

THE PERFORMANCE OF MARRIAGE: UNDERSTANDING THE MOVEMENT
FOR MARRIAGE EQUALITY THROUGH THE MODERN
AMERICAN STAGE

THESIS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. AIN'T THAT SOME #\$\$%&: CENSORSHIP OF HOMOSEXUALITY ON THE AMERICAN STAGE IN THE 1920s30s.....	10
III. THE STONEWALL BUBBLE: THE EMERGENCE OF SEXUAL IDENTITY AS THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF A COMMUNITY.....	29
IV. THE PERFORMANCE OF POLICY: MARRIAGE EQUALITY.....	50
V. CONCLUSION.....	71
WORKS CITED.....	77

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“Given the precarious state of the LGBTQ human rights and our hard-won but tenuous place in cultural representation, acute analysis and deep understanding remain crucial as political and critical strategies.”

-Jill Dolan, *Theatre & Sexuality*.

The 20th century is remembered for breakthroughs in law, science, medicine, the arts, and technology, to name but a few on the long list of disciplines, but it is no secret the 20th century is also characterized by a myriad of human atrocities, the magnitude of some so great, such devastation was previously unfathomable. When future generations write the histories of the 21st century, it is curious to consider what they will have to look back upon. Will there be breathtaking leaps of innovation; or will history tell of multiple acts of world-wide destruction?

Most people alive today were not around, or capable of memory yet, during the 1920s, and as such, a diluted image of the decade has become emblazoned into our public consciousness. It is difficult to think of the 1920s without imagining the speak-easies, the flappers, the gangsters, and all the other popular culture iconography resulting from Prohibition. This image holds a distant kind of cultural mysticism, a watery idea that floats in a place very far removed from our present reality. Yet, when considering the issue of homosexual equality in America, the current state of affairs can be traced back

almost one hundred years to this watery place, the roaring twenties. Although today's dialogue has evolved beyond the primitive conversation borne by the 1920s, by tracking the movement for homosexual equality through performance on the stage, it becomes clear the decade set into motion a series of events, the outcome of which has lead towards an increasingly equal representation of LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of public and private life in America.

On March 3, 1873 the United States federal government passed an amendment to their 1872 Post Office Act, which made illegal the sale as well as the distribution of obscene or lewd materials through the post. Donning the name of the man responsible for the creation of the New York Society for the Suppression of Vice, Anthony Comstock, the Comstock Act began what would become a long history of censorship within the landscape of American writing.

The Comstock Law's vague language allowed for loose interpretations of what constituted "obscene and lewd", thereby enabling people such as Anthony Comstock and his allies, most notably the Young Men's Christian Association, to enforce a personal code of ethics as the normative cultural morality. Although the original intent of the law was to suppress the flow of literature concerned with abortion, contraception, and venereal disease, the Comstock Act and the resulting laws passed by state legislatures, set the stage for a cultural war that would last beyond the next hundred years, namely the struggle of any person who did not identify as heterosexual to be allowed access to the many benefits of organized society within America. Indeed, even today, such a battle still

rages as our federal and state governments grapple with decisions surrounding marriage equality.

When investigating, in Chapter 2, Mae West's *The Drag* (1927) as well as her more widely known work *Sex* (1926), Edouard Bourdet's *The Captive* (1926), and Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934), a clear picture is painted of American censorship during the mid 1920s and into the 1930s; this censorship attempted to "black-out", or relegate to the sidelines, the communities these plays fought to shed the light of acceptance and understanding upon, namely persons who identify as homosexual. This cross-section of American drama demonstrates the role censorship played in encouraging the idea that only one sexual orientation, heterosexuality, could constitute a sexual identity becoming of an American, while simultaneously providing insights into the nature of social response to non-traditional sexual orientations during this period.

