

How songs resonated during the formation and activation of a gay community in the United States

The “Stonewall” documentary series, including Before Stonewall (1998) and After Stonewall (1984) are the premier cinematic sources outlining the development of America’s gay and lesbian community from 1920 through the twentieth century. The films include, but overlook one of the most notable features of the movement, the use of popular songs evolving from one decade to another. Their use in the films, for the most part, provide era-appropriate background music, move the historical narrative, and accompany archival footage noted for its political or historical value. The documentary lacks a discussion of why these songs were chosen to accompany the visual and spoken elements of the film, yet they are not arbitrary. Each song contains a link to a specific event, emotional explanation, collective ideology, or political rhetoric in the gay and lesbian story.

This paper seeks to make these correlations and investigate the role of popular song throughout the ongoing gay rights movement in the United States. The overview begins in the 1920’s and continues to the present (2010) in order to gain as much scope about the socio-cultural resonance of song in the formation and progress of this movement as possible. Because “After Stonewall” was released in 1998, I have provided songs that might accompany a revised edition of the documentary were it to include the most recent decade.

The songs discussed in this paper represent a canon of music that falls into three distinct categories. Each type of song yields meaning and functions in a specific way. The first of these is songs for gays and lesbians, often written or performed by gays or lesbians, but not always. They serve as homosexual identifiers and contain cultural signifiers that help create community. Their obvious meaning and function clearly point to the story and culture of “gayness”. The second type is song that means something different depending on who sings, or who listens/dances. A song about a man sung by a man holds a different sentiment than when it is sung by a woman. A song played in a gay disco is heard by a different pair of ears than when played in a heterosexual disco. These songs function like secret code, legitimize the feelings and shared ideas of a minority community, as well as strengthen the distinction between “them” and “us” thereby enhancing a sense of community. In addition, their meanings have greater latitude of interpretation. The third type is song that parodies well know tunes, changing the words to make them sound “homosexual”. These can at once serve to build group-ness by re-appropriating mainstream songs as “ours”, and at the same time expound the belief that “we are the same because your songs are our songs too”; when we sing together, we feel togetherness. The meaning and function of this final type is often duplicitous, combining comedy and political agenda.

In order to better understand this, let us first look at examples of each of the three kinds of songs. The first example, “Prove it on me Blues” was written, recorded, and sung by Gertrude “Ma” Rainey (1886-1939), the *Mother of the Blues*, in 1928. Anecdotally known as bisexual (Katz), Ma wears a collar and tie, distains men, and laments a fight with a woman who has recently run off. The tone of the

lyrics is overtly lesbian, or “*crooked*” to which Ma replies, “*Don’t you say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me. You sure got to prove it on me*”.

Whether initially intended for Lesbian ears—three years prior Ma had been in a run-in with the law after being caught undressed with other women and subsequently bailed out by bisexual blues singer Bessie Smith (Katz)—the song’s antagonist is a bull dyke character who “*talks to the gals just like any old man*”. This song resonated with women who not only identified as butch lesbians, but also the femme lesbians Ma refers to; the archetypical break-up song retold for the homosexual community.

“Prove It On Me Blues” Ma Rainey, 1928

*Went out last night, had a great big fight
Everything seemed to go on wrong I looked up, to my surprise
The gal I was with was gone.
Where she went, I don’t know I mean to follow everywhere she goes;
Folks say I’m crooked. I didn’t know where she took it
I want the whole world to know.*

*They say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me;
Went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
They must’ve been women, ‘cause I don’t like no men.
It’s true I wear a collar and a tie,
Makes the wind blow all the while*

*Don’t you say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
You sure got to prove it on me.
Say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me.*

*I went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
It must’ve been women, ‘cause I don’t like no men.
Wear my clothes just like a fan
Talk to the gals just like any old man*

*Cause they say I do it, ain’t nobody caught me
Sure got to prove it on me. (Rainey)*

In the next example, the ambiguous poetry of “Secret Love” encouraged the homosexual community through gender-flexible language. Even though not written intentionally for gay and lesbian people, they could listen to it through their own lens of experience. The interpreted meaning includes both a “secret love” for a specific someone of the same gender as well as a general homosexual love. The first stanza advocates the latter, speaking of a love that “*lived within the heart of me*”. The second stanza incorporates an object of secret love, and the confession of this love

to him/her. The entirety of the song, however, refers to the “coming out” experience where a homosexual person struggles with an “impatient” need to love. In the 1950’s this was only expressed in dreams to “friendly stars”. The final stanza realizes a post “coming out” scenario where the closeted homosexual’s “*heart’s an open door*” and the secret ceases. Songs about “coming out” brewed confidence in the widely closeted gay-community of the 1950’s and earlier. Furthermore, songs that could be appropriated by homosexuals built a shared common ground, here through coded meaning, that culture stems from. It is as though this song is not only for “them”, but “me” too.

