



History

"The past, though it cannot be relived, can always be repaired."

John La Farge, S.J

Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Student Subculture

Parts taken from the Report and Recommendations of The Governor's Commission of Gay and Lesbian Youth. Boston, MA, July 1993 and John D'Emilio. By Kerry Poynter

Although there may be some differences among the GLB student subcultures depending on what college or university you look at there is a general national history. This history includes GLB student organizations, which make up most of what describes the GLB student subculture, and stories of harassment or discrimination.

Since the start of the modern day GLB equal rights movement in the United States, which took place at the Stonewall Inn in New York City in 1969, GLB students have been organizing student groups at colleges and universities around the country. The Stonewall Inn, a relatively small gay bar located on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village is heralded as the spark that re-ignited the modern day GLB rights movement. Police raided the bar supposedly looking for illegal sale of alcohol, which was a usual occurrence in the city's gay bars. "the Police raided and attempted to shut down the Stonewall, which was frequented by gay street people, drag queens, students, and others. While patrons usually accommodated the officials, this evening was different: fed up with their ongoing mistreatment, the patrons fought back. Neighborhood residents quickly joined the fray, flinging bottles and rocks at police in riots lasting for three nights."

Out of these riots organizations started springing up all across the country. This included GLB student organizations. "The first GLB student group was chartered at Columbia University in New York City in 1969. Named the Student Homophile League, it created quite a stir on campus and received a great deal of media coverage. This publicity spurred the formation of similar groups at Cornell University, New York University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford University, and elsewhere. Relatively few active members were initially involved, and groups were politically weak, but the seeds had been planted, and a fledgling GLB student movement was underway."

The first "out" student government president, Jack Baker, was elected in 1970 at the University of Minnesota. The University of Michigan was the first to hire counselors, Cynthia Gair and Jim Toy, to specifically address counseling needs of GLB students. The university of Massachusetts was the first to hire a director, Fence Yeskel, for their new GLB student service office in 1985.

Many stories that have been passed down over the years or are documented are about harassment and discrimination against GLB students and people. "Stories like these are the substance of an oral tradition by which gay academics who came of age before the 1970's warned one another of the dangers they faced and socialized their younger peers into necessary habits of caution and discretion."

"In 1959, at a small Midwestern college, a student told her faculty advisor that one of her friends was a homosexual. The advisor informed the dean, who called in the student in question and

pressured him into naming others. Within twenty-four hours, three students had been expelled; a week later, one of them hung himself.

"About the same time, a faculty member at a Big Ten school was arrested in mid-semester on a morals charge (at that time, all homosexual expression was subject to criminal penalties). The police alerted the administration, and the professor was summarily told to leave the campus. He never appeared before his classes again."

"At an elite college in the northeast, male students in the 1960's were in the habit of training a telescope on the windows of the women's dormitories. In one instance, they spied two female students erotically engaged. The women, not the men, were disciplined."

"At a women's college in New England, where accusations of lesbianism were periodically leveled against roommates in the 1960's, the standard solution was to separate the accused by housing them in different rooms."

Origins of the Pink Triangle

Everyone knows about the Holocaust, during World War II that took more than six million Jewish lives. But many do not realize that other groups also were targeted for extinction, including the mentally challenged, Gypsies, and homosexual men and women. Nearly a quarter-million gay men and lesbians perished in Hitler's death camps. Prisoners were forced to wear identifying symbols on their sleeves. People of Jewish descent were identified by a yellow Star of David. Homosexual men and women were branded by a pink triangle. Sadly, after liberation of the camps, many GLB survivors were re-imprisoned by Allied liberators for the crime of being homosexuals. Today, it is a symbol of liberation and pride worn on buttons, lapel pins, tee-shirts, even car bumpers to remind gay and lesbian people of the oppression they have suffered historically and to signal their refusal to be silent victims again.

There is a story that relates directly to the witness we invite you to make today. When Denmark fell to the Nazi armies in 1940, the German occupation authorities immediately decreed that all Jews wear the yellow Star of David on their sleeves at all times, to facilitate their identification for transit to the concentration camps. Legend has it that the very next morning King Christian X, the aging Danish monarch, came out of the palace for his morning walk wearing a yellow Star of David on his coat, thus expressing his solidarity with the prosecuted minority. Word quickly spread about this silent and non-violent act of defiance and soon many other Danes wearing the symbol on their sleeves. Though historians disagree about the actual prevalence of this simple act of Danish resistance, there is no doubt that the population's compassion and resistance contributed to the fact that almost all of Denmark's Jews survived the barbarism of the holocaust that took the lives of most European Jews. Gay, lesbian and bisexual people continue to face legal persecution in many parts of the United States. Fully one-half of the states have sodomy laws which make private sexual contact between consenting adults of the same gender illegal and punishable offenses.

Texas A&M University, Gay and Lesbian Student Services Speaker's Bureau Manual (1993)