These works provided America with some of the earliest instances of gay and lesbian characters, themes, and problems, as well as confirming the already widely known fact that such men and women were not desired by the normative culture, either as characters or citizens. Exploration of how dominant culture, as Dolan would say, "clamped down" on sexual minorities, illuminates the cultural machination behind the expression and repression of the LGBTQ "voice" on the stage during this time period. It ultimately reveals how the strong culture of secrecy surrounding homosexuality during the 1920s and 1930s manifested on stage as a "silent voice" as well as the beginnings of a louder "out and proud voice", both which act as foundations for the eventual cultivation of a homosexual community.

Chapter 3 demonstrates how the pervading culture of censorship and oppression of homosexuality would rule the day until the evening of June 28, 1969 when, in response to a police raid on the Stonewall Inn meant to locate and arrest homosexuals, patrons began rioting in the streets, defying the authoritative and oppressive police force. This night would eventually become, for some, “the shot heard ’round the world” for the homosexual community, understood as the call to arms for a cultural revolution surrounding the discrimination against homosexuals. To have been publicly called a “community” before the weeks of riots that resulted from the raid on Stonewall Inn was unthinkable outside of established, albeit underground, “safety zones”. After the riots, however, activist organizations, newspapers, and pride marches were all established in an attempt to call for equal rights for LGBTQ individuals.

Not everything was a post-Stonewall creation, however. Beginning in the early 1960s Caffè Cino, referred to as “the coffee shop where Off-Off Broadway began,” was, “one of the first places regularly to stage work by and about gay men” (Dolan 25). Caffè Cino quickly became a haven for young gay men, particularly artists, looking for a safe outlet to practice their craft and engage with their community. During the early 1980s WOW cafe, a collective similar to Caffè Cino, but devoted to women, particularly lesbian women, emerged onto the New York theatre scene. In the same way Caffè Cino worked to provide a safe place for young gay male artists, WOW established itself as a “safety zone” for lesbian artists to explore and expand their craft.

Although collectives such as Caffè Cino were forming earlier, it was the Stonewall Riots that marked the overwhelming shift from exploring the individual

experiences of a homosexual towards highlighting the importance of a community at large, and understanding such a community as deserving of the same legal liberation provided to other minority populations in America. This shift becomes further elucidated when researching the changing face of activist organizations in the wake of the riots. Prior to the events of June 28th, nearly all organizations focused on the equal treatment of homosexual citizens preferred to be identified as homophile organizations. Homophile, as a word, was considered to be a better representation of the nature of same-sex partnering, i.e. based on mutual commitment and respect rather than being located in a purely sexual realm. The Stonewall Riots would change the assimilationist attitude of such homophile groups arguing on behalf on the LGBTQ population.

Chapter 4 illuminates how, more than ever before, the past ten years have shown a tendency by dramatists to shift their focus from the celebration of the community to a more systematic approach towards the argument for same-sex marriage. Instead of focusing solely on acceptance and exploration, many recent texts tackle specific issues within the legal code of America, challenging the normative culture to defend their stances on such laws or concede to the suggestion that they are, by nature, laws that produce a state of inequality.

Written by Geoffery Nauffts, *Next Fall* (2009) serves as a prime example of such a shift. While this play does deal with some of the broad-ranging issues that have always swirled around gay and lesbian drama, i.e. acceptance of self and willingness to “come out” to family and friends, it also attempts to tackle the reality that society is built to keep non-heterosexuals on the fringe, devoid of the same legal rights and protections enjoyed

by other Americans. By shedding light onto the fact that gay and lesbian partners are legally unable to act as “next-of-kin” Nauffts not only highlights an individual struggle, but he also suggests similar struggles will only be curtailed by society’s willingness to grapple with the tougher aspects of inclusion for non-heterosexuals. Such a shift then must be recognized as a shift from the creation and celebration of individual identity towards the cultivation of empathy from the surrounding society, and ultimately the attempt to provide *legal* acceptance alongside personal and social acceptance. It is easy enough to agree that a woman should be allowed to walk down the street, hand in hand with another woman. Much more difficult for society at large, however, is to agree that the legal code should be adjusted in order to provide inclusion/discourage exclusion of a certain people group based solely on their sexual orientation. Nauffts, however, does not find himself alone in this shift of dramatic subject.

