

Bearing Our Own Cross:

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer Resource Center Campaign
Georgetown University 2001-2002

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*Like members of other minority groups, homosexuals are interested in their rights,
freedom, and basic human dignity, as homosexuals.*
– Franklin Kameny founder of the Mattachine Society of Washington

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Terminology

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer (LGBTQ)^{*} rights movement has been a steadily growing peace movement that has suffered many downfalls and drawbacks while making advancements in civil rights for future generations. The terminology within the movement has been controversial in itself. As activists worked to find an all-encompassing term, many did not want to commit the cardinal sin of marginalizing members of a movement that seeks to end marginalization. Though popularly called the Gay Rights movement^{**} the members of the ever-growing acronym L, G, B, T, Q are composed of those people who believe that certain rights are guaranteed to people regardless of sexual orientation; yes, there are heterosexuals in the movement.

There are many arguments within the movement that leads outsiders to question how any advancement could be made. From deciding on a name to defining what are the rights that they are fighting for, the activists seem unanimous in their choice of accepting a peaceful way in achieving the goals of the movement. Though some activists agree that all forms of sexual activities and orientations should be unstigmatized, the majority agree that those deemed “harmful” such as pedophilia should not be included in the movement’s agenda. The Gay Rights movement has a long history as a peaceful movement from its very start and the tradition continues today.

^{*} LGBTQ was the voted upon ordered for the acronym used during the Georgetown University LGBTQ Resource Center Campaign. In place of the more commonly used GLBT, LGBTQ places Lesbian before Gay and adds the Queer category. This was initiated to show how gay rights focused to heavily on gay males and often lead to an invisibility of the other members of the movement.

^{**} Due to its more common use, I will refer to the movement as the Gay Rights Movement. When speaking of the LGBTQ Resource Center Campaign, I will use the accepted LGBTQ.

Another term that will be used throughout is “Coming out” and variations of it. Coming out refers to the public announcement of oneself as a homosexual, bisexual, transgendered, or queer. Other similar terms that I will use throughout are outing, to be out, and coming out of the closet. Coming out day is nationally celebrated in the United States as part of the Gay Pride movement. Coming out is unique to LGBTQ people because we live in a heterosexist world. It is assumed that everyone is heterosexual, therefore, heterosexual terminology and expectations should be applicable to everyone, that is not so. For many coming-out is a life long process and over the years the age at which one first begins to come out has dropped significantly. Ultimately, it is one’s acceptance of a part of one’s self. A person’s sexuality is an important aspect to the entirety of that person and it should not be taken for granted.

Introduction

“Respect for the God-given dignity of all persons means the recognition of human rights and responsibilities. The teaching of the Church makes it clear that the fundamental rights of homosexual persons must be defended and that all of us must strive to eliminate any form of injustice, oppression, or violence against them.”¹

-Always Our Children 1997

Discrimination based on sexual orientation and sexual identification is one of the last forms of accepted prejudice in the United States. Injustices, oppression, and violence based on sexuality cover a wide range of areas. It shows itself when a family disowns a child because the child “comes out,” when someone is brutally left for dead in freezing temperatures because he supposedly tried to hit on another male, or when a nation blames sexuality for an epidemic that continues to kill. Homophobia also works on smaller levels. It can be as simple as an uncomfortable gaze towards two males holding hands as they walk down the street. Ranging from local to federal levels of governments, sexuality has taken its place at the top of the lists of controversial topics. In recent years, Congress passed an Act establishing heterosexual marriages as the only valid form of marriage in the United States. Some states still have anti-sodomy laws and some even specifically target homosexuals. In some instances, people who have lived together for many years cannot even be in the hospital room as their partner dies because they are not legal family members.

In 2001, there were 1,643 victims of hate crimes related to sexual orientation (1,152 anti-male homosexual, 257 anti-female homosexual, 217 anti-homosexual, and 17 anti-bisexual).² These numbers represent individual people who have suffered because of

¹ Roman Catholic Bishops of the United States Pastoral Message: *Always Our Children 1997*.

² www.FBI.gov/ucr/ucr.htm. Table 1 Incidents, Offenses, Victims, and Known Offenders by Bias Motivation 2001.

the structural violence of homophobia and heterosexism. Not included in the statistics are the many men and women who commit suicide and the many crimes that are not reported because of fear of retaliation. One of the most infamous cases of a hate crime against homosexuals in the United States was the murder of Matthew Shepard in Laramie, Wyoming. In the court case of his murderers, the defense used homosexual-paranoia, as the reason the crime was committed. This helped to show how extreme and widespread homophobia was in the United States, where people tried to use it as a justification for murder. Even after the international attention given to this crime, reports show that one of the most significant trends, in regards to hate crime statistics, is an overall long-term increase in attacks on gay men and lesbians.³ Matthew Shepard is one of the faces to the numbers but there are many others that go unidentified. Physical violence against homosexuals is one of the most common forms of hate crimes in the United States. Some cities have established anti-hate crime laws that specifically deal with bias related crimes on a different level. State legislators have proposed similar laws though few have enacted them. There is not a federal anti-hate crime law. Opponents of such laws argue that it categorizes hate crimes and makes them into special cases instead of regular crimes. Sadly, the faces that belong to the numbers cannot speak up against those opponents but many who do have a voice continue to speak out.

Beginning with the first establishment of an organization to deal with civil rights issues for homosexuals in the United States, invisibility and anonymity have worked as a double-edged sword. They provided security to many but also forced many to be silenced. The struggles that many activists have faced are both personal and external. Besides the structural and physical violence of homophobia and heterosexism, the

³ www.publiceye.org/hate/statistics/htm.

process of self-identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, or queer is a lifelong one. A study conducted by Professor Ritch Savin-Williams at Cornell University showed that the average age for young men to identify their sexual attractions as gay dropped from the year 1979, when it was around age 20, to 1998, when it was age *thirteen*.⁴

Astonishing statistics showing a correlation between violence and coming out include:

- Gay-identified students are the most likely victims of violence in school (according to a 1997 Minnesota Attorney General school safety report),
- They are seven times more likely to have been threatened/injured by a weapon at school (Vermont Dept. of Education, 1997)
- They are four times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers (both Massachusetts and Vermont studies).
- In a study of gay-identified youth in 14 U.S. cities, 22% of males and 29% of females reported being physically hurt by another student in school, and 7% reported being hurt by a teacher.
- In a Gallup poll of American students age 13-17, the largest number said that gay students are the most vulnerable to harm from violent students, and that “hatred of gay people” is one of the most common topics voiced by violent students.⁵

After the initial self-identification, homosexuals are forced to come out on many social levels throughout his or her life. It can be coming out to parents and other family members along with friends. Coming out can be as small as answering a coworkers question about one’s spouse. Homosexuality is seen as the unnatural sexuality. Whereas heterosexuality is always seen as common and goes without saying that it is so, homosexuality has to be explained and evaluated by most people that a homosexual person meets. Homophobia exists as a reinforcement of the dominant heterosexuality over homosexuality.

Throughout the history of an organized Gay Rights movement, a tactical peace movement has answered a call for social justice. Most activists employ nonviolent

⁴ <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=494>

⁵ <http://www.lambdalegal.org/cgi-bin/iowa/documents/record?record=494>

sanctions as a way of educating the public about the social inequalities and to enforce changes in the status quo. By working to gain political and legal power, activists have created changes in laws that targeted homosexuals and further marginalized homosexuals as a separate group. The history of a Gay Rights movement has been one of ups and downs. In 1897, the first organization, Scientific Humanitarian Committee, was formed in Germany. Great social strides and political gains were made for gay rights during this “Golden Era.” This movement came to an end as many homosexuals were executed in Adolph Hitler’s concentration camps. In the United States, post-World War II activism was cut short by the rise of the Cold War. As it became illegal for those deemed “sexual deviants” to work for the federal government, homosexuality became synonymous with Communism and “enemy of the state.” It was not until the free-loving Sixties and Seventies that a recognizable Gay Rights movement began to take form. During the Sixties and Seventies activists in the Gay Rights movement found companions with other Civil Rights activists. Borrowing their tactics and adapting a uniquely queer peace campaign lead to the creation of a mixed coalition of equal rights activists for all. During the 1980’s the Gay Rights movement faced new enemies in the form of the rise of the Regan-era New Right and the AIDS epidemic. The history of an active Gay Rights movement as a peace movement for social justice continued with the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer Resource Center campaign as a nonviolent peace movement to create change at Georgetown University.