“Secret Love”, sung by Doris Day, 1953

*Once I had a secret love
That lived within the heart of me
All too soon my secret love
Became impatient to be free*

*So I told a friendly star
The way that dreamers often do
Just how wonderful you are
And why I am so in love with you*

*Now I shout it from the highest hills
Even told the golden daffodils
At last my heart's an open door
And my secret love's no secret anymore. (Day)*

The final example is a parody of a mainstream song. These parodies allow the singers to “rub their noses” at the hetero-majority as well as promote their inclusion in the culture at large through the use of a well-known song. “God Save the King/Queen”/ “My country ‘tis of thee” is an English and American anthem known by the popular majority as a symbol of cultural, historical, and national unity. “God save the Queens” pleads and demands that salvations for gays too and their inclusion in the same cultural, historical and national group. In addition, not only are queens equal, but also the “nelly” ones. “Nelly”, a pejorative term, refers to overtly effeminate men. By singing this anthem as a group, gays neutralize the negative “nelly” stigma, collectivize all gay men, and assert their unique culture as equal to, and part of the larger society.

“God Save the Queens”, performed at Black Cat Club (parody of “God Save the King”)

*God save us Nelly Queens,
God save us Nelly Queens,
God save the Queens.*

God save us Nelly Queens,

*God save us Nelly Queens,
God save us Nelly Queens,
God save the Queens. (Members)*

We begin then in the 1920's and the decades preceding WWII. At this time, Gays and Lesbians were largely isolated and spread throughout the United States. As it was common practice to teach little about sexuality, let alone homosexuality, children learned what they could about sex from medical books. Homosexuality was known as a psychological disorder; therefore one chose to deny his/her feelings. Getting caught, or even being accused of sodomy, led to imprisonment, suicide, institutionalization, and life-long stigmatization. Only a sub-cultural knowledge that cowboys, who spent long periods of time alone with one another, occasionally engaging in homosexual behavior, challenged widespread feelings of isolation. This may have been the genesis of songs like *Only a Lavender Cowboy*. This song was written in 1923 by Harold Hersey and re-recorded at least twelve times through the 1970's. (Brown, Chapter 2. The Early Days of the 20th Century)

The text speaks to the emotional struggle gay men felt at this time. In the text, having only two hairs on one's chest unforgivingly signifies cowboys "Lavender-ness" (a term that eventually came to mean gay/lesbian). Despite the cowboys attempts to act "normal" including "*following the heroes*", and to "*fight like the he-men do*", he remains "*inwardly troubled*" and can only join the other men with his two chest hairs. Next, he tries to physically "butch-up" and use tonic to grow more hair, "*but still when he looked in the mirror those two hairs were ever in sight*". This exemplifies the sentiment that one's feelings and true self cannot be masked; that when confronted with stark reality, a gay man looks back from the mirror. The song ends tragically when the gay cowboy, despite unchangeable circumstances, decides to deny his identity and perform a feat of masculine chivalry. Like a knight, he rides out to protect a woman and dies, still gay, with two hairs on his chest.

For gay men, and lesbians, this song teaches about accepting oneself. It warns of the dangers of being someone you are not, but also reflects the trials of homosexual people in the 1920's. Men would know what it felt like to try to change and be "one of the boys" only to have it all backfire.

"Only a Lavender Cowboy" by Harold Hersey 1923

*He was only a lavender cowboy,
The hairs on his chest were two,
But he wished to follow the heroes
And fight like the he-men do.*

*But he was inwardly troubled
By a dream that gave him no rest,
That he'd go with his heroes in action
With only two hairs on his chest.*

*First he tried many a hair tonic.
'Twas rubbed in on him each night.
But still when he looked in the mirror
Those two hairs were ever in sight.*

*But with a spirit undaunted
He wandered out to fight,
Just like an old-time knight errant
To win combat for the right.*

*He battled for Red Nellie's honor
And cleaned out a holdup's nest
He died with his six guns a-smoking
With only two hairs on his chest. (Hersey)*

During Prohibition (1920-1933), many people moved into the cities. Gathering places for gays included New York City and San Francisco. "Open" bars existed in Harlem, where white tourists could watch an effeminate cabaret or witness part of the bohemian world that existed outside of respectable society. Here was the "world of twilight" where disrespectful and questionable individuals congregated. Gay men presumed to know one another by the eyes or a matching necktie and handkerchief. They would ask each other for the time, a cigarette, linger in the same store window, and then wander along the cities' parks and rivers. (Brown, Chapter 3. The Harlem Renaissance)

There are Faeries at the Bottom of our Garden is of the second type of song previously discussed. On the surface, level, the benign text conjures pastoral and whimsical images. In 1934, however, a supposedly all-gay production of Oscar Wilde's *Salome* included this song (Brown, Chapter 4. The Homosexual Underground Expands), a message to the majority that a homosexual minority is growing quietly. It contains metaphors that speak to the ideology and lifestyle of the "twilight world".

