Milwaukee’s Gay People’s Union:

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Abstract

The homosexual experience in the United States is one which many people are interested in given the times, yet still many do not understand the history behind their struggle for equal rights. Unlike the many publicized revolutions such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Feminist Movement, the Gay Liberation Movement is one that often gets glossed over. There is plenty of scholarship regarding the national movement pertaining to New York, Washington D.C., California, and to some extent Chicago, yet there still lacks scholarship. This study will focus the genesis of the Gay People’s Union in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the wake of the Stonewall Riots. In order to understand just why the group formed a thorough analysis of the origins of the movement, starting with the homophile movement in the 1950s up to the birth of Gay Liberation around the time of the Stonewall Riots is warranted. The main finding within the primary scholarship that will be analyzed pertains to the relationship between religion and sexuality and the players in Milwaukee, mainly focusing on the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. The Gay People’s Union played a major role in the Milwaukee scene when fostering a non-violent stance toward Gay Liberation and becoming a community player. The story of the fight for equality in Wisconsin, focusing on Milwaukee is just another Midwest story that has yet to be told.
“The shot heard around the homosexual world”\(^1\) in the New York village of Greenwich sparked a mass movement in the fight for gay rights. What was this event and why was it so significant? This event is known as the Stonewall Riots of 1969 in which the gay people of New York said “NO MORE!” No longer would they allow for the police to harass them and raid their bars. The riots lasted for six days starting on June 28, 1969. This was the final straw and the rise of a movement that would continue on till this day. Sodomy laws in the United States in the 1960s were harsher than ever before. “By 1961 the laws in America were harsher on homosexuals that those in Cuba, Russia, or East Germany, countries that the United States criticized for their despotic ways.”\(^2\) An adult homosexual could receive up either a fine, or several years in prison, possibly even life. During this time homosexuals were smothered by the law everywhere they went and with everything they did. Why was New York the site of the shot heard around the homosexual world? By 1966 there were “over one hundred men arrested each week for homosexual solicitation as a result of police entrapment.”\(^3\) This was a common method for the police, not even in just New York, but New York had the highest statistics.

The other question is why the Stonewall Inn? The Stonewall Inn became very popular and was likely one of the largest gay bars/clubs in the country at the time. Also the club was run by the Mafia and provided the club with tight security allowing its gay patrons to freely express their sexuality within its walls through dancing. The customers of the Stonewall in became very loyal and a sense of gay community was formed there, despite the clubs exploitation. On the night of the riots, when the police raided the bar, the police officers soon became trapped in the Stonewall in because all of the gay and lesbians that they had kicked out of the building and from the surrounding area had gathered outside of the Stonewall to support the patrons of the bar. The

police were afraid of the homosexuals, this was the first time that homosexuals would stand up and fight for themselves and not just be carted off to jail. All over the nation there were gay activist groups springing up. The two main groups being the Gay Liberation Front and the Gay Activist Alliance. Both had different tactics, but both fought for the betterment of the gay community.

One such group that sprung up happened to be located in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Gay People’s Union was a major force in fighting for the liberation of homosexuals in the Midwest region. They worked with many agencies and fostered a philosophy of open doors for the entire community. They wanted everyone to be educated on homosexuality in order to eliminate the prejudice they faced every day. They allowed non-members to come to meetings and organized events such as dances, parades, classes, discussions, meetings, community support, and much more for the gay community in Milwaukee. One fight that many faced was that of religious oppression. With the Formation of the Council for Religion and the Homosexual, discussion between the church and homosexuals was opened in Milwaukee. Religion was not the only force they face in their fight for equality, in fact they faced police harassment and political discrimination as well.

From the very conception of the United States the Christian doctrine has been a major influence in the everyday lives and politics of American citizens. Even for people who do not subscribe to Christianity, the society they live in is rooted in the morals that the Bible sets forth. Like many social aspects, homosexuality is not condoned by the Bible and therefore within society it is not looked upon favorably. During the Cold War, when homosexuals were being mistreated by the federal government the Christian Church played a major role in the
discrimination of these people. Even with all these forces against them, homosexuals banded together to fight for their civil rights both in social recognition and equality under the law.

These rights in which they were fighting for developed into different forms throughout the history of the Gay Rights Movement. During the Cold War the fight was rooted in the right to have a job and not be fired based on their sexuality, but after the Stonewall Riots in 1969 the rights issue was grounded more in the fight for their liberties. This essay will be focused on the development of the gay liberation movement from its genesis and then focusing in on the efforts of the Gay People’s Union in Milwaukee and the fight for their liberties in the 1970s. The main focus of this paper after the analysis of how the gay liberation movement evolved overtime will be to analyze the ways in which they had to combat religious persecution and how it changed the movement in the late 1970’s.