The highest court in our land has chosen two cases, one dealing with the overturning of California’s Prop. 8 and another dealing with a claim against the Defense of Marriage Act, or DoMA, for which they will provide a ruling. The first, *Hollingsworth vs. Perry* (formerly known as *Perry vs. Schwarzenegger*), has the greatest potential for setting a nationwide precedent on the issue of marriage equality, however it is again important to remember that such a precedent could fall in favor of either the LGBTQ individuals at the heart of the hearings, or just as easily fall in support of the hundreds of “pro-traditional marriage” advocacy groups that oppose the extension of marriage rights. The second case, *Windsor vs. United States*, gives hope to gay rights advocates in the way of establishing a precedent for the unconstitutionality of denying

federal benefits, namely estate tax exemptions upon death, to same-sex couples. There are over one thousand benefits granted to heterosexual couples that choose to marry, however none of these benefits are extended to same-sex marriages, and once again, the decision of the Supreme Court will have a monumental impact no matter how the ruling falls.

Dustin Lance Black's *8* investigates the appeal that was made as a result of the ruling against Proposition 8 in California. The case made an appearance before the Supreme Court in March 2013, and Black set out to take his play to every state in America in order to increase support and spread awareness. The original appeal was closed from the media, and as such, there is very little known about the proceedings. In order that he might help bring to light the events surrounding a controversial court case, Black has, in the vein of early German documentary drama, written his piece based upon transcripts of what transpired in the court room. His work provides another example of the way in which the thrust of dramatic literature has shifted from the metaphorical and universal to the concrete and specific.

Standing On Ceremony, a night of short plays written by prominent playwrights which centered around the issues of marriage equality, and known colloquially as the "gay marriage plays", mirror such attempts to shed light on the variety of social, as well as legal, challenges faced by gay and lesbian couples grappling with the moments before and after "I do". While it was enough in the wake of the Stonewall Riots to explore the counter-culture of non-heterosexuals as it related to the community's freedom to exist, the

turn of the 21st century has shown it is now pertinent to identify the systematic legal discrimination faced by the LGBTQ community, and work towards positive legal change.

What began as a fight against censorship regarding the rights of performance venues/productions dealing with the life and struggles of homosexual individuals to be seen and heard, shifted into a nation-wide push for the acceptance and exploration of such individuals, both on and off the stage. This nation-wide push for the acceptance and exploration of homosexuals has, since the turn of the century, shifted into a systematic examination of the legal status of LGBTQ individuals, seen again both in the realm of performance and public policy. This examination of the rights of the LGBTQ community has created a moment of opportunity for the ideals of American freedom and justice to be extended to all Americans, not just those who identify as heterosexual. The Supreme Court's projected June ruling on both *Windsor vs. United States* and *Hollingsworth vs. Perry* will impact the face of American politics, but more importantly will impact the lives of over 120,000 married gay couples, not to mention the millions of gay Americans who have yet to wed. By elucidating the arc of depiction of homosexual characters on stage, from its initial revolt against censorship, through a period of extending exploration and acceptance of the lifestyle, and into this recent era of fighting for equal legal treatment, the nature of theatre's relationship to the homosexual community becomes clear: its representation has consistently advocated for progressive stances towards homosexuality. The current manifestation of this relationship are dramas that, either through subtle suggestion or direct challenge, advocate for changes in legislation, a

reality that would suggest the eventuality of marriage equality legislation in the near future.

