According to one source, it “evolved from a small group of friends” into “a multi-million dollar agency.” Its budget was supported by some public grants, but mostly private donors. The “Keepers of the Flame” donor level, for instance, required a commitment of \$5,000. Additionally, donors were encouraged to grant funds through stocks and bonds, IRA accounts, living trusts, and reverse mortgages.¹⁵⁸ Partnered with WHCHC, it funded stylish housing for persons with AIDS, including Linn House.

Architect Jim Bonar designed this 25-unit complex to blend in with the community. Since the surrounding area “consisted of single family residences and courtyard housing,” he designed Linn House “with the character of a two story home” which made it “compatible with neighboring 1930s and 40s

¹⁵⁵ Andrea Oppenheimer, “Doing Well: James Bonar of Los Angeles Eschews the Role of Do-Gooder,” *Historic Preservation*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 1994. JBP, box O.

¹⁵⁶ Letter, 27 November 1991. EDE, box 322, folder 2.

¹⁵⁷ ACT-UP open letter to West Hollywood City Council, undated. AULA, box 1, folder 32.

¹⁵⁸ AIDS Healthcare Foundation brochure, undated. JBP, box 2.

Spanish style homes.” When the project encountered “NIMBYism,” architects “walked door to door, spoke with residents, held community meetings, and sought support.” Bonar recalled going out of his way to distinguish Linn House with “public housing” projects.¹⁵⁹ The results were impressive. Residents and observers commended the project for its “homelike atmosphere” and availability to individuals of all incomes. One reviewer noted that, “with its varied roof lines, Linn House resembles three houses that have been joined together for an extended family. At no point does it feel like a typically institutional medical-care environment.” The “ingenuity” in design allowed AIDS to “be fought on many fronts...in the neighborhood.”¹⁶⁰ In *Edge*, another lauded the “comfortable” and “soothing atmosphere” of the project. “The feel of the interior of the house,” he explained, “is extremely pleasant to the eyes...The result is a welcoming, warm, and homey shelter.” The walls of Linn House were decorated with still-life drawings donated by U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein. “A lot of these people, they’re still alive and so appreciative that somebody is giving them more than just a bed to sleep in,” she observed. “Emotionally comfortable: That’s probably the biggest key word here.” Importantly, cost was not a factor for applicants. “No one who needs care,” the Linn House director explained, “is turned away for inability to pay. We have people who are wealthy with means to pay for their own stay, as well as those with no insurance. Right now we have people who are homeless and are here under county [aid].” Bonar’s design was lauded by fellow architects and won an American Institute of Architects Council Award.¹⁶¹ It was this attention to detail, however, that abetted true weakness. With a full capacity of only 25 units, the small project did not come close to meeting demand and Bonar admitted it was “barely a drop in the bucket.”¹⁶² Despite good intentions, the WHCHC never developed large solutions to the housing problems of West Hollywood.

Indeed, even as small projects were completed, the housing crisis worsened. The rising homeless population in West Hollywood became a visible indicator that the city had strayed from its promise. “The walking homeless,” one observer lamented, “have become missing persons: missing from our

¹⁵⁹ Linn House project description, undated. JBP, box 2; Bonar OH.

¹⁶⁰ Edward M. Gomes, “Ultimate Shelter,” *Metropolitan Home*, November 1996. JBP, box 2.

¹⁶¹ Gabriel Goldberg, “Linn House,” *Edge*, May 1997. JBP, box 2.

¹⁶² Bonar OH.

consciousness and our deliberations.” Through bureaucratic creations like the WHCHC, leaders “built a wall between ourselves and those who have no place to lay their heads. The homeless demand shelter, not excuses.”¹⁶³ Questioning the actions of the WHRA and WHCHC, one man was “all for helping the homeless” but wondered if “tearing down [buildings] *caused* the homeless situation for those who cannot afford the high-priced condominiums which replaced the apartments.”¹⁶⁴ Not even the “rise of high design,” one columnist in the *Post* opined, could “dim our delight in the mean, mean streets of West Hollywood.” The existence of scores of homeless individuals discredited West Hollywood’s progressive reputation.¹⁶⁵ In light of these critiques, councilmembers exacerbated the problem.