In order to understand just how this fight came to fruition it is imperative to have a grasp on the history of the movement from its genesis. By looking at the political attitudes present prior to the time period of focus for this paper (1970s) it develops an understanding of how the prejudice toward gay people became what it is and was at the time in question. Not many people are aware of the gay rights movement as it was during its birth, so it is the historians’ job to give the background necessary for the complete understanding of what happened and why because the gay liberation movement did not start with Stonewall. There were events and ideologies that gave gays and lesbians the drive to band together as a minority in their fight for liberation.
**Historiographical Background: 1950s and 1960s Homophile Movement**

**Masculinity and Feminization**

This historiography sets up the main argument that the political and social culture during the 1950s and 1960s resulted in the emergence of a homosexual subculture which fostered a politically active group of people who identified with being oppressed by society: politically, socially, and religiously. Although the federal government thought that oppressing people for partaking in social and sexual behaviors just because they did not deem the acts to be acceptable would in itself change people and eliminate the problem, the opposite occurred. Just as African Americans and women banded together to fight for their rights as minority groups, homosexuals did the same. They formed activist groups and militant groups in order to advance themselves in society as groups that would not bow down to the feet of the majority. They not only wanted equality rights, they wanted all of their liberties as human beings. Simply having sodomy laws reversed in their favor was not enough. Yes, it was a goal of theirs, but they also wanted to be recognized as

Where did this anti-homosexuality mindset come from though? This can be understood in detail through the evolution of thought on masculinity starting with Theodore Roosevelt in the late 1800s. A foundation for the study of the political culture during the Cold War is warranted in the study of one very important speech given by Theodore Roosevelt. Gerald Franklin Roberts wrote a thesis (on microfilm) regarding the era of Theodore Roosevelt in 1970. His analysis of the culture that Theodore Roosevelt sought to instill in the lives of every American man, through his politics and his own self-image, set the baseline and understanding for scholarship regarding the reestablishment of Roosevelt’s ideals in the cold war era. Although Theodore Roosevelt died in 1919 the cult of masculinity that he-established during his presidency would emerge again
during the Cold War in response to the growing fear that men were becoming soft. In *The Strenuous Life: The Cult in the Era of Theodore Roosevelt*, Roberts discusses the cult of masculinity that Roosevelt created. He set this up by going into detail about Roosevelt’s upbringing and rise to presidency. He analyzes Roosevelt’s philosophy and presents it in the first chapter stating, “Roosevelt sought to restore, throughout the strenuous life, the older, hardier strain of virtues which, he felt, had been responsible for the nation’s greatness.”\(^4\) This ideal, as just stated would re-emerge in the 1950’s and play a major role in the gay rights movement. Chapter seven discussed the feminine threat to manliness, where in the wake of feminism there was a call to defend and define manhood. Roosevelt himself believed that there was an over-feminization of society and that war was the only remaining outlet for a man to show his dominance.\(^5\) This obsession with manly dominance in America during the 1950s put homosexuals in a tough place because they were being stereotyped as a less masculine version of a man, sometimes even described as purely feminine and soft. By this simple stereotype they were deemed less of a man, even less of a human. Along with all this comes a fear of the “other”; a fear of the homosexual and their different lifestyle.

With an understanding of the roots of Theodore Roosevelt’s masculine ideology in mind, in 1995, another scholar by the name of Arnaldo Testi wrote an article entitled “The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity.” Testi embarks on an analysis of masculinity in the context of an emerging literature on feminism with a call for an understanding of the history of men as men.\(^6\) An obvious point that he is attempting to make is that at the turn of the century there was a shift in society where the male and female identity

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were fusing together. No longer did men prescribe to strictly male attributes, they took on female roles and personality characteristics and women took on male characteristics and roles. This fusion was considered a challenge to males of all classes, because in the end, males would have to redefine themselves in order to accommodate to what the federal government and society was prescribing for them. Testi’s focus on the feminization of society is prevalent in most works concerning masculinity. His discussion of the “new woman” and her threat to man’s power in all aspects of life was different from that of Roberts, where he mainly focused on precisely what Theodore Roosevelt prescribed men to achieve in the wake of this invasion of feminization. Throughout Testi’s work he alludes to and discusses how during the time of Theodore Roosevelt and even the Cold war, there was a call for a return to the “separate spheres” ideology in order to create boundaries of difference and restore society to its previous stable state. The fusion that was occurring was not a synthesis that the federal government wanted due to their fear of soft men that would crumble when faced with communist subversion. They saw the emergence of the homosexual as a prevalent group of people in the United States as a threat to national security and they would do anything to prevent this from becoming an issue, they were ready to combat this problem.

**Cold War Political Ideology and Masculinity**

Moving past the era of Theodore Roosevelt into the Era of the Cold War, this ideology was revisited due to a lack on both sides of the political spectrum to produce a man able to stand up against the rise of totalitarianism and communism. As mentioned earlier the emergence of a soft man, of the homosexual as supported in Alfred Kinsey’s book *Sexual Behavior of the Human Male*, the fact came out that about 10% of the general population were homosexual. This
alarmed people, especially the government. Arthur M. Schlesinger called it an age of transition and at worst an age of catastrophe. Conservatives and Liberals coming into this era had created an age that was “straining all the capacities of man.” In his book *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom*, Schlesinger discusses the politics during the Cold War along with the failures of the right and left and calls for a “new and distinct political generation.” Times were changing and the system that was in place was not working. Because of changing gender norms, what it meant to be a man was evolving, altering the way in which men functioned in the political and social sphere. The challenge of totalitarianism in the political arena became a preferred route for most men in order to flee the freedom of choice and to flee the anxiety that the times were placing upon them. Schlesinger called for a new political ideology called “new radicalism” (i.e. the vital center). The goal of new radicalism was “to restore the center, to reunite the individual with the community in fruitful union.” This book connects both subjects of political culture during the 1950’s and the crisis of masculinity in America. *The Vital Center: The Politics of Freedom* is used as a source in various scholarships on the topics presented above and is essential in the understanding of the time because it was written in the wake of the crisis. This fear of homosexuality that was emerging struck a chord in the political arena. One such work that uses Schlesinger’s book as a backbone is K.A. Cuordileone’s book *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*.