The first stanza describes geography, or that the places where gays and lesbians meet are not very far away, but beyond the boundaries of the outlying gardener's shed, down by the river where most people would not go. Indeed, people *are* there. The second stanza describes what happens when "the faeries" get together. People dance, look out for the police, and generally revel in each other's company. The final stanza simultaneously thumbs its nose at the majority and elevates the gay community. In this group there are beautiful, proud, and handsome kings and queens. The fact that "the queen" is a demure, well-behaved girl during the day is juxtaposed by the final 'coming out' exclamation, "well it's me". This song, like "secret love" advocates the coming out process, but rather than it being an end to find love, it means to shock the establishment and uncover a society swept behind the gardener's shed.

“There are Faeries at the Bottom of our Garden” by Liza Lehmann, 1924

*There are fairies at the bottom of our garden!
It's not so very, very far away;
You pass the gardener's shed
and you just keep straight ahead
I do so hope they've come to stay.
There's a little wood with moss in it and beetles,
And a little stream that quietly runs through;
You wouldn't think they'd dare
to come merrymaking there,
Well, they do!*

*There are fairies at the bottom of our garden!
They often have a dance on summer nights;
The butterflies and bees
Make a lovely little breeze,
And the rabbits stand about and hold the lights.
Did you know that they could sit upon the moonbeams
And pick a little star to make a fan,
And dance away up there
In the middle of the air
Well, they can!*

*There are fairies at the bottom of our garden!
You cannot think how beautiful they are;
They all stand up and sing
When the fairy queen and king
Come gently floating down upon their car.
The king is very proud and handsome;
The queen, now can you guess who that would be?
She's a little girl all day
But at night she steals away.
Well, it's me! (Lehmann)*

The parody song is absent during this period; the most likely explanation being that no solid, secure community had formed. These types of songs require organization, shared beliefs, and the ability of one culture to reflect upon another. The absence of a real homosexual culture during the 20's and 30's precludes the existence of parody songs.

The advent of WWII had a consolidating effect on the homosexual community. Ports of call like New York City and San Francisco opened gay bars to serve soldiers on leave. Women entered the work place in mass numbers, openly

wearing pants, and congregating in large groups. Drag numbers were organized to entertain soldier overseas, and more people from small towns migrated to cities for work slowly recognizing that there were other homosexuals like them. (Brown, Chapter 5. World War II).

Songs like Frank Sinatra's *My Buddy* tapped into the feelings of separation war-torn heterosexual couples and friends felt, as well as homosexual couples feeling isolated and separated by their station at work or in the military. It is a song full of sexual tension, with frequent repeats of "my buddy" as well as the sentiments cast in the longing first two lines of text. The a-sexual nature of the term "my buddy" resonated all the more with the homosexual community as well as the line "*I long to know that you understand*". This easily refers to understanding the nature of homosexual feelings that cannot be shared in the open. Like "Secret Love", this ambiguous text allows for culturally flexible meanings. Also a ballad, men and women may have danced to this tune at recently "open" bars, thereby further cementing it as a "gay song".

"My Buddy" Frank Sinatra. Words and music by Gus Kahn and Walter Donaldson. 1949

*Nights are long since you went away
How I think about you all through the day
My buddy, my buddy, nobody quite so true*

*I miss your voice and the touch of your hand
I long to know that you understand
My buddy, my buddy, your buddy misses you. (Kahn, Donaldson)*

After WWII, two catalyzing events drew together the burgeoning homosexual community. The Kinsey report stated that nearly 20 million gay and lesbian people lived in America, not a large minority, but sizeable nevertheless. Secondly, strong reactions to the GI bill spurred a growing sense of liberalism surrounding women's rights and civil rights. Both of these are gay issues. (Brown, Chapter 6. The Post-War Period)

It is in this context that songs *De Gay Young lad from Trinidad* emerged. Though Ruth Wallis was not a lesbian herself, the lyrics are flamboyantly open and comically refer to homosexuality. With a frivolous Jamaican flavor to the song, Ms. Wallis recounts a failed tryst with a man who turned out gay. In the end she ends up being the lookout and cover for two male lovers. She, in essence, accepts their lifestyle though satirically mourns her loss of a male partner. Songs of this accepting nature would have been quite rare in the 1950's, however their simple existence confirms the spreading knowledge about homosexuality. It is not a call to action, nor a torch song to build community, but rather an affirmation of existence, albeit contrary to the sexual desires of the majority.