* * * * *

Why a nonviolent campaign for a LGBTQ Resource Center?

Imagine that you are a freshman at Georgetown University. You have met your roommate and also other students on your floor. For the first time you are living away from home and you are staying on a co-ed floor. As you begin to unpack your belongings you begin to wonder what you should put up to decorate your area. There is the picture of you and your boyfriend at prom and also the poster of the hot movie star that you secretly have a crush on. You decide to wait a while until you decorate your room because you are not ready to answer some inevitable questions, such as: who is that guy with you at prom? And are you gay?

A few days before classes start, Georgetown has a New Student Orientation that allows new students to meet each other and become familiar with the university. You are separated into small groups and after informal greetings one of the first questions someone asks you is if you have a boyfriend back home. You also overhear someone ask another student how his mom and dad are. Within the first few days of being on campus, some students are faced with questions and situations that they are not sure how to answer. The female student could answer that she did not have a boyfriend back home but did have a girlfriend. The male student could reply that he has two moms.

You are a gay male student and a few days have passed since classes began. You feel insecure because you have not told anyone that you are gay and you are not sure if you will or why you should. Your roommate comes in and begins yelling that this “fag” at the bookstore didn’t give him the right change and then continues to say, “Fags mess up everything.” Almost immediately you question yourself on what to do. You brush off the comments but continue to think about it on a constant basis. Finally it happens, a few weeks have passed and you have met another gay student. You are happy because you

have someone to relate to but one day while you two are chatting in your room, your roommate returns and begins to berate your friend for being a “queen.” You defend your friend by outing yourself. After much hostility, you decide that you cannot live in that environment and begin the process of getting a room change. You are the one who has to move out although it was your roommate creating the hostile environment. You go to the Housing Office and they provide you with a list of students who need a roommate; it is up to you to ask them if you could live with them. Now you have to decide to out yourself to these complete strangers or not say anything and hope that what happened already does not happen again. Welcome to Georgetown! In under a semester your life has changed and at a Catholic university you realize that homophobia and heterosexism are rampant and you should feel guilty for being a homosexual; they do not list that on your \$36,000 bill.

The nonviolent campaign for a LGBTQ Resource Center caused people to realize that problems of homophobia and heterosexism were widespread at Georgetown University. Although, the proposal for a resource center was denied, the campaign allowed LGBTQ students and allies to organize a movement that truly worked to educate the “whole person” no matter what their sexual orientation was. Still, problems exist at Georgetown but steps have been made to remedy them. As long as people realize that problems exist and know that nonviolent action can work then the fight will continue.

History of a Gay Rights Movement in the United States

Before any social movement comes into existence, a set of prerequisites must be in place. An identifiable social group with considerable political awareness must be presumed before a movement is conceivable; those conditions came about relatively recently on the historical stage for same-sex relationships. Homosexuality has not always been organized as a separate "people."

–Barry D. Adam *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*

*"It [Sexuality] is organized into systems of power, which reward and encourage some individuals and activities, while punishing and suppressing others." – Gayle S. Rubin *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality*⁶*

The creation of a movement for civil rights for homosexuals began in the late 19th century. In the United States, the developments of large cities lead to greater levels of financial autonomy and personal anonymity. As urban communities became more commonplace, social organizations defined by homosexual expression began to appear. Historian John D’Emilio argues that Capitalism in the United States lead to the creation of a gay identity. He states, “The expansion of capital and the spread of wage labor have effected a profound transformation in the structure and functions of the nuclear family, the ideology of family life, and the meaning of heterosexual relations. It is these changes that are most directly linked to the appearance of a collective gay life.”⁷ As the country’s economic structure began to change, the fundamental aspects of peoples’ livelihoods began to change also. People began to move into the cities leading to the larger cities having larger homosexual populations. Capitalism provided both the tools and space for the creation of a homosexual community. D’Emilio continues, “By the end of the [19th] century, a class of men and women existed who recognized their erotic interests in their

⁶ Gayle S. Rubin *Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality* published in Carole S. Vance, ed., *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* 1984

⁷ John D’Emilio “Capitalism and Gay Identity” 49

own sex, saw it as a trait that set them apart from the majority, and sought others like themselves.”⁸

From the early beginnings of a homosexual community, invisibility and anonymity provided security while forcing marginalization of people. Bars began to spring up in major cities as well as cruising areas – areas where gay men staked out other gay men. Bathhouses also served as meeting places for gay men. Lesbians formed private social and literary clubs in addition to bars. At first, these individuals developed ways of meeting one another and institutions to foster a sense of identity – an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on attraction to one’s own sex.⁹ By 1915, there existed a distinct homosexual community in larger cities of the United States including New York, Washington, DC, and St. Louis. For the most part the community was “hidden from view because of social hostility, an urban gay subculture had come into existence by the 1920s and 1930s.”¹⁰ Along with the formation of homosexual communities came calls for organizing movement groups for civil and political rights. Author Barry Adams states, “The Society for Human Rights was the first formally organized movement group in the United States. Founded by an itinerant preacher and laundry, railway, and postal workers, the society was incorporated in Chicago on 10 December 1924.”¹¹ With the beginnings of distinct homosexual communities and organization efforts came an uprising of structural homophobia and heterosexism. In the scientific field, new theories were developed describing homosexuality as a condition, “something that was inherent in a person, a part

⁸ John D’Emilio 50

⁹ John D’Emilio 50

¹⁰ from *The Reader's Companion to American History*. Copyright 1991 Houghton Mifflin Company.

¹¹ Barry D. Adam *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* 46

of his or her nature.”¹² Social scientists began to debate whether or not sexuality and sexual orientation were inherent or learned characteristics.

The onset of World War II was a critical time in the history of a Gay Rights movement and the social history of homosexuality. Internationally, organizers in Germany and Europe faced the oppression of Hitler’s regime. Along with thousands of Jews, many homosexuals were carted off to concentration camps. They were forced to wear pink triangles on their clothing. In modern times, the pink triangle and the rainbow have become symbols of the Gay Pride movement. The “Golden Era” of a Gay Rights movement came to an end in the gas chambers of Hitler’s concentration camps. Some open homosexuals who held public offices were forced to resign and once again anonymity and invisibility became ways of survival. A positive aspect of World War II was the centralization of a sex-segregated military. The militaristic community created an atmosphere for homosexuality. In addition to the military, many young people left small towns for larger cities looking for wartime employment. After the war, the foundations of homosexual communities lead to many people deciding to remain in the city. A gay identity was beginning to develop based on the formation of communities. Those who stayed began to create and sustain a gay subculture in the United States. From its onset, homosexual communities were marginalized and removed from mainstream America. During the 1940’s many cities saw their first gay clubs.