In Cuordileone’s book, more so than Schlesinger’s, there is an extensive focus on the crisis of homosexuality in relation to manhood. As a whole, Cuordileone’s book consists of a holistic analysis of the crisis of masculinity in America from 1948-1965. While this book encompassed many facets of the wider discussion, the book itself focused on the central theme of

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8 Ibid., xvii.
9 Ibid., 256.
masculinity during the Cold War and how it was transforming and being scrutinized. “The lavenders were homosexuals, otherwise known in the parlance of the era as ‘sex perverts’ and linked to the former types by virtue of a shared moral laxity.”

Homosexuals were linked to both liberals and communists by the conservative right. Cuordileone states in his book that, “liberals, homosexuals, and Communists posed a threat to American life, and that somehow political, moral, and sexual subversion went hand in hand.” Cuordileone did not believe this himself, but he references Reverend Billy Graham who spoke the language of the Cold War political philosophy. This book brings forth the fear of homosexuality as being a trait that was susceptible to communist subversion. The Right used homosexuality as a justification for the possibility of subversion of communism in the United States. The federal government claimed that homosexuals were susceptible to being blackmailed and this happened because they were “weak”. This idea was presented in the light of the Alger Hiss Case, in which Alger Hiss was accused of being a Russian spy. Whittaker Chambers named Hiss as a communist, but he himself also came out as being a homosexual in the 1930s. This brought forth the fear that homosexuals were working in the state department and was immediately used by Joseph McCarthy as a connection to communism and therefore helped him charge homosexuals. Many believe that World War II was a turning point in gay and lesbian history, that it was a time of coming out for homosexuals in the military, but most of this was kept secret and the movement of coming out did not occur until the 1970s in full explosion. The two separate movements will be discussed later. They are separate because the tactics and focus were different.

Cuordileone’s book exposes the idea that homosexuals were a threat to national security. This fear and persecution of homosexuals was called the Lavender Scare which was discussed in

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11 Ibid., 37.
12 Ibid., 71.
depth in David Johnson’s book, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government*, which came into publication in 2004 only slightly earlier than Cuordileone’s book in 2005. Of all the books contained in this historiography, David Johnson’s book is by far the most original. In his introduction he even emphasized political historians’ lack of interest and concern for the Lavender Scare. They disregarded it as a small phenomenon sprung from the Red Scare. As quoted from the book, “The Lavender Scare is the story of how Washington, D.C., and the federal bureaucracy—synonymous in the national imagination—came to be thought of as havens for socialists, misfits, and perverts.”13 In response to this phenomenon, brought on by the Kinsey Reports, Senator Bridges would urge McCarthy to shift his focus to security risks, which included homosexuals. In Joseph McCarthy’s Wheeling Speech he said, “at the same time, however, he revealed that a number of persons considered to be security risks had been forced out, and amount these were ninety-one homosexuals.”14 In addition this book also is about the Cold War origins of the gay rights movement. As the Lavender Scare was becoming a part of the political landscape in the 1950’s it is important to understand the context in which the government was pushing society domestically and how that affected the lives of homosexuals in this country.

In response to the Lavender Scare, domestic containment became a central focus. Presented in Elaine Tyler May’s book *Homeward Bound* (1988), domestic containment is discussed as an ideology. Policymakers pushed for traditional gender roles as the best way for Americans to be happy and secure. When Alfred Kinsey published his book on the *Sexual Behaviors of the Human Male* in 1948 he dropped an atom bomb on the American population. Meaning that the statistics posed in his book were both alarming and unexpected for majority of

14 Ibid., 1.
the population. He exposed the unorthodoxies present in American society that had been suppressed for so many years. Taboo subjects had now become topics of conversation. This scared policymakers and they aimed to contain this information. Homosexuality was by far the most scandalous manifestation of Kinsey’s findings. Gay-baiting, similar to red-baiting, emerged and “destroy[ed] careers, encourage[ed] harassment, creat[ed] stigmas, and forc[ed] those who confessed to their guilt to name others with whom they associated.”