CHAPTER II

AIN'T THAT SOME #\$%&: CENSORSHIP OF HOMOSEXUALITY ON THE AMERICAN STAGE IN THE 1920s AND 1930s

“Marriage equality” is a recent development in the movement for LGBTQ rights, but the inception of the argument began far before any such moniker was created. It is easy to be swept into the cultural foray surrounding the issue of marriage equality, and easier yet to forget the history upon which the movement rests. It is heartening to imagine marriage equality legislation as a symbol that America has ushered in a new age of progressive acceptance, seemingly promising to a new generation that the discrimination faced by American homosexuals is soon to become a thing of the past. Without the early pioneers of LGBTQ rights, however, there would not be such a vibrant debate swirling around the nation’s highest courts today. Three works, *The Drag* (1927) by Mae West, *The Captive* (1926) by Edouard Bourdet, and *The Children’s Hour* (1934) by Lillian Hellman, demonstrate how the American stage provided the earliest inroads into the argument for LGBTQ equality. By examining these works, as well as the censorship battle that raged around them, it becomes clear that, although marriage equality had yet to be named as a goal, these playwrights and their respective plays exposed the nation to the struggle facing homosexuals and did much to establish an early semblance of support for LGBTQ individuals.

It is widely known that Mae West (1893-1980) provided a defense of the “new-woman” of New York City in the first half of the twentieth century, and did much to advance the role women played in the realm of the arts and society. In her essay “Queering the Stage: Critical Displacement in the Theatre of Else Lasker-Schuler and Mae West” Gail Finney notes, “in the case of female playwrights, the challenges typically associated with the transition from page to stage were compounded by their gender, since they generally lacked the social authority and economic power of men” (Finney 54). In a time when women’s voices were traditionally considered marginal, West was able to cement herself as a fixture of American entertainment, and promote a new type of female unbound by the societal constraints of a patriarchal society. Often overlooked, however, is the monumental role she played in shedding light on yet another disenfranchised population, the homosexual community. While she remains an icon of female empowerment, her contributions towards the recognition and empowerment of “the homosexual voice” are little discussed.

West’s defense of the defenseless has been attributed to her gender, in either that she, as a female, is innately, if not stereotypically, more compassionate, or that she, as a young female at the turn of the 20th century, was confronted with a new image of womanhood. Neither of these scenarios, however, prove sufficient to explain her affinity for the fringe. To gain a clear picture of what prompted West’s insistence upon supporting the unsupported, one must look to her formative childhood years. Mae West’s father, known colloquially as “Battlin’ Jack West”, a moniker with a deeper meaning than may first be gleaned, was an Irish Catholic immigrant, and as such dealt

with some of the harshest racism New York City had to offer. In her book *Mae West: An Icon in Black and White* Jill Watts expounds upon this situation saying, “White Anglo-Saxon Protestants defined the Irish as a separate, nonwhite race, disparaging them as ‘savage’, ‘bestial’, and ‘lazy’, degrading stereotypes strikingly parallel to those thrust upon African Americans” (Watts 6). Due to such a social climate, Jack West began making a name for himself on the streets as a fighter, and eventually found himself amidst the ranks of underground boxers, a world that would introduce him to the gangs that ruled the streets of the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Relegated to the status of second-class citizen, Jack West turned to the criminal underground to provide him with the power and pride his pedigree could not.

West’s mother, also an immigrant, was no stranger to the struggles facing the culturally non-normative classes. She became infatuated with the American cinema and star system, avowing to become a famous actress herself, despite the blistering reality that Hollywood had little need for a German immigrant who could not speak English very well. In her quest for fame and fortune, she took a job as a corset model, defying her parent’s wishes that she lose her dream of glamour. Born to two people who had found themselves outside the normative culture, and yet had found success by exploiting both their bodies and their station in society, Mae West grew up in an environment that fostered non-conformity.

More importantly than the background of her parents, however, are the experiences they provided her in her youth. Her mother, overjoyed at Mae’s health and vitality, took every opportunity to encourage Mae’s love of self. She humored her

desires, catered to her whims, encouraged her curiosities, and even transplanted memories, fueling an argument that her mother attempted to create in Mae the woman she wished she once wished to become. “Tillie shaped her daughter not only with an unconventional upbringing but also by fashioning her memories,” (11) notes Watts on the matter, mentioning that several of Mae’s early memories of being strong willed and resistant to authority were not actually remembered, but rather told to Mae by her mother. Her mother was also integral in her love of entertainment, taking Mae often to see comedy shows, vaudeville acts, plays, concerts, and all arts of the like. It was in this world that Mae would incur the influence of a particular African-American performer, Bert Williams.