In 1986, the council gutted its homeless shelter program. “This decision will radically alter the City’s program,” one official warned. Ironically, although the council made decisions, she blamed the county. The cuts could be avoided, she thought, “pending Supervisor Edelman’s decision...to retain the funds.”¹⁶⁶ Her understanding of the budget was misguided. As an independent city, West Hollywood decided how to allocate funds, not Edelman. But city leaders encouraged this mistaken view. At one meeting, Steve Schulte and John Heilman “complained that the city may be spending too much money on social programs.” Heilman believed the city was spending “an awful lot of money per person” and Schulte noted that “helping the homeless is primarily the ‘responsibility’ of the County.”¹⁶⁷ In response, one aide advised Edelman to “make no commitments [to West Hollywood]. All you’ve gotten is nothing but grief for your assistance...in return, the County’s always made to be the ‘bad guy.’”¹⁶⁸ By 1987, councilmembers introduced the “Help the Homeless” program in response to mounting criticism. It established two “drop-in centers” at public parks which offered “information on where [the homeless] can receive clothing, food vouchers, employment training and a number of other services.” Even the program’s coordinator admitted its ineffectiveness. “The primary focus,” she admitted, “is to gather statistical information on the homeless.

¹⁶³ T. Anderson, “Letters,” *Los Angeles Post*, 27 March 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 14.

¹⁶⁴ K.S., “Letters,” *Los Angeles Post*, 12 March 1987. RSC, box 5 folder 14.

¹⁶⁵ R.L.V., “Mean Streets,” *Los Angeles Post*, 7 November 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

¹⁶⁶ Letter, 15 July 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 14.

¹⁶⁷ B.K. Stinshoff, “Social Services Priorities Criticized,” *Los Angeles Post*, 12 March 1987. RSC, box 5, folder 14.

¹⁶⁸ Aide to Edmund Edelman, 1 May 1985. EDE, box 528, folder 1.

It is nothing more than a Band-Aid program.”¹⁶⁹ Here was a *homeless* program that *housed* no one. City leaders were not unique in their feebleness. In one speech, L.A. Deputy Mayor Grace Davis admitted that “current budget cuts suggested by President Reagan will limit our ability to provide any services to the homeless.” With no escape from austerity in sight “the problem of homelessness in Los Angeles County and the nation will not disappear.” Recognizing the permanent loss of public funds, she suggested “partnerships” with private entities would become ever more important.¹⁷⁰

By the late 1980s, West Hollywood had gone the way of the county. Instead of resisting the austerity measures which had launched its being, the city solidified them. This earned an ironic chastisement from Ron Stone, the leader of incorporation. Suffering from AIDS, he penned a despondent open letter shortly before his death. He remained committed to the promise of incorporation. Rent control and affordable housing were the only “methods by which the most basic level of government [could] address economic injustice.” While some argued that “rent control might not be the winning straw” it was “the only straw within reach.” Activists “ought to be damn glad that [West Hollywood] was willing to accept the risks and hold the line on something so basic as housing.” But The 1980s had turned out differently than he’d hoped. “When we see the homeless and the destitute,” he bemoaned, “we cry out that this new devil-take-the-hindmost attitude across the land has to stop! This new philosophy of greed has got to be turned around! *There have to be controls on our drift towards a society divided into millionaires and misery.*”¹⁷¹ As he put pen to paper, Stone might have second-guessed his decision to help unite queer progressives and business leaders. In the end, activists were naïve to think they could combat the urban crises of the metropolis by retreating. Rather than solve those problems, West Hollywood exacerbated them. Moreover, queer urban renewal strengthened conservative arguments about the city. Rather than seek a return of public investment, queers came to champion privatization.

¹⁶⁹ B.K. Stinshoff, “City Launches Program to Help Homeless,” *Los Angeles Post*, 4 September 1986. RSC, box 5, folder 14.

¹⁷⁰ Grace Davis speech to Department of Commerce, 22 April 1986. TBP, box 4896, folder 3.

¹⁷¹ Ron Stone to David Roberti and West Hollywood, 26 December 1985. RSC, box 8, folder 8.