The FBI embarked on an extensive investigation of sexual deviants due to their security risk to the nation in being seduced, blackmailed, or subject to possible subversion. If someone decided to pursue an unorthodox path, they were risking being labeled as perverted, unpatriotic, immoral and even pathological. Along with domestic containment comes the more specific sexual containment ideology. May presented this topic in light of adhering to traditional gender norms and the nuclear family to create strong children who would in return become strong men, or submissive women. This would continue the cycle of raising strong men to fight the Russians in the Cold War. With everything discussed, this all boils down to the crisis of masculinity and the call to produce a man strong enough to combat communism. Therefore, homosexuality as a way of life was not seen as an acceptable lifestyle. It completely went against social norms and anyone associating themselves with that lifestyle during this fragile time in United States history was ultimately going to be investigated. If not by the federal government in response to being a security risk, they would be threatened and harassed ad entrapped by local police officers.

In Douglas M. Charles’ article, “From Subversion to Obscenity: The FBI’s Investigations of the Early Homophile Movement in the United States, 1953-1958,” two groups, the Mattachine Society and ONE Inc., are analyzed in the context of an analysis of the corresponding FBI files

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on both groups. In conjunction with The Lavender Scare, this article paints a picture of the homophile movement that was forming because of the discrimination of homosexuals. This movement is important and should not be glossed over in context of the Red Scare. “The successes of both groups enabled the later development of the Gay Liberation Movement.”\(^\text{17}\) The mission of the Mattachine Society was to “unite homosexuals, educate the public about homosexuality, encourage tolerance, and engage in activist politics.”\(^\text{18}\) The FBI tried to silence both of these groups by conducting investigations into obscenity and links to the communist party, in which after reforms, found no connection. These groups formed due to the persecution and purge of homosexuals from the government in 1950 to fight for the rights of these individuals; the right to hold a job despite one’s sexual orientation. When taking these cases to the Supreme Court, the court was actually in their favor. The case in question here is in regards to ONE’s publication of obscene material. In 1957 the Supreme Court would reverse the decision of the 9\(^{\text{th}}\) Circuit Court and deem ONE and other publications to not be obscene.\(^\text{19}\) With these successes it became more pertinent for the U.S. government to push for a masculine ideology that would foster traditional gender and family roles prescribed in Elaine Tyler May’s book. This way the generation to come would be composed of less homosexuals, or so they thought. In reality, this did not happen. The era espoused the idea that it was time for homosexuals to take a stand and make their voices heard. It was a process, and did not happen over-night, but as they became more active and agitated by the various cruelties placed on them they would rise as a visible and proactive minority population, ready to stand up to injustice.


\(^{18}\) Ibid., 265.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 285.
It is crucial to include in the historiography of masculinity during the Cold War to the man who built his platform on the same ideology as Theodore Roosevelt’s *Strenuous Life*. This man of course is John F. Kennedy. His career was grounded on the ideology of masculinity. Robert Dean in his article “Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy” Dean connects the subject of masculinity and even simply gender as a factor in policy reasoning, creating political culture. The politics, even during Eisenhower’s presidency, allude to the fear of being judged as effeminate. Roberts makes a good point in saying, “the way that powerful men have imagined masculinity is a problem worthy of study by historians of politics and diplomacy.”\(^{20}\) The way that masculinity is defined in the realm of politics is important because the men that shape policy are also prescribing ideals for the everyday man. Kennedy’s presidency is in fact the ideas of Schlesinger’s vital center coming to fulfilment. Kennedy subscribed to the ideology of sexual containment, just as May’s book discussed as well. He promoted men as breadwinners for the family, the ideal he had in mind alluding to a classical Greek masculinity.\(^{21}\) Although Kennedy provided programs that were possible solutions to the masculinity crisis, they did not “save” those who subscribed to non-conformist lifestyles such as homosexuality. It is important here to see the return to the ideals present in early times simply because of the fear of a lifestyle different from the ordinary. The only difference this time was that there was opposition and resistance to conforming to social norms.

*Gay Liberation in the Making*

Although the efforts of politicians to promote traditional ideals and push for sexual containment, the years of the 1920s through the 1960s produced the homophile movement. The


\(^{21}\) Ibid., 44.
federal government was trying to rid Washington of its gay subculture, but instead it created an oppressed minority; the homosexual minority. These people would soon identify with this injustice and group together because of a shared identity. John D’Emilio’s book *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, discusses just this phenomenon. The book generated an analysis of the attitudes that persisted during the homophile movement which set up the possibility of the gay liberation movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. He discusses the events during the 1960s that would ultimately give activists more opportunities and lead people to develop a self-definition as either a homosexual or a lesbian which only strengthened the homosexual subculture; they would adopt direct action protest techniques in response to the Civil Rights Movement during this time. Although homosexuals would be condemned by churches, the law and the medical field, they would continue to band together in their fight for liberation in a society that continuously saw them as deviant human beings. This fight focused itself in urban areas and a subculture was formed.

In Jack Onge’s book, *The Gay Liberation Movement*, Onge discusses the entire movement as starting with the homophile movement that came previously. It is important not to bypass the homophile movement and solely focus on the gay liberation movement because without the efforts of the homophile movement the liberation movement would not have taken off the way it did. Onge’s book lays out what happened in New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Chicago, along with the philosophies of the liberation movement and political implication. This book gives a fairly detailed overview of the movement as a whole and is even considered primary material for the time because this book was released only two years after the Stonewall Riots. Created in response to the author’s experiences at the Chicago demonstrations, this book is

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valuable for historical purposes. Being a source that was published during the movement it was talked about a lot by the gay community. In the Gay People’s Union news publication, *GPU* News, they write in October of 1971 their view of Onge’s work. The paper states that although the book is able to give accounts of the happenings going on at that time, there is little historical analysis able to be done in order to form a “long term perspective necessary for a point of view.”