Williams was known for his signification, a comedic trope rooted firmly inside the African-American comic tradition, and Mae would eventually mimic and ultimately master the act of such double-entendres, word-play, and contradiction. When her father, having met Williams during a night of boxing, brought Williams home to meet Mae, she stormed away and began to cry, a result of her father’s deceit. Williams, singing to Mae from her window, finally convinced her he was who he said he was, and his appearance was not to be trusted as his blackface routine required he paint himself much darker than he actually appeared. This was Mae’s first understanding of the gap between the performer and the performance, and her early interactions with Bert Williams would shape her understanding of comedy by providing her with the major comedic tool with which she would rise to fame: signification.

Mae West was embroiled in the new-age politics of New York City, and before she was even of age she had learned of her parents' "undesirable" nature as immigrants, been heralded as a new type of woman by her mother, and been introduced to her favorite comedian, an African-American vaudeville performer, by her father. While her gender may have played a part in her cultivation of the unspoken and perverse, she was influenced by African-American performance, hailed from an immigrant culture, and was constantly surrounded by the criminal underground. Her youngest years were an exercise in experiencing the fringe of all sorts, and she undoubtedly left her youth inspired not only to be "a new-age woman", but to extend her charisma, conviction, and charm to all those who did not come from culturally normative backgrounds.

West's rise to fame was a rapid ascent, moving from vaudeville acts to plays and finally into films with an ease few performers of the day experienced. The year was 1924 when West witnessed a prostitute picking up dockworkers and became inspired to write what has become known as her most controversial work, *SEX* (1926). Her show attempted to demonstrate how women could use the very thing that kept them down, their sex, to elevate themselves into a position of power. It was not a show of support for prostitution, but rather a call to arms for females, insisting that their sensuality was worth far more than "trick turning" for a meager existence. The show opened to a mixed response as there were those who worried about the salacious content found at the heart of the piece. During the 1927 run of *SEX*, Mae West was busy working on a follow-up piece, *The Drag*, and this work promised to be every bit as salacious as her current

Broadway show, ultimately bringing to a head the rumbles of discontent amongst those agitating for “cleaning up the stage”.

The Drag chronicles a young gay man’s marriage to a woman, and his resulting identity struggle. Rolly Kingsbury, the son of a judge, is married to Claire in order to mask his true feelings for the same sex. A love quadrangle, of sorts, begins to take shape as the audience learns that not only does Rolly secretly love his co-worker Allen Grayson, but Grayson himself is secretly in love with Claire, Rolly’s wife. All the while David, Rolly’s ex-lover, is seeking closure on his relationship to Rolly by visiting Dr. Richardson, Claire’s father, for psychiatric guidance. Soon Grayson learns of Rolly’s secret affection for him, and scolds Rolly for mistreating Claire by using her as a coverup for his true sexuality. Act two, opening to a drag party thrown by Rolly while Claire is away, provides some of the most controversial moments of the work. The evening carries on its course, littered with word play and double-entendres, until the drag ball is raided by police. Rolly is determined to sort everything out with the police the next day, but he unfortunately never gets that chance as he is murdered by David while sleeping. Rolly’s father, when coming upon the scene, threatens to kill David, and David remarks on the similar nature of both David and Rolly and points out that even a judge’s son can be gay.