Conclusions

In November 2014, Democratic candidate Shiela Kuehl was elected to Ed Edelman's old seat on the L.A. County Board of Supervisors. It was serendipitous: Edelman's retirement in 1994 after twenty years on the Board coincided with Kuehl's political rise to fame. With the exception of Valerie Terrigno, she was one of the most prominent lesbian politicians in the nation. "My experiences in the gay and lesbian community," she argued, "prepare me to combat discrimination for all" Angelenos.¹ She served in the State Assembly until 2000, when she won a State Senate seat, replacing progressive CES-champion Tom Hayden. Still, her 2014 supervisorial race was the highlight of her career. "It's the biggest job I'll ever have," she confessed. "Being one of five is important...especially running something the size of Ohio." Winning the seat was no cakewalk. Santa Monica City Councilman Bobby Shriver proved a serious challenger. The older brother of Maria Shriver, he amplified his Kennedy roots in the campaign and won major endorsements, including that of New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg (who also contributed \$100,000). Kuehl's progressive record, however, won her local support. Democratic clubs enthusiastically backed her, as did U.S. Congressman Henry Waxman. Most importantly, in West Hollywood, she routed Shriver. Winning overall with just 53% of the vote, her strong margins in "America's first gay city" put her over the top. The press celebrated her as the "first openly gay member of the county board." Finally, it seemed, lesbians and gays had broken through at the county level.² That assumption belied local queer history. In taking her seat on the County Board of Supervisors, Kuehl reentered the political home for queers in L.A.

For a brief but productive moment in the 1970s, queers utilized the liberal welfare state to grow gay liberation in L.A. County. Public financing allowed activists to focus on two central aspects of the movement: economic justice and queer family legitimacy. By the mid-1980s, thanks largely to external pressures, the state ceased being the chief benefactor of gay activism. Instead, the private marketplace-

¹ Lillian Faderman & Stuart Timmons, *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 332-333.

² "Kuehl Wins L.A. Supervisor Race," KPCC, 5 November 2014.

(Web:<http://www.scpr.org/news/2014/11/05/47827/election-2014-kuehl-wins-la-supervisors-race-mcdon/>; last accessed 1 December 2015).

development interests and corporate entities-were given control of the movement. When this occurred, the two priorities of gay liberation were separated. The quest for queer family rights, in the form of marriage equality and parental rights, continued, while the emphasis on economic justice was muted. In the 1970s, activists persuasively argued that these priorities relied upon one another. How can a family gain security in the face of homelessness? In hindsight, the strategy of queer privatization proved unsuccessful. In L.A. County, the state, not the marketplace, proved the best conduit for gay rights. The experiences of queers in this study urge historians to tell urban, political, and sexual stories in new ways.

They encourage scholars to revisit the “origins of the urban crisis” and move beyond race in urban studies. While it is true that the roots of the urban crisis run deep and long, scholars need to pay greater attention to the transformation of urban policies in the 1970s and 1980s. Thanks in part to Thomas Sugrue’s *The Origin of the Urban Crisis*, historians have gravitated towards declensionist tales of the city in modern America. From this perspective, the Tax Revolt of the 1970s and the turn towards austerity in the 1980s were set in motion in the 1940s. Elsewhere, Sugrue has argued that, “if American cities ever had a golden age, it certainly was not the 1970s.” The decade simply lacked “a coherent urban policy” and failed to produce “any significant urban initiatives.”³ Yet, for the activists in this study, urban programs were working in the 1970s. While the shadow of the Tax Revolt has obscured them from view, CDBG and CETA programs enabled activists to improve their lives and communities. Much like the public housing projects studied by Nicholas Dagen Bloom, they worked because activists maintained community control.⁴ And, while racial minorities have remained central to stories of urban decline, this narrative shows how the urban crisis cut beyond race. Low-income lesbians and gays, regardless of their race, also felt the sting of privatization. Historians need to incorporate them into broader urban narratives.

³ See Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Sugrue, “Carter’s Urban Policy Crisis,” in Gary M. Fink & Hugh Davis Graham (eds.), *The Carter Presidency: Policy Choices* (Lawrence, KS: The University of Kansas Press, 1998), 137-138.

⁴ See Nicholas Dagen Bloom, *Public Housing that Worked: New York in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

The experiences of queer Angelenos can also shape the way we write about modern American politics. For too long, historians have been obsessed with the “origins of the New Right” in the 1970s and 1980s. This has obscured important liberal transformations which deserve attention. Even after the failed presidential bid of George McGovern in 1972 (which is usually where stories of liberalism go to die), the Democratic Party expanded in multicultural ways. Long before the 1990s and the recent movement for marriage equality, queers were active players in the reshaping of liberal politics. This has been largely forgotten by both queer scholars and liberal historians. This study joins other attempts to incorporate lesbians and gays into mainstream liberal history in order to demonstrate their shared interests.⁵ When Democrats like Ed Edelman diversified their liberal tents, when they made the party inclusive rather than exclusive, liberal programs worked better. Rather than treat queers as conservative or liberal political foils, we should incorporate them into the hearts of our political histories.