"De Gay Young lad from Trinidad" Ruth Wallis, 1950's

*De Gay Young lad from Trinidad,
Oh what a time I almost had,
He was as gay as he could be
but he was much too gay for me.*

*I always knew they grew palm trees
bananas de always had
but you can imagine my surprise
I found a pansy in Trinidad.*

*Oh yes he was very authentic
as described in de geography
had his accent on de wrong syllable
and his lingo was queer as could be*

*De gay young lad from Trinidad
oh what a time I almost had
I might have sowed a few wild oats
but he preferred banana boats*

*oh I took him down by the ocean
it was romantic as it could be
de waves de were swishing against de shore
like the waves swished so did he*

*I wanted to teach him to love me
but he seemed to be awfully shy,
and de things I was trying to teach him,
I found him learning from some other guy.*

*Two gay young lads from Trinidad
oh what a time I never had,
my girl friends were jealous cause de never knew
they had no fellows and they thought I had two.*

*He was crazy right from the beginning
you never know one is wearing a suit
so if you make dates with nuts, girls
you might just wind up with a fruit.*

*Oh we were really quite a threesome
two guys on me 'heaven's above'
now nobody knows I'm de lookout
and those other two are in love.*

two gay young lads from Trinidad

*oh what a time I never had,
and while they're walking hand in hand
say I'm still looking for a man.*

*and while they're walking hand in hand
say I'm still looking for a man.*

I'm still looking for a man. (Wallis)

This growing tolerance would be shortly usurped by the wave of McCarthyism. Homosexuals were frequently targeted as communists and political deviants. Pressure to marry and conform to heteronormative dictates both pushed gays and lesbians back in the closet as well as strengthened their community through secret underground societies. The first of these was "The Mattachine Society" and "The Daughters of Bilitis" which served to maintain and further the cultural progress gained post WWII. The 50's also saw the first publications of homosexual journals, reviews, and magazines including "One" and "The Ladder". They were gay and lesbian specific, circulating from one society member to another thereby creating a large web of homosexual subscribers and society members. (Brown, Chapter 7. The McCarthy Days: Homosexuals = Communists)

Songs like *Oh When the Queens go Marching in* prove that a large enough society existed to make cultural parodies of mainstream values. Set to the tune of "*Oh When the Saints go Marching in*", a popular tune since Louis Armstrong's version in the 1930's (Shelton), this version allows gays and lesbians to poke fun at the popular majority as well as cultivate an air of militarism. Parodying a marching song implies continued movement, organization, purpose, and a desire for a specific goal. Songs like this, sung in groups, large or small, function as jokes and as unifying tunes.

"Oh When the Queens go Marching in"

*Oh When the queens go marching in
Oh when the queens go marching in
oh when the queens go marching in
oh when the queens go marching in (Protesters)*

A slow boil characterizes the decade of the 1960's. Meeting in bars proved difficult; random police raids involved backing paddy wagons up to the door and arresting everyone inside, or undercover policemen preparing a sting. A desire to connect Black rights, Women's rights, and Gay rights was constantly met with resistance by the unwillingness of other minority groups to hurt their movement by associating themselves with the "gay agenda". In addition, general tensions rose as the United States mired itself in Vietnam. On the other hand, the Hippy movement provided a haven of liberalism, lesbians held high positions in NOW (National Organization of Women), albeit in secret, and the most recent Kinsey report approximated that 200,000 gays and lesbians lived in L.A. alone. (Brown Chapter 9.

The 60's)

It is through these circumstances that on the evening of Friday June 27th, 1969 a bar raid at the Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village erupted into a three day long riot injuring three policemen. Gays and lesbians began fighting back by appearing in the streets, lighting fires in trash cans, pulling fire alarms, and inciting other homosexuals to “come out”. (Brown, Chapter 10. The Stonewall Riots)

Coincidentally, this same evening Judy Garland, beloved by the gay community, died. There is little correlation to be found between the mourning of this star and the feelings of rage expressed that evening, however her signature song *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* became an unofficial anthem for Gays and Lesbians, and one of the last songs that resonates the feelings found in the pre-Stonewall years. Aside from studies examining the homosexual undertones of the movie *Wizard of Oz* (1939), the lyrics of this particular song made it powerful. In addition, speculation exists that this song served as a strong influence in the creation of the “pride flag” (The Gay Almanac)

The quick summary would be, “I long to find the place where it is heard that my troubles will disappear”. Other textual notes include the peaceful, romanticized pictures elicited of a soul longing for a better life, flying like a bluebird beyond the woes of the normal world. In the black and white, wrong and right real world homosexuals, like in the song *Secret Love*, could only lift up their wishes to far away stars. In the “better, colorful world” beyond the rainbow, fantasy emerged, and dreams “that you dare to dream really do come true”.