*GPU* News also says that the organization of the philosophy is counterintuitive because by separating it between chapters he is not able to address the pro and anti-homosexual views of the direction of the movement.

One important aspect that is mentioned in this book, other than the political and social implications, is the religious influences within the movement. Onge mentions that this “assassination,” by the Catholic Church, of homosexuals had been going on for over two-thousand years. The religious influence on the government’s sex laws during this time, and even today, had a strong hold on how homosexuals are treated socially in the United States. Only in the 1960s did the harassment decline and the two entities were able to have meetings together, but the religious fight did not end there. There were only certain denominations that tried to relate to the idea of homosexuality, but there was still backlash and resistance. The United States was rooted in Christian dogma. Even if Christianity may not be someone’s religion of choice they are stuck with the reality that the morals associated with the church permeate society in many ways. The links between sexuality and religion are a major theme of this paper in that as a politically active group of people the Church had a lot of pull in society and dictated the morality that a majority of American’s subscribed to as well as law enforcement. Yet, with all the

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resistance the homosexual community faced they rose above the challenges and made their voices heard.

*The Beginning of the Liberation Movement – The Gay People’s Union*

“The Beginning of the Liberation Movement – The Gay People’s Union”

“By the mid 1970’s, homosexuals and lesbians had formed more than 1,000 organizations scattered throughout the country.”

Much of the scholarship discussed here focused on either Washington D.C. or California, but as the quote states there were more than 1,000 organizations and one of those important gay liberation organizations was rooted in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The Gay People’s Union was started at the UW - Milwaukee campus by Eldon Murray in 1970. Murray was proud of who he was and he set an example for other gay men and women to “come out.” Instead of the government succeeding in ousting the homosexual problem, they only created more of a problem for themselves by mobilizing the gay community. By 1975 homosexuals had succeeded in ending job discrimination for most federal positions, excluding the FBI and other intelligence agencies.

They created a politically active group of people who shared an identity in which they were subject to the political, social, and religious injustice. The political culture of the 1950s can be attributed to the genesis of the gay liberation movement, yet there is one significant event that perpetuated the movement into full swing. This event was known as the Stonewall Riots of 1969. Scholarship on Stonewall is quite extensive, but one book that holistically presented the events surrounding the Stonewall Inn, by David Carter, wrapped it

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up quite well. At this time homosexual sex was illegal in every state except Illinois. The so-called “turning point” of Stonewall was a mixture of events that happened years earlier and current headlines that all came together to ignite the current fight for gay rights. The events of Stonewall provided evidence as to the tactics of law enforcement during this time. They used “women to assist in the arrest of any transvestites”. Women officers were used as a tactic because they were less suspicious than their male counterparts.

On the night the police officers raided the bar, homosexuals who had seen too many bars busted and decided to no longer be quiet about the injustices placed upon them. The riots had started and so had a movement:

“Everyone in the crowd felt that we were never going to go back. It was like the last straw. It was time to reclaim something that had always been taken from us. It was something that just happened. All kinds of people, all different reasons, but mostly it was total outrage, anger, sorrow, everything just kind of ran its course. It was the police who were doing most of the destruction. We were really trying to get back in and break it free. And we felt that we had freedom at last, or freedom to at least show that we demanded freedom. We didn’t really have the freedom totally, but we weren’t going to be walking meekly in the night and letting them shove us around—it’s like standing your ground for the first time and in a really strong way, and that’s what caught the police by surprise. There was something in the air, freedom a long time overdue, and we’re going to fight for it. It took different forms, but the bottom line was, we weren’t going to go away. And we didn’t.”

The gay community was no longer going to be pushed around, and the Stonewall riots made that especially clear. No longer were the times that homosexuals would accept the life of the oppressed second class citizen. They had human rights and they were going to fight for them.

This event sparked the formation of the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) and the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA). The idea of Gay Power really took off during this time, the front believed that

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28 Ibid., 131.
29 Ibid., 160.
the oppressors would not be moved by reason and justice, they would only be moved by power.\textsuperscript{30} The gay liberation movement moved toward an activist stance versus an education for all regarding gay rights. The 1970s were the time for direct action, no longer were they going to sit still and push for their rights through just ideas and education of their people and society, they needed to be active in their fight, not idle. The movement would be shaped by the civil rights movement, the anti-war movement and the woman’s movement, which all attracted large numbers of homosexuals.\textsuperscript{31} Carter, in his book, emphasizes that an event such as this could have happened near any gay bar, but there were many factors including the location, the population of New York, the time of year and much more all added together to create an ideal time and space for the riots to occur and for them to escalate the way they did. After Stonewall, the split between the homophiles and the gay liberationists took place. The latter consisted of many people in their teens and twenties whereas the homophiles were people in all age categories. This split also occurred within the Gay People’s Union within a year of their formation. The Gay People’s Union began as the Gay Liberation Organization, but only a few months passed and the split seen after the Stonewall Riots occurred within this one Gay Rights group. The more revolutionary individuals (students mostly) would split and form Milwaukee’s Gay Liberation Front and the ones looking to promote gay liberation in the form of non-militant activism formed the Gay People’s Union headed by Eldon Murray. In an article that Murray wrote he mentions that “they use the Gay Activist Alliance in New York as a model.”\textsuperscript{32} Before getting into the detail of the Gay People’s Union in Milwaukee it is important to understand just what the gay liberation movement was nationally and what their platform entailed.