As previously shown, with advances in visibility came new forms of systematized violence and prejudices. During the 1950’s homosexuality became synonymous with Communism. Many people believed and were encouraged to believe that homosexuality

¹² John D’Emilio 52

posed a threat to the national security of the United States. Many people were fired from their jobs because they were suspected of being homosexuals. Ironically, the sex-segregated community in the military worked the hardest in removing homosexuals from the military. Many cities began to accumulate lists of “known” homosexuals and would make these lists public in local newspapers. Guy Gabrielson, national chairman of the Republican Party testified, “Perhaps as dangerous as the actual Communists are the sexual perverts who have infiltrated our Government in recent years.”¹³ President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued an executive order in 1953 barring gay men and lesbians from all federal jobs.¹⁴ Following the Executive Order, many state and local governments and private corporations began barring gay men and lesbians from jobs. The FBI soon established a surveillance program to track and monitor homosexuals. Violence towards homosexuals was commonplace from both the federal and local levels. Local police forces, with the consent of the federal government, began to harass gay citizens on a continuous basis. In addition to public listings of homosexuals, raids on gay bars lead to the arrest of dozens and men and women on a single night. The vital circumstances of a social justice movement began to take form as gay men and lesbians began to organize. In November 1950, in Los Angeles, a small group of men led by Harry Hay and Chuck Rowland met to form what would become the Mattachine Society. Mostly male in membership, it was joined in 1955 by a lesbian organization in San Francisco, the Daughters of Bilitis, founded by Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon.¹⁵ Membership remained small for both organizations but soon chapters were established in

¹³ Barry D. Adam 62

¹⁴ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0194028.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0194028.html>

various cities. Anonymous subscriptions to the organizational newspapers gave people a way to remain informed and invisible.

Building on the foundations of the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, new organizations began to take root. It was not until the free-loving sixties and seventies that a recognizable modern Gay Rights movement began to take form. During the Sixties and Seventies activists in the Gay Rights Movement found companions with other Civil Rights activists. Borrowing their tactics and adapting a uniquely queer peace campaign lead to the creation of a mixed coalition of activists for equal rights for all. Black Panther leader, Huey Newton in a show of solidarity exclaimed, “Homosexuals are not given freedom and liberty by anyone in the society. Maybe they might be the most oppressed people in the society.”¹⁶ The movement for social justice for LGBTQ people is comparable to other social movements in history. An oppressed minority realizing that an opportunity has risen will begin to organize and express their dissatisfaction of the status quo. During this period, a dramatic shift occurred within the movement that began to challenge the supposed *complacent* and *assimilation* views of the more visible organizations. Historian Barry Adam notes, “The proliferating social movements of the decade, which came to be known as the New Left, engendered a militancy in the gay community that overturned the homophile approach...the homophile movement of the 1960’s expanded and reorganized as part of a larger social upheaval and soon began to question the assimilationist approach.”¹⁷ Influenced by the model of a militant black civil rights movement, the “homophile movement,” as the participants dubbed it, became more visible. Activists in Washington, DC began to employ many types of sanctions in protests

¹⁶ Barry D. Adam 86

¹⁷ Barry D. Adam 76

of the government's discriminatory employment policies. In other cities, people began to target the rampant police harassment. By 1969, perhaps fifty homophile organizations existed in the United States, with memberships of a few thousand.¹⁸ As the invisible majority began to gain a voice, great strides were being made to reinforce the Gay Rights movement. Along with the achievements of peaceful activism came a rise in strategic raids of known homosexual areas and physical violence towards homosexuals. All of these changes in the Gay Rights movement escalated on a Friday evening in New York City.

Many scholars designate the evening of June 27, 1969 as the start of the modern Gay Rights movement. Though history has shown that organizations had been around before then and that strong advancements were made prior to that date, June 27, 1969 marked one of the most visible and violent social resistances of the modern Gay Rights movement. On that evening the police in New York City raided a Greenwich Village gay bar called the Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall had been raided on previous occasions resulting in many arrests and public "outings." Contrary to expectations and previous encounters, the patrons fought back, provoking three nights of rioting in the area. Participants used trashcans and other weapons to attack the police. Ironically, it is this violent resistance that marks the start of the modern Gay Rights movement in the United States. Soon after the raid, many "gay power" slogans began to appear on surrounding buildings. People cite the Stonewall Riots as a call for a massive grassroots gay liberations movement. Fundamentally, the riots offered a public arena for the grievances of LGBTQ people to be heard. Similar to the other radical protest of the time, LGBTQ

¹⁸ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0194028.html>

people began to challenge the accepted social violence that they were experiencing. The riots also started a call for “Gay Pride.” Pride meant a public proclamation of ones sexual orientation and a resistance to the hostility and punishment that society was allowing. Activists began to usher in a social change movement that began years before Stonewall but had now changed along with the times. By 1970, 5,000 gay men and lesbians marched in New York City to commemorate the first anniversary of the Stonewall Riots; in October 1987, over 600,000 marched in Washington, to demand equality.¹⁹

The social changes brought on by the modern Gay Rights movement were far reaching. From the legal and political fields, the greatest change was an acknowledgement of gay men and lesbians as people. Many larger cities began to include sexual orientation in their civil rights statutes. In 1975, the Civil Service Commission eliminated the ban on the employment of homosexuals in most federal jobs. In the religious field, many of the nation's religious denominations engaged in spirited debates about the morality of homosexuality. Roman Catholics continued to view homosexuality as morally wrong but called for compassion. Some denominations including Unitarianism and Reformed Judaism allowed gay and lesbian ministers and rabbis. A vibrant gay and lesbian community had started to become a well-organized community with political and business clout. In some cities, openly gay candidates ran and were elected to different levels of government. The movement had fully come out of the closet.

¹⁹ <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0194028.html>

As history has shown, a great opposition met the great advancements of a Gay Rights movement. During the 1980's the Gay Rights movement faced new enemies in the form of the rise of the Regan-era New Right and the AIDS epidemic. Some members of the LGBTQ community believe that while AIDS is an important issue in the gay and lesbian community, writing about AIDS in relation to the Gay Rights movement only reinforces the stigmatic relationship between gays and AIDS. One of the most controversial moments of the modern Gay Rights movement occurred with the rise of the New Right. In 1977 the singer Anita Bryant led a successful campaign to repeal a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida. Following the example set by Ms. Bryant, politicians, such as Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, and fundamentalist ministers, such as Jerry Falwell of Lynchburg, Virginia, founder of Moral Majority, Inc., created a heavily financed and well organized movement to counteract the Gay Rights movement. A 1981 letter from Falwell warns, "Please remember, homosexuals do not reproduce! They recruit! And, many of them are after my children and your children."²⁰

The AIDS crisis has forced both gay rights supporters and the opposition to publicly speak out. With battling slogans of "Silence = Death" and "God Gave Gays AIDS" the movement found a strong rallying point that forced gays and lesbians to be seen as people. Today's activist who are twenty-three years old or younger have never lived in a time without AIDS; they have also grown up in the era of "Gay Pride." It may seem too optimistic to view the historical timeline as one of great contradictions that empower the movement but it is that hope and optimism that is the underlying theme of the Gay Rights movement. The onset of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s both intensified

²⁰ Barry D. Adam 121

the antigay rhetoric of the time but also lead to further organization by LGBTQ groups. During the early days of the crisis, the majority of reported cases were in homosexual males. Because of this, AIDS was thought to be a gay disease. Institutionalized homophobia led to many people ignoring the disease and even blaming homosexual males for bringing the disease on themselves. Outreach groups began to form in order to help people living with AIDS and as more information was learned, to educate the community about the disease. Two prominent groups that formed during this time relied on a more militaristic and confrontational style of action. AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) and Queer Nation employed direct-action confrontational tactics instead of more peaceful forms of sanctions. Queer Nation, in particular, was confronting heterosexuality and heterosexism. Barry Adam notes, “The Queer Nation idea intended to challenge the now ‘respectable’ integrated gay/lesbian in favor of a radical coalition of the sexually excluded, including bisexuals, Transgendered people, and presumably some heterosexuals as well.”²¹ The Gay Rights movement began to take on many shapes. The central goals remained the same though some argued that the goals of one organization did not represent their particular goals and that action could be both violent and nonviolent. The AIDS crisis has galvanized the American gay community and brought support from the wider community for recognition of the menace posed by AIDS. Paradoxically, the tragedy and loss of the AIDS crisis has led to a strengthening of the Gay Rights movement and has shown the transformation of the movement into modern times.