Lastly, the struggles of queer activists in L.A. emphasize the necessity of a strong welfare state to the development of gay rights in America. Queer historians have done an excellent job documenting the oppressive history of the state. Subject to harassment, brutality, and economic discrimination, lesbians and gays have rightly been suspicious of state institutions and power.⁶ That important history should not blind us from moments of state success and cooperation. In the 1970s, funding agencies were fundamental to the provision of social services for lesbians and gays in L.A. County. Whether or not county officials were homophobic, they supplied resources which provided shelter for homeless gay drifters and provided lesbians with job training. This deserves to be remembered by scholars and activists alike. If the gay rights movement is to move beyond marriage and promote an inclusive economic agenda, queers will need to work alongside others to strengthen the welfare state in America.

⁵ These include Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: The Forging of Modern Liberalism* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012) and Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

⁶ Powerful examples include David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004) and Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

The recent struggles of Queers for Economic Justice (QEJ) illustrate some of these lessons. In 2002, QEJ set out to combat homelessness and poverty in New York City. Much like the Angelenos documented in these pages, they argued that queer rights and economic rights were mutually inclusive. “For many of us,” one activist explained, “QEJ is a statement. We wanted to try to build something that assumed a different set of priorities, that talked about homelessness, that talked about poverty, that talked about race and sexuality.” Despite innovative activism and a dedicated staff, QEJ closed its doors in 2014. While it “always had a loyal and committed group of donors,” it “wasn’t enough to keep [the organization] afloat.”⁷ The collapse of QEJ stemmed from multiple problems, yet the lack of a viable public funding strategy was especially damning. In this QEJ and West Hollywood have much in common. While conservatives have long argued welfare be relegated to the private sphere, in actuality the private marketplace has never proven remarkably effective at addressing homelessness and poverty. Alone, it cannot adequately support the needs of the marginalized. There is still another lesson to be gleaned from QEJ. Despite the severe obstacles, the dedicated activists who comprised the organization’s ranks demonstrate that the spirit of gay liberation remains alive. And, in the words of Supervisor Ed Edelman, it remains worthy of investment.

⁷ “Queers for Economic Justice Closes Doors,” *Autostraddle*, 24 February 2014. (Web: <http://www.autostraddle.com/queers-for-economic-justice-closes-its-doors-thanks-to-lack-of-economic-justice-224520/>; last accessed 1 December 2015).