Before June 27th 1969, most popular songs that found resonance among the gay community incorporated feelings of longing, secretiveness, and an attempt to shed light on the things shared with the heterosexual majority. There are few calls to “come out”, assert oneself, or demand equal treatment. These sentiments, however, exist in nearly all songs to come. *Some Where over the Rainbow* serves as a capstone to the ideology of previous generations. It continues to remind men and women what life was like before 1969 and how far the gay and lesbian civil rights movement has come and how far it must still go.

“Some Where over the Rainbow” music by Harold Arlen, lyrics by E.Y. Harburg, performed by Judy Garland. 1938.

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Way up high,
There's a land that I heard of
Once in a lullaby.*

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Skies are blue,
And the dreams that you dare to dream
Really do come true.*

*Someday I'll wish upon a star
And wake up where the clouds are far*

*Behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops
Away above the chimney tops
That's where you'll find me.*

*Somewhere over the rainbow
Bluebirds fly.
Birds fly over the rainbow.
Why then, oh why can't I?*

*If happy little bluebirds fly
Beyond the rainbow
Why, oh why can't I? (Garland)*

In 1970, a year after the Stonewall riots, the first Gay Pride parade took place in New York City to commemorate the events of the previous summer. People recall it as “the moment the closet door opened”. The march began quietly in Queens. People were afraid the march would turn violent, so they walked quietly hoping that others would join them. After a slow beginning, more and more gays, lesbians, and those that supported them joined the crowd, enlivening the march and filling it with songs and chants that elevated them to a parade of thousands. This would be the first of many marches of a now unified, public, and very vocal minority. (Ethridge Chapter 3. Stonewall Riot Days)

“Coming out” humanizes the gay cause. By putting a face on these individuals, they become someone’s son, daughter, sister, brother, coworker, pastor, boss, etc. The effect of seeing crowds of “out and proud” gay and lesbians legitimizes the “coming out” of others. Exponential growth of gay and lesbian visibility and political leverage results. The Reverend Ted McIlvenna, a gay activist and organizer recalls, “The most important thing, I believe, that Gays and Lesbians have done to change the world is to come out of the closet. That revolutionary act, for me, is the most important thing that we’ve done in thirty years”. (Ethridge, Chapter 15. Gays in the Mainstreams)

The parody song *Ain’t Gonna Stay In The Closet No More* succinctly captures the new rhetorical, political, and emotional sentiment of the outraged gay and lesbian community. By changing the words of a popular hymn, gays and lesbians point out an oppressive Christian Right, taking the song as their own. The vehement repetition is devoid of the previously derogatory terms found in other parodies. Homosexuals, at this time, are not looking for a humorous and quaint connection to the heterosexual majority, rather they are militantly asserting their unalienable rights to equality through a declaration of “enough is enough”. The overall sentiment is “we will be invisible and marginalized no longer”.

“Ain’t Gonna Stay In The Closet No More” (parody of “Ain’t Gonna Trouble War No More)

I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more,

*I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more,
I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more,*

*I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more,
I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more,
I ain't gonna stay in the closet no more.* (Protesters, Ain't Gonna Stay In the Closet No More)

There were two widely popular chants of the first march. Known also as “Gay Liberation Day”, these rhymes speak to the unshackling of an oppressed people. The first chant calls for equality, the second for action. Their brevity, rhyme and rhythmic energy make them easily remembered and repeated. Constant repetition by a large crowd infuses their meaning with urgency, power, and legitimacy. By agreeing to join the parade and chanting, gays and lesbians “came out” and self-identified with the movement, adding their voice and their humanity to the general cause.

Chants of the First Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade.

“2,4,6,8, Gay is just as good as straight” (Protesters, 2,4,6,8 Gay Is Just As Good As Straight)

“Out of the Closet into the streets” (Protesters, Out Of The Closet Into The Streets)

Post-Stonewall society saw the rise of gay and lesbian organizations. The Gay Liberation Front formed in 1969, modeled after the Vietnamese Liberation Front. It quickly fractured into smaller, more radical and mobilized groups. The pressure of these groups and “closeted” gay psychiatrists forced the hand of the American Psychological Association/APA to remove homosexuality from the list of pathological diseases in 1973. Not long after, openly gay Harvey Milk won election to the post of San Francisco city supervisor, the first non-closeted homosexual ever elected to public office. After his and the mayor’s double assassination, the Gay and Lesbian National Lobby formed in Washington D.C. bringing the gay rights movement to the national stage (Ethridge, Chapter 4. After the Riot - Gay Power).

On a separate front, Lesbians cultivated a movement of their own. Concerts of women’s music, music by women singer-songwriters, grew from performances in church basements, diners, and bookstores to larger indoor and outdoor venues. In 1974, Elaine Noble of Massachusetts was the first lesbian elected to the national legislature. Betty Friedan, renowned feminist, labeled lesbians “the lavender menace” fearing their presence in NOW would ruin the feminist cause (Ethridge, Chapter 5. Women's Voices Are Heard). This alienation from the women’s movement combined with the disrespect found within the gay movement is echoed in this third chant. Here, Lesbian marchers parody a previously all-gay chant, using odd numbers that yield a different rhyme.