²¹ Barry D. Adam 163

Since the 1980's the movement has faced even more political and legal challenges. From issues ranging from domestic partner rights to the privacy of one's own bedroom, the Gay Rights movement fundamentally questions the forced status of being a second-class citizen. The Supreme Court upheld state laws prohibiting homosexual conduct in 1986, and activists have focused their efforts on overturning sodomy laws in those states that still retain them (fewer than twenty); in most states, the laws apply also to heterosexuals but are used primarily against homosexuals. By 1999 the antisodomy laws of 32 states had been repealed or declared unconstitutional; in all but five of the remaining states, the antisodomy laws applied to both heterosexuals and homosexuals.²² Recently, the Supreme Court has agreed to hear arguments in its 2003 session against the sodomy laws of Texas.

In recent years, the political agenda of the movement has included the issues of marriage and adoption for gay and lesbian couples. Activists have also fought for spousal benefits, such as health insurance and pension plans for long-term domestic partners, and the legal recognition of same-sex couples. In response to the new activism, many states began to pass legislation explicitly banning same-sex marriages. By 1999, 30 states had done so. Some achievements include statewide domestic partnership systems in California and Hawaii and the availability of domestic partner benefits in many workplaces. Seventy-five years after the establishment of the first organization for the civil rights of homosexuals, the Vermont Supreme Court declared in 1999 that the state must grant homosexual couples the same rights and protections that married heterosexuals have, and in 2000 the state legislature backed "civil unions" for same-sex

²² www.ACLU.org

couples that offer many benefits similar to those of heterosexual marriage. A major setback occurred in 1996 with the signing of the Defense of Marriage Act by President Bill Clinton. The Act restricts on a national level the federal definition of marriage to heterosexual couples. Another controversial Act signed by President Clinton was the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. In 1993 the Defense Dept., at President Clinton's order, changed the ban on homosexuals in the military to a ban on homosexual activity. The policy was presented as a way to allow gays in the military to serve without fear of discharge or other penalty as long as they did not reveal their sexual orientation. Once again homosexuals were being pushed into the closet and forced to become both silent and invisible.

The Gay Rights movement continues to gain advancements and face opposition. Throughout its existence, many activists have taken different approaches to the movement to varying degrees of success and failures. There have been numerous peaceful movements and also movements that have employed violent sanctions. In the United States, a growing awareness of civil rights helped bring the different organizations for gay rights into modern times. There have been many great achievements from the Gay Rights movement but in many legal and social areas, homosexuals are still viewed as second-class citizens. On university campuses the greatest activists continue to take to the streets in the name of equality. In the tradition of Gay Rights activists who have chosen a nonviolent movement, the history of gay rights activism at Georgetown University has overwhelmingly been a peaceful movement. By studying and associating with a peaceful movement, Georgetown activists have made great gains on campus but have also met opposition. The greatest external factors that have hindered the movement

at Georgetown include Georgetown's Catholic identity, the will of alumni, and internalized homophobia and heterosexism. It was not until a movement for a LGBTQ Resource Center that the issues of homophobia and heterosexism became fully visible to everyone. People began to acknowledge that there existed problems for LGBTQ students that were unique to them. Statistics on hate crimes, suicide, depression, drug use, and other miscellaneous issues supported the fact that the resources available at Georgetown were not adequate. Realizing that these problems must be remedied, students once again chose a nonviolent movement to address the issues and to work for social change.

History of a Gay Rights Movement at Georgetown University

On the Main Campus, where a substantial majority of the students are Roman Catholic, they first come to us at seventeen an eighteen. At this time of life sexual identity is a serious question and, for at least some, is a source of anxiety and trouble.

*–Letter to the Members of Georgetown’s Faculty and Alumni, March 28, 1988
Timothy S. Healy, S. J. Georgetown University President*

As capital of the United States, Washington, DC has been the site of much social reform. Throughout the years, a call for equality has been met with the rights to vote, own property, and to live in privacy. The blood of many fighting for these basic rights has marked the land and it is natural that many battles in the fight for Gay Rights have occurred in this historic city. A few steps from where the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) and the military’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy have yet to be signed, a court case involving individual rights at a university was being argued. The Gay People of Georgetown University (GPGU) group was suing Georgetown University for the basic funds and rights to be recognized as an organization on campus. The case and the activism leading up to the courts ruling characterized the changing attitudes of the Gay Rights movement. Fundamentally, a student group was challenging the first Catholic university in the United States to accept and recognize their group like any other on campus. The organization was founded in 1977, received “student body endorsement” on two previous occasions, which entitled the group to advertise in student publications, to apply for lecture funds, and limited use of University facilities. On both occasions, the University did not give approval for the organization. Citing that such recognition would have meant that “the University endorsed the activities of the organization, and would also have afforded it more extensive benefits including University funding” President Thomas Healy, S. J. did not give recognition.

After years of forced invisibility by the University, two student groups, Gay People of Georgetown on the main campus and a similar group at the Law Center, challenged Georgetown for recognition. A vital part of the student's arguments centered around the fact that Georgetown University is located in Washington, DC. Under the Human Rights Act of the District Columbia, the groups argued that Georgetown was in violation of the act by unlawfully discriminating a group of its students. The Human Rights Act states that it is unlawful, "To deny, restrict, or to abridge or condition the use of, or access to, any of its facilities and services to any person otherwise qualified, wholly or partially, for religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, personal appearance, sexual orientation... of any individual..."²³ In October, 1983, Judge Sylvia Bacon of the DC Superior Court ruled that the Act was unenforceable due to Georgetown University's adherence to Catholic doctrine and the "free exercise" clause of the Constitution. The Court of Appeals of the District of Columbia initially ruled 2-1 in favor of the student coalition.²⁴ Under the advice of counsel, the University did not challenge the ruling to the Supreme Court of the United States. In fear that a ruling at that level would establish an unfavorable precedent, the University reached an agreement with the coalition that would allow the receipt of tangible benefits.

Calling in political and alumni supporters, the students showed how a coalition of students could fight and win gains against an established precedent of discrimination and invisibility. The students fought to establish the roots of today's Georgetown University Pride organization. Almost two decades later the attitude of the Gay Rights movement was changing again as gay and lesbian students on campus faced extraordinary problems

²³ Human Rights Act of the District of Columbia

²⁴ Gay Rights Coalition v. Georgetown University – 536 A. 2d 1 (D.C. App. 1987),

with the university and the resources available to alleviate those problems. Though years had passed since the court cases, many of the key players were still around on campus including Jack DeGioia who was recently inaugurated as the University's first lay president. The students wanted access to resources that all students are offered.

“In addition, there are some unique issues that face lesbian and gay students that heterosexual students do not have to face. There are differences between gay men and lesbians in the process of identifying oneself as lesbian or gay. In addition there are issues concerning: Grieving the loss of membership in the dominant culture and entry into a permanently stigmatized group; The experience of being a minority, especially an invisible minority, and its impact on one's life; Lack of family support or strong role models; and potential lack of peer support and isolation.”²⁵

The two student groups, Gay People of Georgetown University and Gay Rights Coalition, became official student organizations after the DC Court of Appeals ruling in 1987. Through the years the student organizations changed names numerous times; the most recent title is Georgetown University Pride (1993). In 1994, a historic change occurred as “sexual orientation” was added to Georgetown University's non-discrimination admissions policy with help from the Center for Minority Educational Affairs. The next milestone in LGBT life at Georgetown University came in 1998. The Safe Zones Program was established on campus as a program of the Diversity Working Group. The Mission Statement of Safe Zone Program states, “The program seeks to assist Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered students in identifying members of the community who can provide resources, referrals, and support. Participation in the Safe Zone Program gives faculty, staff, and students the opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to creating a safe environment and a safe community for all people.”²⁶ The

²⁵ Evans, N. J., & Wall, V. A. (1991). *Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals on Campus*. American College Personnel Association.