\textsuperscript{30} Onge, 15.
\textsuperscript{31} Margaret Cruik
\textsuperscript{32} Eldon Murray, \textit{The Eldon Murray Papers}, Box 3, UWM Manuscript Collection 256, Milwaukee Archives.
With this dichotomy came a differentiation in the politics of the liberationists. They first called for an individual coming out: collectively, privately and publically.\textsuperscript{33} This idea is discussed in the book \textit{Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement} by Marc Stein. He discusses the need to rethink the movement because not many people know the history and there is not a comprehensive history of the national phenomenon that we call the fight for gay rights. The purpose of this piece of scholarship is precisely the motivating force for this paper. There is much about certain events in the history of gay rights in correlation to the Cold War, but many of these histories are isolated to a certain geographic region such as New York, California and Chicago to a certain extent. Scholarship pertaining to the Midwest is scarce. By bringing a gay rights group from Milwaukee, Wisconsin an even broader understanding of the movement can be formed and not isolated to the three or four major areas in the United States, because this movement was national, not isolated as previous scholarship alludes to.

Although scholarship may be scarce on gay liberation in the Midwest, specifically Wisconsin, does not mean that connections cannot be made based on the copious amount of scholarship available at the national scope. Carl Whittman’s landmark book, \textit{Refugees from Amerika: Gay Manifesto}, published in 1970, is a source that pertains to any gay liberation group. Gay liberation groups subscribed to the same philosophy, even the Gay People’s Union in Milwaukee. Whittman lay’s out four points in a call to action for gay liberation: “1) Free ourselves: come out everywhere; initiate self-defense and political activity; initiate counter community institutions, 2) Turn other gay people on: talk all the time; understand, forgive, accept, 3) Free the homosexual in everyone; we’ll be getting a good bit of [expletive]from threatened latent’: be gentle, and keep talking & acting free, 4) We’ve been playing an act for a

\textsuperscript{33} Marc Stein, \textit{Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement} (New York: Routledge, 2012), 86.
long time, so we’re consummate actors. Now we can begin to be, and it’ll be a good show!”34 They Gay People’s Union advocated for generating discussion and education within the gay community of Milwaukee in order to give them the courage to “come out.” The leaders knew there were a majority of homosexuals that were simply too afraid to expose themselves. Yes, the movement in itself fought for equality and legal rights of homosexuals, but first and foremost, for this to happen the gay community needed to expand and not be afraid to be open in public about their sexual orientation.

Groups like the Gay People’s Union were gay rights activist groups, but they were also support groups. One way in which the Gay People’s Union offered services to its members and the community was through a phone committee made up firstly of volunteers, but as time progressed and the GPU became more professionalized the volunteers needed to have certain qualifications and membership status with the GPU. This service was available for anyone to call anonymously as a “counseling service, used to help raise a spirit of unity and help serve the needs of the gay community.”35 Between the years of 1974 and 1975 there was a shift to requiring the telephone operators to: “1) being a GPU member for 1 year, 2) being out of the closet for 3 years, 3) go to training sessions in counseling, and 4) read at least 5 basic books on gay liberation.”36 Qualifications such as these would be beneficial for providing quality services to callers. Although social services such as the call line were great sources for Milwaukee’s gay community, the President of the Gay People’s Union Alyn Hess thought that too much emphasis was being stressed on the social services aspect of the organization. Hess along with Murray, although not wanting to become violent like their counterpart, wanted be more of an activist group and take action in their fight for social, political and religious equality. It was all fine and

35 Gay People’s Union Records, Box 1, Annual Reports 1974-1978, UW Manuscript collection 240.
36 Ibid.
dandy to offer services and educate people, but more needed to get accomplished. The demands of the gay liberation movement as laid out in Margaret Cruikshank’s book *The Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement* are listed as:

1. An end to all forms of social control of homosexuals;
2. Civil rights legislation to prevent housing and job discrimination;
3. Repeal of sodomy laws;
4. Acceptance of lesbian and gay relationships;
5. Accurate portrayal in the mass media.\(^{37}\)