Appendix

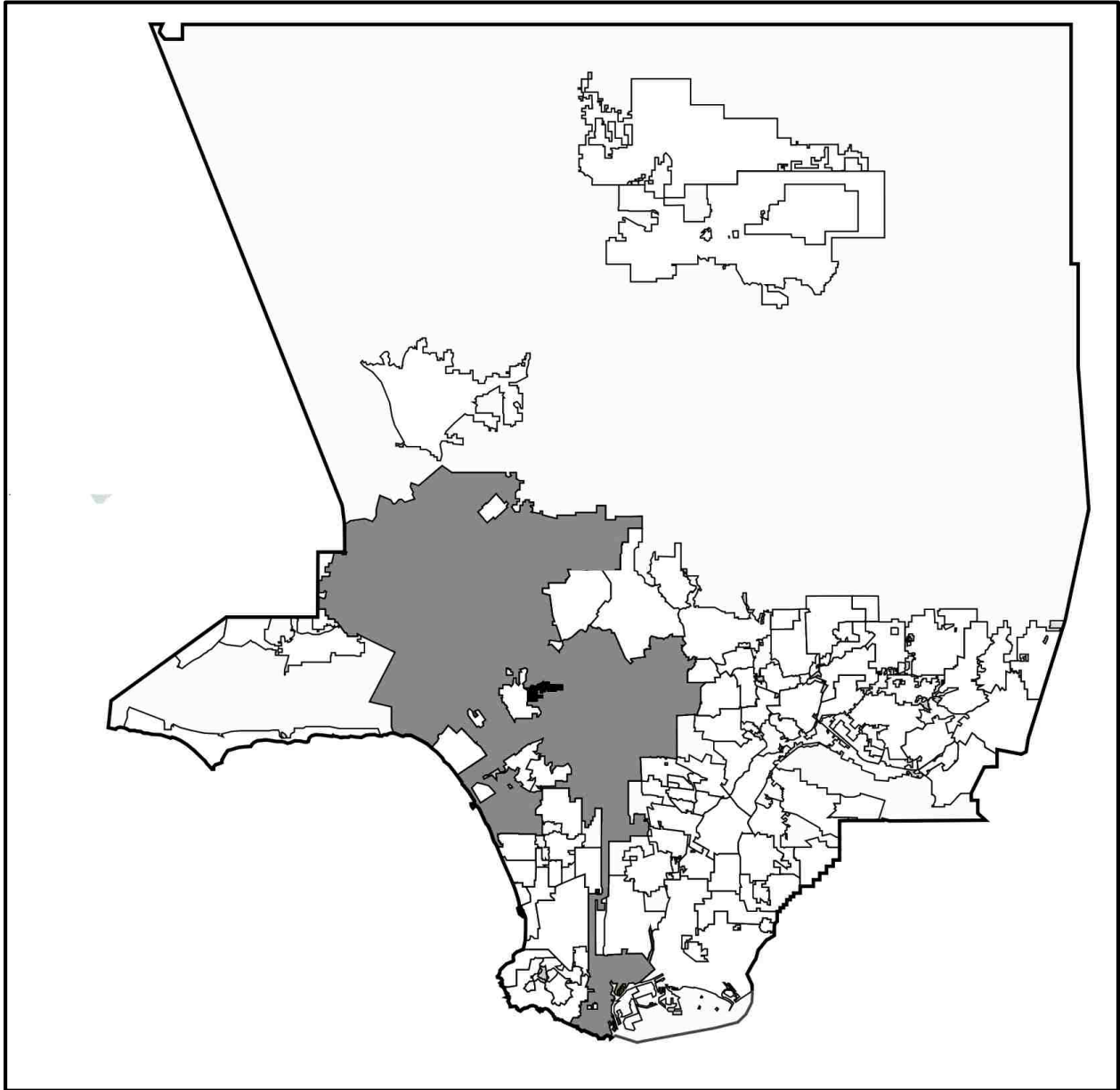


Figure 1: Los Angeles County, circa 1990. This map shows city boundaries within the county. The fairly shaded area indicates the city limits of L.A., while the darker area reveals West Hollywood, which is surrounded by L.A. and Beverly Hills.