²⁶ Safe Zone Program pamphlet

Safe Zone Program and GU Pride both consisted of student and faculty members who provided resources to LGBTQ people. The groups work to challenge the stereotypes of LGBTQ people in addition to striving to overcome prejudices such as homophobia and heterosexism while promoting diversity within Georgetown University.

The introduction of the Safe Zone Programs was met with both support and anger. The Program became one of the most visible resources on campus but ironically its focus on one-on-one interactions (between volunteer and student seeking help) further contributed to the isolation of LGBTQ students. The student group began running a coming out support group for the University body. Although it had been noted by former-GU President Thomas Healy, S. J. that “sexual identity is a serious question and, for at least some, is a source of anxiety and trouble” the University did not provide any resources in offering support to the GU Pride coming out support group. The University stressed that the on campus counseling services (CAPS) provided adequate resources for help in coming out. Based on anecdotal evidence, the counseling services were shown to be insufficient for the average LGBTQ student and dealt with students who had problems that had escalated beyond the individual’s control. Like the Safe Zone Programs, CAPS relied on confidentiality and invisibility of the one-on-one process. Because they are broader social problems, counseling services do not challenge the issues of homophobia and heterosexism, which the individual who is seeking help did not cause.

In response to a report written by members of GU Pride, Vice President of Student Affairs Juan Gonzales formed the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer (LGBTQ) Ad Hoc Committee in early June. The Committee was comprised of students, faculty, and administrators of Georgetown University. Student members of the

Committee included Rachel Bouttenot (CAS 2003), Joe McFadden (CAS 2002), and Kevin Comeau (SFS 2002). It was important to have a student present on a committee that would directly affect them. It allowed voices and faces to be given to the problems that the committee was analyzing. In addition to that they provided strong leadership and worked as liaisons to the LGBTQ student body. The Ad Hoc Committee Report states:

The committee was charged with reviewing the report, identifying areas of concern, and making short term and long term recommendations for moving the university forward on the support and care of our Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Queer students. The report specifically requested the review of services related to Housing, Residence Life, Counseling, and academic life, as well as the general invisibility of LGBTQ students at Georgetown.²⁷

The following is a brief synopsis of their findings:

- **Housing:** In regards to the logistics of room assignments and reassignments related directly to the Office of Housing and roommate conflict and mediation, areas governed by Residence Life the student report suggests that roommate conflict related to sexuality and the process for room moving can be “stressful and create even more emotional hardship than the conflict itself presents.”
- **Counseling Center:** Many students reported that they had negative experiences with the counseling center. The primary form of therapy is individual counseling.
- **Academic Issues:** The main focus was on language classes and the exercise used for learning pronouns. Ex. A gay male student is asked to describe his perfect *girlfriend*. This lesson “presupposes a specific romantic, or sexual orientation.” The student is placed in the awkward situation in either having to “come out” to the professor and his class or he answering the way the professor intended. In cases where the gay male student answers the question using the *male* pronoun it is counted as incorrect.
- **General Invisibility:** On this issue the committee offered a number of new initiatives. These include programs during New Student Orientation (NSO) and expansion of the Safe Zone Program.

²⁷ LGBTQ Ad Hoc Committee Report August 7, 2001

The greatest recommendation of the committee was the creation of a resource center.

The report worked to balance the need for a resource center with Georgetown's Catholic identity. It states:

It was suggested that an LGBT Coordinator be hired to build a resource center for LGBT students. This individual could provide counseling and support to students, act as an advocate for this population of students, and educate the community at large about issues and concerns related to LGBT students. It is important to note that when hiring such an individual it would be essential that they have familiarity with Catholic and Jesuit philosophy of education as well as with the church's stance on sexuality issues...Education in the Jesuit tradition requires that we educate the 'whole person.' Clearly, for our students, issues of sexual identity and sexual orientation are critical during their college years. It is our responsibility to recognize that addressing this reality is an aspect of nurturing the whole person.²⁸

The roots of the LGBTQ Resource Center Campaign began with the greatest recommendation of the Ad Hoc Committee not being enforced. Students felt that finally the University had an opportunity to provide resources for one of the last minority groups on campus. Not only had the University relied on sometimes inadequate volunteerism to aid with LGBTQ issues, now the University which created the Committee were not listening to the Committee's recommendations. Many students initially felt that nothing would ever come from the Committee Report and that everything would return to the status quo. Fortunately, the time was right once again for change to happen on the Georgetown Campus. Professor Ed Ingebretsen created a tutorial for students to research and analyze the impact of Catholic identity and homosexuality at Georgetown. Student leaders included Joe McFadden (CAS 2002), Theo Greene (CAS 2002), Anthony House (CAS 2002), and Danielle DeCerbo (CAS 2003). This great intellectual mix represented a good portion of the LGBTQ community at Georgetown. Professor Ingebretsen wrote, "Their work, done within the context of academic freedom guaranteed by the academy

²⁸ LGBTQ Ad Hoc Committee Report August 7, 2001

(school and tutorial) helped bring this [the Resource Center campaign] about.” Headed by great student leaders and with support from faculty and administrators who for years had experience in the Gay Rights movement, the LGBTQ Resource Center Campaign was born. Citing reasons for the Resource Center that included community building, health benefits (issues including: mental disorders, suicide, body image and eating disorders, HIV, alcohol abuse, and other substance abuse), Hate and Bias Crimes, and inadequate campus resources, the campaign began to take shape.

The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Queer Resource Center Campaign

“Nonviolent action is a generic term: it includes the large class of phenomena variously called nonviolent resistance, Satyagraha, passive resistance, and nonviolent direct action. While it is not violent, it is action, and not inaction; passivity, submission, and cowardice must be surmounted if it is to be used. It is a means of conducting conflicts and waging struggles, and it is not to be equated with (though it may be accompanied by) purely verbal dissent or solely psychological influence.”²⁹

Dr. Juan Gonzalez soon expanded the summer Ad Hoc Committee into the academic year. Now known as the LGBTQ Working Group, its focus was to continue the work of the Ad Hoc Committee and further investigate and examine LGBTQ issues. The working group was comprised of students, faculty, and administrators. Key leaders were Joe McFadden (CAS 2002), Danielle DeCerbo (CAS 2003), and Mary Kay Schneider from the Office of Student Programs. Mr. McFadden was the current president of GU Pride and Ms. DeCerbo was elected to be co-president of GU Pride near the end of the campaign. The working group agreed with the recommendation for a Resource Center and presented a proposal to Dr. Gonzalez. Again there was no response, which led to the student members of the working group to begin forming a coalition of other undergraduate students to formally begin a LGBTQ Resource Center campaign. The main objective of the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign was to further demonstrate the benefits that a resource center would provide for LGBTQ students and the Georgetown University community and the establishment of such a resource center on the Georgetown campus. Using data and recommendations provided by the Ad Hoc Committee established by Vice President of Student Affairs and anecdotal data from LGBTQ students, the campaign focused on the problems and challenges that students

²⁹ Gene Sharp “The Technique of Nonviolent Action”

face at the University and the lack of adequate resources available to alleviate said problems. The strongest aspect of the campaign was the fact that the Ad Hoc Committee commissioned by the University was the biggest proponent for the Resource Center. The campaign occurred as a result of the administrations refusal to either accept or refuse the recommendation. The silence of the University led to the campaign gaining a voice.