William Stewart and Emily Hamer, in their exhaustive work *Cassell’s Queer Companion*, point out that *The Drag* is, “memorable in being one of the first plays on Broadway to openly deal with gay themes, which aroused the ire of religious groups such as the Society for the Prevention of Vice” (Stewart/Hamer 74). While they are correct to note that this play was a breakthrough in that it dealt openly with issues that were

previously disregarded by society as perverse and unspeakable, it did not make it to Broadway. *The Drag* premiered on February 1, 1927, in Bridgeport Connecticut, and eight days later on February 9, 1927, the run of *SEX* was raided and shut down by the New York Police Department in an attempt to keep *The Drag* from making it to New York City stages. The group Stewart and Hamer mention, The Society for the Prevention of Vice, are the very people who threatened to ban the play should West try to move her show out of the fringe theatres in the tri-state area and into the city. While *SEX* was controversial, *The Drag* was deemed dangerous.

George Chauncey explains in his book *Why Marriage?* that many in New York City were not ready for such open discussion concerning homosexuality: “In 1927, after a serious lesbian drama [*The Captive*] opened on Broadway to critical acclaim-- and after Mae West announced she planned to open a play called *The Drag*-- New York state passed a ‘padlock law’ that threatened to shut down for a year any theatre that dared to stage a play with lesbian or gay characters” (Chauncey 6). Both Chauncey’s book and Linas Alsenas’s work *Gay America: Struggle for Equality* provide clear-cut diagnoses of the reasoning behind the censorship of *The Drag*. Alsenas notes, “In 1927, the New York state legislature passed a bill outlawing plays ‘depicting or dealing with, the subject of sex degeneracy or sex perversion’ which at the time meant homosexuality” (Alsenas 39). This type of bill was brought about by figures such as Mr. John S. Sumner, the Secretary of The New York Society for the Prevention of Vice, who placed strong societal pressure upon the legislative body. In a later section in *Cassell’s Queer Companion* entitled “Mr. Sumner’s New Censorship” Stewart and Hamer explain Mr. Sumner’s beliefs clearly

when they state: “The constitutional right of the citizen to express his opinions in public does not imply an obligation on part of the publisher to print these opinions” (Stewart/Hamer 423). It becomes critical, for a moment, to step away from *The Drag* as the sole focus, and shed further light onto the complex nature of the censorship war that was waged between the end of September 1926 through the beginning of April 1927.

Edouard Bourdet’s *The Captive* opened on Broadway on September 29, 1926.

The following day, the *New York Times* review by J. Brooks Atkinson read, in part:

The Captive writes the tragedy of a young woman, well-bred and of good family, who falls into a twisted relationship with another woman. For nearly half of the play this loathsome possibility, never mentioned, scarcely hinted at, hangs over the drama like a black pall, a prescience of impending doom. . . . *The Captive* might degenerate into a commercial exploitation of a revolting theme. (Katz 83)

It is interesting to note the choice of language in Atkinson’s review, using adjectives like “twisted,” “loathsome” and “revolting” to describe the homosexual relationship at the heart of Bourdet’s work. These derisive words seem to flow easily out of Atkinson, as though there is no real question about the fact that such a relationship would be twisted and revolting. The normative culture of 1926 America was indeed in agreeance with Atkinson’s choice of language, considering that exactly one month after the play’s opening *The Times* reported that, “three unidentified plays were under police investigation” and reported again on November 15, 1926 that a “play jury” was created to head off shows that featured, “highly complicated and suggestive psychopathic relationships” (Katz 83). In fact the jury was tasked, on the same evening that its creation was reported, with meeting to decide the fate of *The Captive*.

On November 16, 1926, the morning after the jury had been created, it was reported that the jury could not gather enough votes to “convict” *The Captive* of being overly salacious, and the show’s run would be allowed to continue. This news did not sit well with Mayor Walker, and after a little more than a month *The New York Times* ran this headline: “MAYOR STARTS WAR ON IMMORAL PLAYS-- Warns Producers Censorship Will Result Unless They Voluntarily Clean Stage-- THREAT BRINGS PROMISES” (Katz 84). The article found beneath this headline warned that the Mayor intended to seek further censorship legislation if producers did not willingly clean up their act, and that, “many complaints have been received at the City Hall about the salacious dialogue and situations of certain plays . . . The last straw, it is understood, came when plans were announced for the production of a new play, said to be even more daring than one which has aroused unfavorable comment because of the subject it deals with” (Katz 85). The “new play” was none other than Mae West’s *The Drag*, rumors of which had finally made it back to The Society for the Prevention of Vice and Mayor Walker.