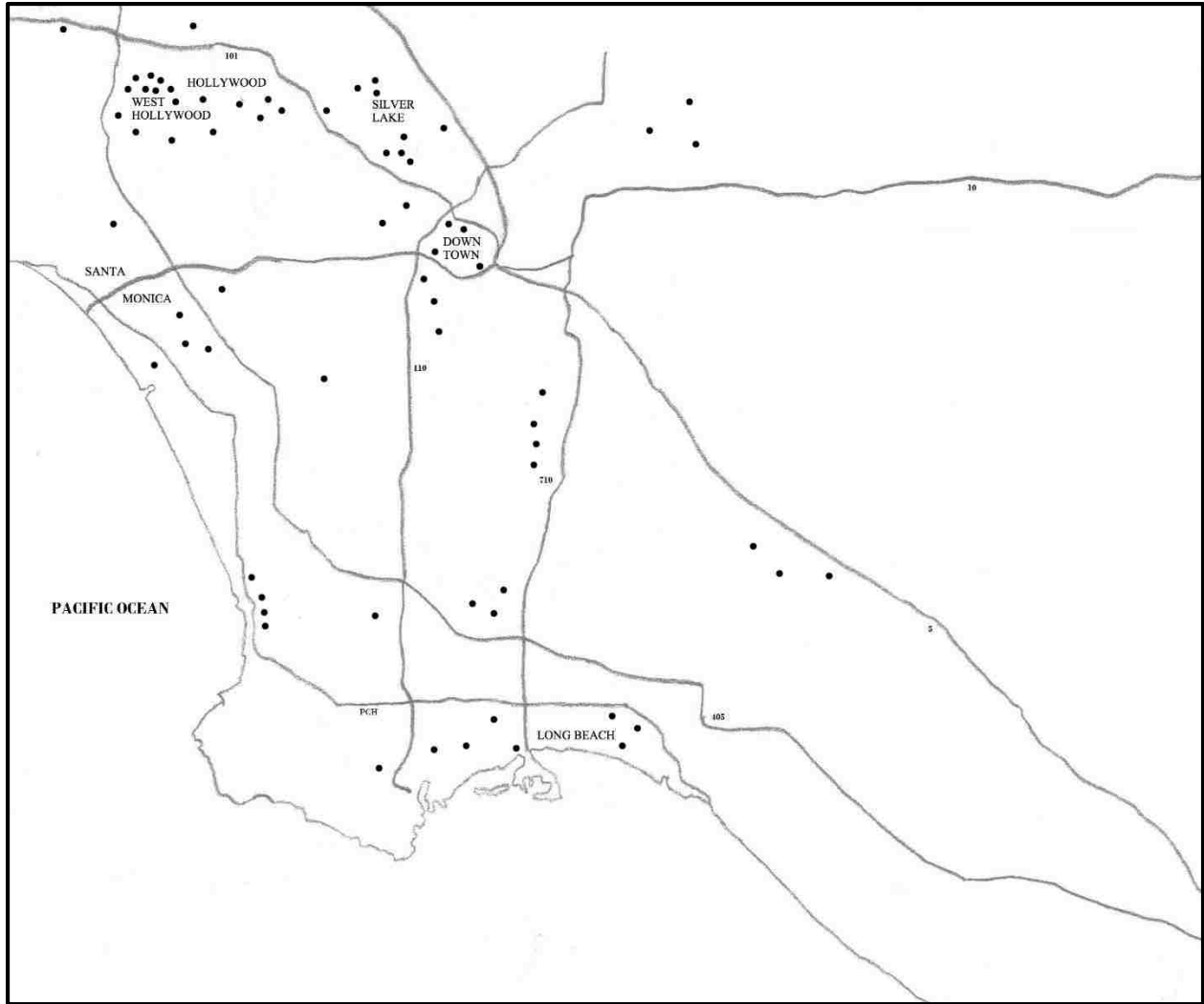


Figure 2: Queer housing patterns in Greater Los Angeles, 1974-1980. While West Hollywood became associated with lesbians and gays throughout the 1970s and 1980s, queers lived in most corners of the metropolis. Since census data does not account for sexuality, determining where people lived is difficult. Nevertheless, organizational records offer clues. Utilizing records from the Gay Community Services Center and the Stonewall Democratic Club, this map reveals “home addresses” for queer activists from 1974-1980. Dots represent addresses that were listed on organizational forms or meeting minutes. As the map reveals, queers could be found outside Greater Hollywood in great numbers.