Lavender Menace chant

“3,5,7,9, Lesbians Are Mighty Fine” (Group)

As a reaction to the social and political success of the Gay Rights Movement, and specifically the 1977 Dade County Florida ordinance prohibiting discrimination of sexuality, Right-wing Christian fundamentalists like Anita Bryant and Jerry Falwell began anti-homosexual campaigns across the country. Their blend of religion and politics began a dramatic paradigm shift in the United States where politically minded evangelists aimed to change the laws rather than their previous goal of changing minds. Where minds might stray, laws must be followed. One after another, anti-sodomy laws emerged in states across the country. The 1979 march in Washington D.C., the “First Great March” occurred as part of the political, social, cultural, and ideological battle raging across the country. Unlike previous marches, people marched under banners including the name of their State sending a message that gays and lesbians exist in every part of the country. Participants stressed not an East Coast/West Coast movement, but a national one with concerned citizens from everywhere (Ethridge, Chapter 8. Anita Bryant and the Backlash).

The third chant, from the 1979 march, details the “enemies” of the Gay Rights Movement by naming them. The angry tone created by the word “bigots” mirrors the passion that resonated among irate protesters. The most curious word “racist” signifies that the homosexual community, at this time, considers themselves a unique breed of people. They are also connecting their plight with the African American Civil Rights movement of the previous decade by including the subject of race.

Third Chant from “The First Great March”

“Racist Texans, anti-gay, born again bigots go away”. (Protesters, Racist Texans, Anti-Gay, Born Again Bigots Go Away)

The 1980’s seemed a continuation of setbacks for the Gay Rights Movement. Two Republican Presidents sat in the White House. Michael Hardwick, arrested in his home in Georgia for sodomy, lost his privacy case against the Supreme Court, and a slew of gay bashings, including the heavily publicized murder of Julio Rivera—only one of his three killers served slight jail time—pummeled the homosexual cause. Most devastating of all, however, was the outbreak of the AIDS epidemic among gay men. Unsurprisingly, the Christian Right spun the disease as a sign from God that homosexuality was indeed an abomination. Shockingly, the government did little to help the plight, educate, or mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS (Ethridge, Chapter 9. Aids and Reagan).

The unprecedented neglect of the United States government reignited the flames of a wavering movement. Firstly, lesbians, after a decade long rift with gays rallied around the dying men, reuniting the entire movement for the first time. Groups like Act Up formed, where men with HIV engaged in theatrical

demonstrations that put a public face on the health crisis. Additionally HIV forced men out of the closet, most noticeably Hollywood actor Rock Hudson, whose AIDS related death made the 1985 cover of TIME magazine. The continued silence from the government necessitated the “Second Great March” in 1987. The purpose of the march would be to discuss AIDS. Its speakers included celebrities Jesse Jackson and Whoopi Goldberg. The second purpose was the creation and display of The Names Project AIDS Quilt, a giant quilt spread across the National Mall made up of individual squares remembering men and lovers who succumbed to AIDS. This continues to be the largest community arts project in the world (Ethridge, Chapter 11. Aids Activism Grows the Movement, Chapter 12. The Great March, 1987).

Over a million people attended the march outside the Food and Drug Administration building holding banners that read “Silence = Death” and reciting chants like “*Health care is a right, health care is a right*”. The FDA has always been a powerhouse of information and research. This time, demonstrators called for patients’ rights above all other concerns of sexuality.

Chant from “The Second Great March” 1987.

“Health care is a right, health care is a right” (Protesters, Health Care Is A Right, Health Care Is A Right)

The 1980’s included other successes like Corretta Scott King’s call for a change in the language of the 1964 Civil Rights Act to include “gay” in the language, and the 1982 advent of the International Gay Games (Ethridge, Chapter 10. Gay Culture in the 80's).

Through bittersweet progress, the arrival of the 90’s and a newly elected Democratic President refilled hope in the movement. During his election campaign, Clinton promised to revoke the ban on gays serving in the military. After entering office, however, he instituted Don’t Ask Don’t Tell in 1993, and DOMA (the Defense Of Marriage Act) in 1996, both of which dealt crushing blows to the Gay and Lesbian agenda. “The Third March” in 1993 addressed the first of these, but more importantly it was a highly visible, media driven international broadcast. The London Philharmonic played military songs, and celebrity Drag Queen Ru Paul entertained audiences (Ethridge, Chapter 13. The 90's - Culture War, Chapter 14. Clinton and "Don't Ask Don't Tell, Chapter 15. Gays in the Mainstreams)

The 1990’s also experienced a wave of celebrity outings including Ellen DeGeneres, KD Lang, Anne Heche, George Michael, Elton John, Tracy Chapman, and Melissa Ethridge (*After Stonewall* narrator). A number of gay-oriented productions like Hollywood’s *The Birdcage* (1996), and Vanity Fair’s cover of KD Lang and Cindi Crawford peppered popular culture. The act of “coming out” proved stronger than ever, even more so when done by someone already lionized by the American public.