Leaders of the Georgetown University Pride organization began to organize a coalition of LGBTQ students and allies. Comprised of undergraduate students from all years, the coalitions first goal was to make public the silence of the University. Furthermore, the students focused on the issue of LGBTQ invisibility and ways that the invisibility had become institutionalized. The coalition was working to change the perceptions of LGBTQ people at Georgetown while gaining more people power from the student body, faculty, and administration. The coalition noted that the University itself was one of the greatest enforcers of the LGBTQ invisibility. In addition to the resources on campus that centered on one-on-one interactions, the students noted:

“Georgetown does not keep statistics of any kind related to GLBT students. All evidence gathered has been forced to be anecdotal. That lack of statistics is another symptom of the university’s current contribution to the invisibility of the GLBT student issues. Evidence gathered from GLBT students shows a huge range of problems GLBT students face that have no answer in current university programs. Eating disorders, suicide, depression, sexually transmitted infections, rape, isolation, substance abuse, poor academic performance, prostitution, and harassment are just some of the issues related. Though not all GLBT students face all these problems, all GLBT students we have talked to experienced at least one-and most have experience more than one- of these problems.”³⁰

The campaign constantly stressed that the current available resources for LGBTQ issues were both inadequate and relied on extreme circumstances. The resources were made available after situations became so severe that the remedy for the problem were

³⁰ Initial Resource Center Proposal to Dr. Juan Gonzalez

sometimes more stressful and harmful than the problem itself. Concurring with the Ad Hoc Committee, members of the campaign believed that a centralized resource center should be established in order to counter the issues of LGBTQ students at Georgetown that were not being properly addressed. The issues of homophobia and heterosexism would also be primary challenges that a resource center would combat. The University believed that the available resources are enough but the reality is that institutionalized factors such as homophobia and heterosexism need a different response because young queer people are oppressed in a different way than other minorities.

The coalition had established its goals and reasons for the necessity of a resource center at Georgetown University. The official campaign began with a first proposal sent to Dr. Juan Gonzalez. When a response was not given, the students began the next phase of the campaign that relied on sanctions described by Gene Sharp as “Techniques of Nonviolent Action.” Sharp states, “Generally speaking, the methods of nonviolent protests are symbolic in their effect and produce an awareness of the existence of dissent.”³¹ Many members of Georgetown Pride were already aware of the ongoing concerns of both the Ad Hoc Committee and the students associated with the Resource Center campaign. In order to further push the campaign, the coalition had to show that a problem existed to the student body of Georgetown. Not only did the students have to show that a problem existed but they also had to convince a majority Catholic university that a LGBTQ Resource Center did not conflict with Catholic identity. The institutionalized factors of heterosexuality and heterosexism within the university proved to be another issue that the coalition would have to face. Realizing that a successful

³¹ Gene Sharp “The Technique of Nonviolent Action”

campaign depended on LGBTQ allies, the students began a nonviolent campaign for the resource center.

The first sanctions that the coalition imposed emphasized the methods of nonviolent protest and persuasion. Beginning with formal statements from the coalition the goals of the campaign were established and introduced to the student body. The students then submitted a petition signed by over 1,000 members of the University community in support of the campaign to the administration. The next sanction allowed many students to take part in public speeches, which primarily occurred in Red Square. Georgetown University has designated Red Square as an open space for speech on campus grounds. Another form of public speech took part in the classroom of campaign members. While introducing the next form of sanction that the members were to initiate many members worked to inform their classmates about the campaign. The students had to “come out” to his or her classroom, whether or not he or she was LGBTQ or not. The students risked a backlash from both fellow classmates and professors by supporting the campaign. Based on interviews after the campaign, few if any members experienced any sort of backlash. The sanction allowed members of the student body to sign preformatted letters of support and to add personal opinions to them. These letters were to be delivered to Dr. Juan Gonzalez as a symbol of both solidarity and concern for the campaign. In addition to the mass petitions and letter campaigns, many groups on campus including Georgetown Solidarity, the Philodemic Society, Georgetown Democrats, and both *The Hoya* and *The Voice* (the two leading weekly student publications) declared their support for the Campaign to the University.

Student support was vital to the campaign as many symbolic public acts began to take place. Allies, on occasion, wore ribbons of support for the campaign. GU Pride also displayed a rainbow flag while tabling in Red Square. Tabling is a common technique used by Georgetown student groups that requires members to sit at a table during school hours in order to offer information concerning specific clubs or issues. Because the coalition still had not heard from Dr. Juan Gonzalez students began to pressure him with e-mails and telephone calls. In celebration of Valentine's Day, members of GU Pride sent Dr. Gonzalez Valentine's card. In addition to student support, many faculty members and administrators participated in public assemblies. They led teach-ins to inform the community about LGBTQ issues and the proposed resource center. In a highly publicized move, the Philodemic Society hosted a debate concerning the Resource Center. The outcome shocked many as the highly conservative group affirmed the need for a Resource Center. The students then worked to create communication with a wider audience. To show both unity and support for the campaign, members of the campaign and other organizations created banners, posters, and leaflets. Opponents of the campaign also took advantage of this sanction and in the process destroyed many of the leaflets and banners. The coalition now realized that the backlash that was expected had started to occur as more students were becoming aware of the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign.

Dr. Gonzalez soon informed the coalition that he would soon issue a decision. In the upcoming days the committee began focusing on Methods of Social Non-cooperation and Methods of Nonviolent Intervention. The students soon saw an opportunity to show the harmful effect of institutionalized and accepted discrimination of LGBTQ people.

Some students had stated that once it was publicly known that he or she was a homosexual some priests had refused Communion to the student. Members of the coalition used this as a reason to take part in a selective boycott on Cardinal during a mass at Georgetown. The students wore black and stood with his or her back turned to the Cardinal throughout the mass. As the day of Dr. Gonzalez announcement approached, students began to employ physical, psychological, social, and political interventions. Every time any form of harassment occurred students would call Dr. Gonzalez's office and home to inform him that this was one of the reasons that a resource center was needed. Students continued to e-mail Dr. Gonzalez and staged call-ins to his office telephone. On the day of his announcement, members of the coalition staged a sit-in in the lobby of his office as the leaders of the campaign learned that their request had been denied. The proposal for a LGBTQ Resource Center at Georgetown had been rejected on the grounds of conflict with Georgetown's Catholic identity.

One of the more controversial sanctions by the GU Pride student organization was attributed to the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign. Every spring semester, Georgetown University hosts GAAP weekends. These weekends are sponsored by the Georgetown Admissions Ambassador Program and allow accepted high school and transfer students to visit and tour the campus. The program does not include any LGBTQ related topics on its itinerary. In response to this neglect, members of GU Pride formed a subcommittee to focus on welcoming LGBTQ students to the University and offering a listing of available resources. Relying on nonviolent tactics of reaching a broader audience, the students chalked Red Square with "Welcome Messages" to the LGBTQ visiting students. Chalking is a form of earth writing that makes use of public space to

spread a message. The students believed that because Red Square is an allotted free speech zone their messages were both appropriate and needed. In addition to chalking, students created banners using numerous flyers that included messages such as “There are Gay Hoyas too” and “There are Bisexual Hoyas too.” Groups of students not associated with the subcommittee claimed to find the messages offensive and physically and verbally attacked the participants of the welcoming. Using threats of violence and open destruction of banners, the students argued that Georgetown University as a Catholic university should not support a resource center nor should Red Square be made available to LGBTQ students. In response to the flyers, opponents created similar flyers slogans such as “There are White Hoyas too” and “There are Straight Hoyas too.” The LGBTQ Resource Center campaign was gaining great attention from both supporters and opponents. A positive aspect of the violence towards the campaigners was that a few students who were involved with taunting the campaigners would actually stop and ask why they felt a LGBTQ Resource Center was necessary and how would the campaigners answer the question concerning conflicts with Georgetown’s Catholic identity. Ironically, a campaign that was not initiated by the Resource Center coalition was creating the most visibility for the campaign. After the proposal had been rejected, it became clear that the LGBTQ campaign on campus would not be denied. Michael Nagler states, “Nonviolence seeks lasting gains not a rapid ‘win’; it always wants improved relations with the opposing party, never its submission. It operates by persuasion, not coercion.”³² Students had shown that a need for a resource center existed at Georgetown and had gained support from many who at first did not agree with the

³² Michael Nagler “At the Core of Nonviolence”

campaign. Little by little steps were being made to truly create a Georgetown that would educate the “whole person.”