**Religious Conflict in the 1970s**

Just as racism has its roots in the Civil Rights Movement, the term homophobia; meaning the irrational dread or hatred of homosexuals or homosexuality, permeated the thoughts of those who adhered to fundamentalist religions such as Roman Catholicism.\(^{38}\) One such instance where an anti-gay protest used fundamentalist religious networks was in Dade County, Florida in 1977. Anita Bryant can be quoted saying, “I don’t hate the homosexuals@! But as a mother, I must protect my children from their evil influence….They want to recruit your children and teach them the virtues of becoming a homosexual.”\(^{39}\) Although this event is further along in history than the start of the gay liberation movement, it really demonstrates the way that society at the time used politics and religious fundamentals to fight against homosexuality in America. This may be an opinion, but through analysis it is shown that religious entities use certain hot topic issues to impose their moral judgments on a secular society. They find homosexuality, along with many other social issues to be a threat to their religious authority. In America religious groups tend to have a significant amount of political power. Even when religious groups backed

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\(^{38}\) Ibid., 10.
off homosexuals were still faced with the medical field deeming them sick which stemmed from the religious viewpoint of homosexuals being sinful.

One of the demands of the gay liberation movement was the acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships, but it was not easy to persuade churches to accept homosexuals. This constant fight with the particular religions especially Christianity would be a major obstacle for homosexuals to deal with. Even in Milwaukee the gay population had to combat religious oppression. The Council on Religion and the Homosexual in Milwaukee is modeled after the San Francisco entity and they follow the same guidelines which include:

1. Orienting members of religious communities on aspects of homosexuality in accordance with homosexual testimony and scientific data; 2. Providing opportunities for homosexuals to present their views to religious organizations; 3. Promoting dialogue and deeper understanding of sexuality, morality, ethical behavior, and life of religious faith; 4. Studying dynamics of authentic human relationships from biblical, theological, and social science perspectives; 5. Researching further understanding within the larger framework of sexual revolution; 6. Encouraging a broadened editorial policy and objectivity of religious publications and other media; 7. Becoming a national voice on law, policies, and penal reform; 8. Helping professionals deal with issues of human sexuality, especially with young people; encouraging other such councils; 9. Promoting thorough and objective consideration of human sexual behavior from all points of view and with deep concern for the human beings and values involved in such sensitive, personal matters.

The Milwaukee group added on a tenth objective “to work with existing homophile organizations in the community in the furtherance of the preceding goals.”

This is where the Gay People’s Union comes into play. They would be the tax exempt group that the funds for this organization would be channeled through because they themselves were not tax exempt. Eldon Murray himself was associated with this group and went to various meetings to bring the concerns of the gay

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community to the table regarding their oppression by the church especially by the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. One of the major players in this movement was Wilbur C. Cain of Ebenezzer Lutheran Church. His stance on the relationship between the homosexual and the church was understood in a Milwaukee Journal article on January 8th, 1972. He believes in sex being a God created gift to make us all functioning males and females, but as long as homosexuals do not interfere with another’s chosen lifestyle they should be free to live their life as they wish because Jesus loved and was loved so we should love others as they are. This was not the mainstream idea held by the church at this time though, they believed that homosexuals must remain celibate in order to live a truly religious life. There was even a fear of associating with gays which was called the “velvet stain”, which kept many religious people away from gays, which limited the amount of discussion that could be had between the two groups. The problem at hand is that much of the church’s belief about the homosexual are stereotyped by the idea of promiscuity that is practiced within the lifestyle. Yet the goals of the Council on Religion and Homosexuality pose in their ninth guideline that they want to promote consideration of human sexual behavior from all points of view with the deep concern for the human beings and values involved in such sensitive, personal matters. As stated eloquently by Father Curran, “at times one may reluctantly accept homosexual union as the only way in which some people can find a satisfying degree of humanity in their lives.” Yet, Curran does not believe homosexuality to be free of sin, in fact he fits the mold of the time believing that the act of homosexuality is in itself a sin, and that humans are essentially rooted in sin and it is the homosexual’s job to overcome this sin, but there has to be a compromise to allow them to sin as long as they work toward overcoming it. This essentially is not

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41 Milwaukee Journal, Don’t Call God’s Creation Obscene, January 8, 1972.
what homosexuals wanted to hear, they believed they could never be changed and it was their true nature and it needed to be accepted by all.

During this era of change sexuality was evolving and the traditional Christian doctrine was no longer the only way in which sexuality was seen. The Council on Religion and the Homosexual believed in accepting the homosexual and guiding them in the morals of the church. The belief here is that God is accepting and so should they. They also see the reasons for the homosexual giving up on his morals is because he is living in a world where he is rejected and does not fit in anywhere. Unlike the views of Father Curran they believe that as long as the homosexual is in a monogamous loving relationship and are harming no one, they should be allowed to live their lives the way that they deem is best for them to achieve fulfillment in their lives. The author of the book *The Homosexual and the Church*, John J. McNeill believes that the attitude of the church toward homosexuality is another example of social injustice. The Church during this time and in the past has stereotyped the lifestyle and morality of homosexuals and essentially what the Council on Religion and Homosexuality aims to do is to open the dialogue between the church and homosexuals because not allowing homosexuals to be comfortable expressing their feelings toward the injustices they face with the church only adds to the churches misunderstandings and ongoing prejudices that prevail to this day. The church prescribes a morality for the homosexual without even understanding the attitudes and the lives of the homosexuals. One way that this dialogue was started originated with Charles Schinlaub contacting Eldon Murray to organize homosexuals to travel to churches to talk about their experiences and homosexuality in general. They wanted to open the eyes of the religious community, to see homosexuals as real people as valuable assets to both the church and to society.