Melissa Ethridge’s *I Wanna Come Over* (1995) extends from the folksy lineage of lesbian singer-songwriters from the 1970’s as well as subtly recaptures the double-meaning song type heard before 1969. Her lesbianism--however publically understood--did not deter the public’s accessibility to the songs sexually ambiguous lyrics. The most central meaning, for homosexuals, remains clear. The song tells the

story of two women engaged in a love affair. One woman lives with her male partner, and the other, the narrator/Melissa, tries to convince her to one, let her inside, and two that their passion demands address.

The first verse sets the scene of the husband leaving and two hesitant lovers reuniting. In the second verse, the singer recalls the damaging influence of a damning friend. She tries to convince her lover that their sexual fire burns too strong to succumb to dissuasion. The third verse contains the final push for love over confusion. Containing the message of the song, the chorus proclaims, "*I wanna come over, to hell with the consequence. You told me you loved me, that's all I believe*". The consequence of social destruction, personal stigmatization, health crisis, and the other plagues gays and lesbians do not supersede the need to love.

"I wanna come over" by Melissa Ethridge. 1995

*I know you're home, you left your light on
You know I'm here, the night is thin
I know you're alone, I watched the car leave
Your lover is gone, let me in
Open your back door, I just need to touch you once more.*

*(chorus:)
I want to come over
To hell with the consequence
You told me you love me
That's all I believe
I want to come over, it's a need I can't explain
To see you again
I want to come over*

*I know your friend, you told her about me
She filled you with fear, some kind of sin
How can you turn, denying the fire
Lover, I burn, let me in
Open your back door, I just need to touch you once more.*

*(chorus)
I want to come over
To hell with the consequence
You told me you love me
That's all I believe
I want to come over, it's a need I can't explain
To see you again
I want to come over*

*I know you're confused, I know that you're shaken
You think we'll be lost once we begin*

*I know you're weak, I know that you want me
Lover, don't speak, let me in.*

*(chorus)
I want to come over
To hell with the consequence
You told me you love me
That's all I believe
I want to come over, it's a need I can't explain
To see you again
I want to come over. (Ethridge)*

The next song, a definitively second-type, double meaning song, *Defying Gravity* from the Musical Wicked (2003) also continues a gay-themed lineage. Wicked, written by gay author Gregory Maguire is a musical adaptation of his novel. It crafts the behind the scenes story of Elphaba, the notorious Wicked Witch of the West from the novel The Wizard of Oz by Frank L. Baum. An outcast from birth, Elphaba grows up trying to fit into the mainstream culture of Oz only to decide to “defy gravity” and strike out on her own, true to her own beliefs and values. For homosexuals, Elphaba’s is a “coming out” story. Her struggle resonates with the strife of gays and lesbians trying to accept themselves and figure out how to live in a world that does not consent of them.

The song *Defying Gravity* captures the moment of Elphaba’s “coming out”, her decisive moment of change and dramatic thrust into not only the sky, via flying, but life on her terms. The first verse speaks to a blossoming self-awareness and rejection of the “rules”. In the chorus she wondrously sings “it’s time to try defying gravity”, that which pulls her down and keeps her under the thumb of “normalcy”. Her friend, Glinda (known in The Wizard of Oz as “the Good Witch”) tries to dissuade Elphaba’s rejection of the popular majority. Elphaba responds in the second verse asserting, “some things can’t change”; to gays and lesbians, this means their sexuality. She speaks the fear of all people faced with “coming out”, losing the love of other. But as she puts it, “well, if that’s love, it comes at much too high a cost”. The cost is suppressing one’s sexuality and one’s self. At one point she almost convinces her friend Glinda to join her in defiance, however Glinda chooses to remain while Elphaba flies off alone but free.