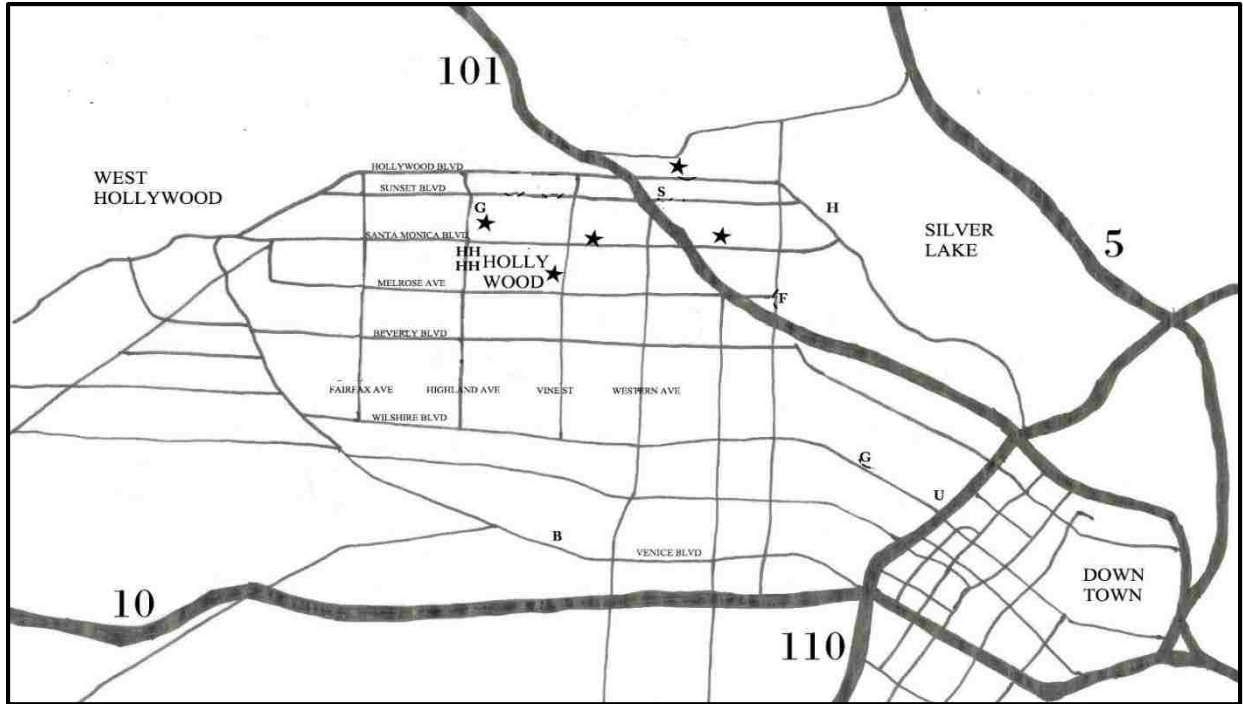


Figure 3: Locations of queer housing shelters and political clubs, 1968-1984. As this map indicates, the Greater Hollywood area housed the majority of the queer organizations examined in this study, which helped associate the area with gay activism. Map key: stars: liberation house; B: Boyle Home location; F: L.A. Gay Liberation Front headquarters; G: Gay Community Services Center locations; H: the Hoover Street commune; HH: Hudson House locations; S: Stonewall Democratic Club; U: United States Mission.



Figure 4: West Hollywood city boundaries after 1984. While queers were used to metropolitan politics, incorporation confined them to much smaller political boundaries. Map data © 2016 Google Maps

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Zaretsky, Natasha. *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007.

Curriculum Vitae

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Education:

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Teaching Experience:

Part-Time Instructor, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2012-2015

Additional Academic Experience:

Instructor/Designer, Community to Campus, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2013-2015
Undergraduate Co-Advisor, History Department, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 2014-2015

Courses Taught:

American History since 1877
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Selected Fellowships, Awards, and Grants:

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UNLV, President's Research Fellowship, 2015-2016
Urban History Association, Best Graduate Student Paper, 2014
American Historical Association-Pacific Coast Branch, Graduate Student Grant, 2014
UNLV, Dean's Award, 2014
UNLV, Hal K. Rothman Award, 2013
UNLV, Harold and Judith Boyer Award for Oral History, 2013
UNLV, Summer Research Scholarship, 2012, 2014
University of Redlands, Craig Lockhead Award, 2008

Professional Affiliations:

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Committee on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender History
L.A. History and Metro Studies Group, Huntington Library
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Publications:

“‘A Ray of Sunshine’: Housing, Family, and the Queering of the Welfare State in 1970s Los Angeles” in Jonathan Bell (ed.) *The Politics of the Closet in the Age of Reagan: New Perspectives on Sexuality and the American State since the 1970s*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, forthcoming 2017.

“Rethinking the ‘Era of Limits:’ Equitable Housing, Gay Liberation, and the Opening of the American Family in Greater Los Angeles during the Long 1970s,” *California History*, Vol. 91, No. 3, 2014.

“Harry Cohn: Man, Myth, and Mogul” in *Immigrant Entrepreneurship: German-American Business Biographies, 1720 to the Present*, vol. 4, edited by Jeffrey Fear. German Historical Institute. Last modified October 16, 2012.

Selected Presentations:

“Sexuality, Space, and Metropolitan Development in California,” (roundtable participant), Society for American City and Regional Planning History Conference, Los Angeles, CA (2015)

“Forgotten Narratives: The Grassroots, the State, and Gay Activism in Los Angeles during the 1970s,” Southwest Oral History Association Conference, Del Mar, CA (2015)

“Space, Fair Housing, and the Making of Queer Left-Liberal Politics in Gay Liberation Los Angeles,” Urban History Association Conference, Philadelphia, PA (2014)

“Lessons in Gentrification: Rent Control, Business Interests, and the Making of a ‘Gay City’ in West Hollywood,” American Historical Association Pacific Coast Branch Annual Conference, Portland, OR (2014)

“Rethinking Gay Liberation and the Long 1970s: Housing, Politics, and the Opening of the American Family in Greater Los Angeles, 1970-1984,” Whitsett Graduate Seminar in California History, California State University, Northridge, CA (2014)

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