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Despite the efforts of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual they disbanded in 1974, but not before attending a conference for the United Methodist Church in Wisconsin. Here for the first time they actually got added to the list of concerns for the church to consider. They discussed how they needed to be there for homosexuals, not push them away. This was a step in the right direction, but because of a lack of organization on the part of the Council on Religion and the Homosexual, they did not continue their mission. This did not stop the gay community from continuing their efforts though. The fight equality continued and the Gay People’s Union played a major part in this. As mentioned before though, another force that the gay community had to deal with was the police. In the 1970s the sodomy laws were still not lifted and police found tactics that would aid them in trying to oust the homosexual problem.

One of these tactics included entrapment. Entrapment by the police meant that the police would dress up as if they were a homosexual and then catch them in the act. This often happened in gay bars, bathhouses, public restrooms and so forth. With that said most of the police efforts were focused on men and the lesbians were sort of left out. Women did not have to face much of the scrutiny that men did. This again ties back to the political culture of the time aimed at the idea of masculinity and the role that men were supposed to play in society. Homosexuals went against the mold. Ways in which the Gay People’s Union would focus their efforts at exposing the gay community, the “coming out” process was to make themselves visible in society and show that they did exist and homosexuality was a normal thing.\(^{45}\) Much of their efforts culminated around Gay Pride week in which they would conduct parades, have picnics and fundraisers. The goals of the Gay People’s Union was for all members of the gay community to begin to be openly gay and not be afraid to show it. It is estimated that there were 25,000

homosexuals in Milwaukee at the time, but only a small percentage actually belonged to the Gay People’s Union.

Much of what the Gay People’s Union was doing prior to 1977 were organizing social events, but here there is a shift toward political action due to the Christian anti-gay movement\textsuperscript{46} that started with the infamous Anita Bryant who was quoted earlier in the paper. They gay liberation movement was taking another turn in its direction of emphasis. They had three new issues at hand for their activism which included 1) anti-discrimination protections in the form of gay rights bills; 2) elimination of police harassment, especially vice raids of gay bars; and 3) eliminating the practice of unfair representations of lesbians and gay men in the media.\textsuperscript{47} The Christian anti-gay movement would reinvigorate the gay and lesbian movement. No longer was the movement called the gay liberation movement, they were liberated at this point, now they needed to focus on changing the laws and keeping them changed in order to continue to live the lives out in the open without the fear. This became the way of the Gay People’s Union as well. In their 1977 annual report Alyn Hess, the president of the organization asks himself whether he wants to be an organization for social services/social events or for activism the states \textit{I prefer activism!}\textsuperscript{48} The goals of the organization at this point, as directed by the president are to professionalismize the organization, to hire full time staff. This will increase their legitimacy and will help them achieve their goals in a more timely and efficient manner. Another connection that can be made is the level of police harassment that was seen during this time period (1977-1979, maybe longer). In Fetner’s book she states the connection between the Christian anti-gay movement and the level of police harassment that is present as shown on pages 29-32 in her book. In the Presidents report for 1978 in the annual records of the Gay People’s Union, Miriam

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\textsuperscript{46} Tina Fetner, \textit{How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism}, 26. \\
\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Ibid.}, 28. \\
\textsuperscript{48} Gay People’s Union Records, Annual report for 1977, Box 1, 3.
ben Shalom states that the major challenge that year was the busts and police harassment against the community.\(^4^9\) There were even eight accounts of sexual perversion which constituted a felony charge for the individuals. This incident happened at the Broadway Health Club on May 6, 1978. As noted in the report 18 men were arrested and two were injured by the police. The club was under surveillance for two weeks and when the police entered the club they beat the person at the desk and did not present him with a search warrant. Then on July 15, 1978 Le Club Finlandia was raided similarly. These are only two instances, but I am sure there are many others just the same, especially on gay bars. The Gay People’s Union helped the individuals who were arrested find legal counsel and they fought the harassment to the very end, which meant that they needed funds in order to hire lawyers, many people sent in money to help the cause.

**Conclusion**

There are many ways in which the movement changed and ultimately changed the goals and efforts of the organizations present during the gay liberation movement. Without the grassroots efforts of these organizations this country would not be where it is today in regards to gay rights and freedoms. The shift in the focus of which liberties that they gay community strove for, but they were always fighting for their rights as human beings. They wanted to be considered part of society, not an outcast or a moral deviant. To be understood and then allowed to be who they are, to be accepted. Just as racism is still present in this country, homophobia will probably stick around, but with efforts similar to the education provided by groups such as the Gay People’s Union and the other various organizations to day that help politically fire up the population toward social acceptance of homosexuals, anything can become possible. With their hard work and effort, sodomy laws were lifted in Wisconsin in 1983. Gay marriage is still not

\(^4^9\) *Ibid.*
legal in this state, but with the continued support of this social issue and using some of the same tactics, anything is possible.
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