“Defying Gravity” from the musical Wicked (2003) by Stephen Schwartz

*Something has changed within me
Something is not the same
I'm through with playing by the rules
Of someone else's game
Too late for second-guessing
Too late to go back to sleep
It's time to trust my instincts
Close my eyes: and leap!*

*It's time to try
Defying gravity
I think I'll try
Defying gravity
And you can't pull me down!*

*GLINDA
Can't I make you understand?
You're having delusions of grandeur:*

*ELPHABA
I'm through accepting limits
'cause someone says they're so
Some things I cannot change
But till I try, I'll never know!
Too long I've been afraid of
Losing love I guess I've lost
Well, if that's love
It comes at much too high a cost!*

*I'd sooner buy
Defying gravity
Kiss me goodbye
I'm defying gravity
And you can't pull me down:
(spoken) Glinda - come with me. Think of what we could
do: together.*

*(sung) Unlimited
Together we're unlimited
Together we'll be the greatest team
There's ever been
Glinda -
Dreams, the way we planned 'em*

*GLINDA
If we work in tandem:*

*BOTH
There's no fight we cannot win
Just you and I
Defying gravity
With you and I
Defying gravity*

ELPHABA

*They'll never bring us down!
(spoken) Well? Are you coming?*

GLINDA

*I hope you're happy
Now that you're choosing this*

ELPHABA

*(spoken) You too
(sung) I hope it brings you bliss*

BOTH

*I really hope you get it
And you don't live to regret it
I hope you're happy in the end
I hope you're happy, my friend:*

ELPHABA

*So if you care to find me
Look to the western sky!
As someone told me lately:
"Ev'ryone deserves the chance to fly!"
And if I'm flying solo
At least I'm flying free
To those who'd ground me
Take a message back from me*

Tell them how I am

*Defying gravity
I'm flying high
Defying gravity
And soon I'll match them in renown
And nobody in all of Oz
No Wizard that there is or was
Is ever gonna bring me down! (Schwartz)*

The 2000's loudly brought the question of homosexual marriage to the political table, most noticeably the on going fight surrounding California's recent battle concerning Proposition 8. Anti-discrimination laws in schools, the work place, and in public places are firmly penned in nationwide law books. In addition to Domestic partner laws and marriage rights, most recently homosexuals serving in the military have resurfaced in the political debate for equality. Young people are feeling free to "come out" at an earlier age, and the most recent generation is the most tolerant voting body in the United States ("Polls Examined"). This lens provides the context of the final song in this paper.

It is a modern parody of “I Am The Very Model of a Modern Major General” from Gilbert and Sullivan’s H.M.S. Pinafore. Like “De Gay Young Lad from Trinidad”, this song makes fun of the gay man. However unlike previous decades, gays are making fun of themselves. Feeling free to reflect humorously upon one’s own culture presupposes a certain security in that culture’s stability and legitimacy. The folks of the Gay Rights Movement of the 60’s and 70’s would have felt livid about a song that stereotyped and mocked their efforts at promoting an image that demanded serious consideration and civil equity. Before the 1960’s, not enough cultural signifiers existed to profile a gay man. It simply would not have been possible. The homosexual community currently holds enough stock in the American cultural system for parodies like this could exist. The final stanza, however, presents a caveat of morality; noting that the aforementioned caricature is just that, fake. Gay men, as well as lesbians, want the same thing they’ve always wanted, love, and the ability to love freely.

“I Am The Very Model of the Modern Homosexual” from the musical Dirty Little Showtunes by R. Reinhart, 2001

*I am the Very Model of the Modern Homosexual
My cooking skills my lovely home
Are really quite exceptional
I hit the gym each day each night
My muscles are perfectional
My gluts my pecs my gleaming gut
Are really quite delectable*

*I know which movie star is gay
and who pretends at Het-er-o
My knowledge of Gay Hollywood
is really just incredible*

*But still in matters ethical
Artistic, metaphysical
I am the very model of the modern homosexual*

*I watch every trashy TV show
I know the rumors talk the talk
I gawk at all the biggest stars
But wish that I could walk the walk
I have red carpets in my dreams
The finest tux the grandest gowns
I used to do drag long ago
Before the Republicans came to town*

*I back gay causes to the max
And fund the Human Rights Campaign*

*Lesbian soldiers get a check
Transvestite priests get all my change
Transsexual senators count on me
To back them on Election Day
I vote straight Democrat and gay
And MCC is where I pray*

*And still in matters ethical
Artistic meta-physical
I am the very model of the modern Homosexual*

*I have a house on Castro Street
Greenwich Village is my home
I visit all the gay resorts
Key West Palm Springs.
Cape Cod and Rome
I watch the L Word faithfully
And Will and Grace my favorite show
Take one look at my Porno stash
And then watch out for "Thar She Blows"*

*I prance around like princess Grace
And dance at all the latest bars
My smile is frozen on my face
I drive the most expensive cars
All the boys just look and drool
And beg the number for my phone
I haven't touched a man in years
I bitch and then go home alone*

*For all the sex I say I get
I might as well be celibate
I'm so busy looking beautiful
I'm gay but that's the hell of it
My boy friend left me long ago
And said I was a bitchy queen
I don't care what the world may say
My life and love are relevant*

*I need a man that I can love
I'm lonely and I have to shout
Hold me tight and kiss me hard
Then show me what love's all about
Or still in matters ethical
Artistic, metaphysical
I'll only be the model of the modern homosexual (Reinhart)*

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