The LGBTQ Resource Center campaign heavily depended on the previous court cases and the growing momentum of the Gay Rights movement. With strong leadership and solidarity with other student groups on campus, the activists overwhelmingly accepted that a non-violent movement would be the only way to accomplish the goals of the campaign. Echoing peace movements of the past, the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign made the Georgetown University campus a place to have a voice. Through the shouts of “fuck you fags” and “you are going to hell”, the activists worked to make their case to the administration known to the campus community. It was okay to be gay at Georgetown University but this immediately linked you to the Resource Center campaign – even if you did not support it. Those who wholeheartedly supported the campaign saw themselves coming-out to the entire university and unabashedly slamming the closet door shut. Throughout, the students relied on tactics of a nonviolent campaign. With minimal resources but tremendous support, the coalition of students, faculty, and administrators worked for the establishment of a LGBTQ Resource Center. Tactics ranged from personal anecdotes describing the challenges of being LGBTQ self-identified at Georgetown to staging sit-ins during working group and administrative meetings. In the end, the University denied the proposal for the establishment of the Resource Center but the voices of this generation continue to echo as does those of a generation before. Georgetown University has heeded the winds of change before and hopefully one day in the near future, the University will continue to work with students in understanding the challenges of what it means to be a student.

An anonymous essay titled. “The Myth of the Gay Hoya” appeared in the 1975 edition of *Ye Doomsday Book*, a Georgetown University publication. In this essay, the writer states the manifesto of the present Gay Rights movement and calls for the destruction of the myth of the gay Hoya. Ironically, twenty-five years later the harrowing statement of “We’ve attempted to organize. We’ve tried to become visible, only to be accused of being incompatible with Christian morality. So we’ve been sent ‘for help’ to the Psychological Counseling Service” became a premonition of the future LGBTQ Resource Center campaign. The history of the Gay Rights movement at Georgetown University has been a tumultuous one. Each passing year and graduating classes have led to both advancements and loses in LGBTQ resources at the university. A campaign for gay rights took place at the nations first Catholic university. Its impact has been felt throughout the Georgetown community both positively and negatively. Like previous campaigns it was a series of ups and downs that lead some to question what if any advancements were made. The Gay Rights movement is a peace movement for equal civil rights for all regardless of sexual orientation.

Rejection

“There is no doubt that Georgetown University can and will continue to provide new and educationally valuable services to LGBT students. But we cannot create or support a center whose mission would unavoidably lead to advocacy of sexual behavior outside the context of traditional marriage. I believe that the proposed LGBT center cannot avoid this risk. Center staff would inevitably find themselves supporting activities that reasonably could be construed as promoting or advocating homosexual behavior. Such endorsement would run count to Church teaching and, thus, University practice.”³³
-from Dr. Juan Gonzalez’s response to the LGBTQ Resource Center Proposal

After waiting for weeks, Dr. Juan Gonzalez finally responded to the committee’s proposal for a LGBTQ Resource Center at Georgetown University. Citing the University’s Catholic identity and that the current on-campus resources as adequate, Dr. Gonzalez rejected the proposal. The months of arduous organizing by the students were answered with a page and a half response that acknowledged the committee’s labor but did not elaborate on its rhetoric. The two leading on-campus student papers urged Dr. Gonzalez to give further explanations for his response and to this day there has been none. *The Voice* wrote, “Gonzalez commended center supporters for their efforts over the past four months, but it’s difficult to commend Gonzalez for his response. Supporters gave Gonzalez a well-reasoned argument for creating the center, and he should have given them a well-reasoned argument for rejecting it – not a two-page form letter that’s far too short on substance.”³⁴ Obviously, Dr. Gonzalez believed that his response was adequate enough for refusal of the proposal but it also shows the arrogance of the University in responding to student needs. *The Hoya* concurred with *The Voice* on its editorial pages; they wrote, “We’re not sure what motivated the university’s illogical response. Perhaps it was a desire to avoid criticism. Either way, the university either

³³ Letter from Dr. Juan Gonzalez to Committee Members February 08, 2002

³⁴ *The Georgetown Voice* Editorial Page “Two pages too little” February 14, 2002

dodged an important question or answered it incorrectly. The university needs to reevaluate its response.”³⁵

By hiding behind its Catholic identity, Dr. Gonzalez demonstrated the inherent contradictions of being a LGBTQ student at Georgetown. In 2001, the current president of the University is a layman. Of the numerous main campus deans, none are Jesuit. Currently, only seven out of forty-four members of the Board of Directors are members of the Society of Jesus. The University offers courses on different religions of the world and offers special housing for Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu students. Of course, when something is not legally allowed such as same-sex marriage it would not be defined as a “traditional” marriage which supports the argument: [It] would unavoidably lead to advocacy of sexual behavior outside the context of traditional marriage. Despite the numerous reports that the committee provided, the hundreds of student signature showing support, letters from members of the Society of Jesus in support of a center, and the many personal anecdotes that students shared, the proposal was rejected because of a religious loophole.

Almost immediately students began to organize another campaign in response to Dr. Gonzalez’s response. Groups of students prepared a packet for DC City Council members in hopes that the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign could serve as a springboard to overturn the Armstrong Amendment in Washington, DC. The Armstrong Amendment is a congressionally imposed amendment to the DC Human Rights Act that provides a loophole for religiously affiliated organizations. After meeting with lawyers and legal representatives from the ACLU- National Capital Area chapter and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, organizers decided that this was not a strong enough legal

³⁵ *The Hoya* Editorial Page “No Excuse for Excuses” February 14, 2002

case to act on. Student organizers did see this as an opportunity to further attack the invisibility of LGBTQ students on campus. Using one of the sanctions from the Resource Center campaign, students saw GAAP weekends as a perfect time to educate incoming students about what does it mean to be LGBTQ at Georgetown. During every GAAP weekend in Spring 2002, members of GU Pride chalked and put fliers throughout campus. Some students joined groups of campus tours to ask questions related to LGBTQ life. These actions were met by retaliation from GAAP organizers who stated that GAAP weekend is not the proper time to do such things. A compromise was met and students stopped joining campus tours but other activities continued. The students were letting the wider community know that although the LGBTQ Resource Center proposal was rejected, problems still existed and they were going to provide as much resources as they could with or without the University's support.

Aftermath

“Georgetown University, as a Catholic, Jesuit institution, is committed to meeting the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual needs of our entire student body. The University works in myriad ways – all consistent with our religious identity- to support our lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community on campus.”³⁶

The aftermath of the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign demonstrates the positive and negative aspects of a nonviolent campaign. It is hard to define the campaign as either a success or a failure and instead one must look at the changes or awareness that the campaign created. In an interview with Chris Trott (SFS 2003) a member of the LGBTQ working group, he stated that LGBTQ issues were still important to the University. The working group is comprised of faculty, staff, administrators, and students who work together to analyze issues relating to LGBTQ student life and suggest improvements to the Vice President of Student Affairs. It was established as a result of the Resource Center campaign as a way to create a permanent watchdog on LGBTQ issues at Georgetown. A compromise was reached that in lieu of a resource center a coordinator would be hired whose sole purpose would be to address LGBTQ issues and concerns at Georgetown including conflict resolution, awareness, and programming. Starting in April of 2002, the working group’s main focus has been on the hiring of a LGBTQ Community Resources Coordinator. Like any nonviolent campaign, small steps are how changes are made.

The fall semester of 2002 was spent developing a job description of the Coordinator position. Once this was accomplished, Vice President of Student Affairs Juan Gonzalez introduced a candidate to the committee who had ties to the President DeGioia and did not have LGBTQ training. Members of the working group saw this as

³⁶ Georgetown University Student Handout: LGBT Support Services on Georgetown’s Campus

very underhanded and controversial. Ironically, the great public awareness that had occurred during the campaign was now almost completely gone and few people outside of the working group were aware of these actions. Soon, a new job description was developed and advertised throughout the winter. The working group received numerous applicants for this part-time position. The hiring process has included a series of interviews and elimination of applicants. As of this time the position has not been filled but based on interviews with members of the working group they believe that a candidate would soon be hired.

Another direct result of the campaign was the introduction of LGBTQ related issues into course curricula. Professor Shelly Habel of the Sociology department at Georgetown assigned her classes group projects that had the class analyze different aspects of LGBTQ life on campus. Along with personal interviews, each group reviewed and discussed the different resources available to LGBTQ students on campus. The reports were analyzed in order to recommend improvements to current available resources. One of the greatest recommendations was for further research on LGBTQ students of color. The Resource Center campaign was unique in that it challenged the stereotypes of homosexuals on Georgetown campus. The campaign was composed of a diversity of groups not just a gay white upper-middle class male thing. There was a representative group of minority students involved in the campaign from many ethnic groups on campus. An outside cause of minority students involved with the campaign was to make sure that a minority presence was seen. Minority LGBTQ students felt that this was an opportunity for them to be involved with an issue that would let people know that they existed also. When asked if the members of the working group are a good

representation of the LGBTQ student body, Mr. Trott stated that in theory yes but it has trickled down to those members, regardless of sex or race, who feel the most dedicated to the issues.

A paradox of the campaign has always been the importance of anonymity and invisibility. Depending on someone's degree of "outness" the more relaxed he or she would feel in making public LGBTQ issues. There has to be a balance between those who are not out and those who are out to some degree. When this balanced is not achieved one factor or both might feel that they are not being represented. Throughout the campaign there existed internal conflict between members of the campaign. As stated by Michael DeStefano (CAS 2005), "Many people felt that they could not get involved enough with the campaign due to the organization of the campaign." He cites that a main problem was that the leaders of the campaign, including GU Pride President Joe McFadden, Anthony House, and Danielle DeCerbo did not disseminate responsibilities to the members as much as they should have, but it was this strong leadership that made the campaign possible. Mr. McFadden as leader was able to get people excited and involved in a very non-threatening and welcoming environment. Current GU Pride President Jamaal Young (SFS 2003) states, "The leaders that took office after the campaign did not step forward with ideas of what to do now! There is a marked difference between the leadership during the campaign and the leadership that has occurred after it. I believe that work must continue on LGBTQ issues and visibility." The aftermath of the campaign has been one of confusion and of advancements. There was not a huge public display or outcry against the rejection and many members of the LGBTQ community

were disappointed with the compromise of a coordinator over a resource center; there appears to be a split within members of the LGBTQ community over what to do now.

Conclusion – What Happens Now?

“We who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension. We merely bring to the surface the hidden tensions that is already alive... Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself...”
-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Letter from a Birmingham Jail

The Gay Rights movement continues to challenge the assumptions that the larger power organizations of heterosexual society forces on marginalized groups. The history of the movement from its first organized groups to its current position at Georgetown University in regards to the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign is one that works to re-humanize a disenfranchised population. Moving from a national outlook to a small university setting demonstrates the impact of past campaigns that have helped to shape the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign at Georgetown University (2001-02). Ironically, the Gay Rights movement gained visibility and notoriety during the Stonewall Riots of 1969 that included violent acts. Dubbed the start of the modern Gay Rights movement, the Stonewall Riots pitched activists against police. Since then the movement, for the majority, has moved back to a peaceful movement. Although there exists prominent organizations that employ more confrontational sanctions, the Gay Rights movement works to balance the will of activists with the goals of the movement. The activists at Georgetown have had to fight for recognition and for resources but have chosen to employ different nonviolent tactics. The campaign members challenged the predominant social aspects of the university and gained a voice to make public the injustices and oppression that students encountered.

The biggest question after the LGBTQ Resource Center campaign was what happens now. Great advances were made throughout the campaign including a higher

level of visibility for LGBTQ issues and open dialogue between members of the Georgetown community. A year later, dialogue has been moved back into closed meetings with the working groups and most students are not informed of what is happening with the hiring of a coordinator. GU Pride, which had a sharp rise in membership throughout the campaign, is virtually divided after a controversial election. Many people felt that Pride had become an activism club and not a social club, as it had been in the past. Newly elected co-presidents, Jamaal Young (SFS 2003) and Karane Williams (CAS 2005) state that their main goals are to once again raise the levels of visibility on campus, to work with a committee of Pride members to delegate different responsibilities, to further enhance the relationship between students and alumni, and to find a better balance between the social and activism aspects of the club. The aftermath of the movement demonstrates how quickly things can change and how much work there is left to do.

On a national level, the movement continues to be strong. Activists have found that the political and legal realms are where the greatest impacts on society can be made. Organizations such as the Human Rights Campaign lobby to change laws and to elect gay-friendly politicians. In secondary schools throughout the nation, more Gay/Straight Alliances are being formed. The reactions have varied from a great support of the students' initiative to threats of cancellations of all non-curricular clubs to stop a GSA. On the legal front, the American Civil Liberties Union, Lambda Legal Defense, and the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force continue to challenge laws that are discriminatory towards homosexuals. As more gains are made, greater attention is being given to transgender rights and issues. Other legal issues include custody rights, same-sex

marriage, sodomy laws, and domestic partner benefits. Activism is stretching from coast to coast and in all different age groups. People are becoming more accepting and aware of LGBTQ rights and are challenging the inherent discriminations of homophobia and heterosexism. Opponents of gay rights have also continued to organize as these new advancements are made. The new battlefields are in the courtroom and in political arenas. The old struggles still continue on a daily basis for most. The issue of coming out is a very personal one and varies from person to person. Anti-capitalists who see it as a commercialism of sexuality are attacking Gay Pride itself. As more people become educated on LGBTQ issues and as organizing continues, the voices of the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis can be heard.

Today's LGBTQ issues are different from those in the past. AIDS still continues to kill millions but more scientific research has allowed many people to live longer than expected. Invisibility and anonymity are still vital parts of the movement though more and more people are coming out. On primetime television most of the major shows have reoccurring homosexual characters. The Gay Rights movement has found a wide range of role models including political activists, athletes, movie stars, and in LGBTQ teachers. Discrimination against sexual orientation does remain an accepted form of prejudice but the challenge continues. As activists have shown, they must bear their own cross as they face the injustices, oppression, and violence in society.

* * * * *

The movement for social justice continues to thrive as a nonviolent movement throughout the nation. It can be as small as coming out to oneself or demonstrating in the

middle of a Catholic university for resources but each act is call for change. The Gay Rights movement as a peace movement will not stop until discrimination against LGBTQ people is no longer acceptable and when LGBTQ people are offered the same opportunity for happiness as heterosexuals. History has shown that nonviolent movements do work and a commitment to a peace movement is the first step to social justice.

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