On January 18, 1927, *The New York Times* printed a letter to the editor written by a mother, Elsie McCormack, that deplored the state of the American stage by saying,

As a mother of growing children there is one suggestion I would like to make to Mayor Walker on the subject of play censorship, and that is all forms of sex perversion be banned as subjects . . . Curiosity is one of the greatest lures at the dangerous period of adolescence. I have been compelled to enlighten my children on subjects that they have heard discussed or seen depicted upon the stage . . . nakedness and sex appeal along normal lines may discount modesty and outrage good taste, but perversion is a horror and social smallpox that should be treated in the segregation of the pest house laboratory. (Katz 85)

Like Atkinson in his review of *The Captive*, this mother uses choice language to describe her viewpoint on homosexuality, and once again, with words like “perversion”, “horror”, and “social smallpox”, it becomes clear that during this time homosexuality was still, by and large, considered a disease that could be spread, an infectious malady that should be segregated from society for the safety and well being of children in the “dangerous stage of adolescence”. It is interesting to note that when students were asked a few weeks later, in Dr. Donald Clive Stuart’s development of drama class at Princeton, “to list all the plays they had seen during the term and to choose the one liked the best, giving their reasons, [they] selected Edouard Bourdet’s *The Captive*” (Katz 85).

The discord between the mother’s concerns and the student’s response provide an example of the earliest formations of a debate we still have raging today. Although today’s argument for equality seems hyper-focused on the issue of marriage, it is important to understand that such an argument is a highly refined and polished goal arising from much earlier, and more immediate, needs for equality between hetero- and homosexuals. In 1927, homosexuals were still relegated to the sidelines, watching as institutions geared towards maintaining the rejection of homosexuality from normative culture and institutions geared towards the enlightenment and expansion of young minds laid out arguments for the rejection and acceptance of such drama. And furthermore, it was the drama, not homosexuals, the Princeton students supported. At this point it still was not about allowing homosexuals to live freely amongst society, but rather whether or not we would allow our spaces for cultural expression to express the existence and struggles of homosexuals.

Despite the ruling by the play jury that *The Captive* was not immoral, on February 10, 1927 *The Captive*, along with Mae West's *SEX* were raided by New York City police, and several members of both casts were arrested, along with Mae West herself. The next day *The Times* reported: "District Attorney Banton said yesterday that he would prosecute those implicated in the production of "The Captive" and "Sex" in spite of the fact that they had been acquitted by play juries" (Katz 87). It would seem even the legal process implemented by the Mayor himself, clearing the plays of wrong doing, would not be enough to curb the tide of censorship. *The Captive* by Bourdet and *SEX* by West were considered salacious by many, but had managed to avoid censorship for months, all the while running to packed houses. The same article in which the District Attorney threatened to ignore the ruling of the play juries and proceed with prosecution also mentioned: "Varying reasons were advanced yesterday for the sudden police activity against shows which had been permitted to run without molestation for months. It was admitted that "Sex" was not worse than it was eleven months ago, and "The Captive" no worse than it was four months ago" (Katz 87-88). District Attorney Banton advanced no specific answers as to why the police had quickly taken action, but was careful to mention that, "many complaints had come from many sources against the drama, showing that the public was thoroughly aroused" (88).

It would seem that, despite Atkinson's concern that *The Captive* would "degenerate into commercial exploitation of a revolting theme", the show itself had not digressed into something revolting. On February 13, 1927 *The Times* headline read: "RAIDED SHOWS PLAY TO CROWDED AUDIENCES-- PRODUCER DROPS THE

DRAG-- No Further Effort Will Be Made to Present It, He Declares” (Katz 88).

Although the shows that were currently running had managed to escape with only scratches and bruises (and one night spent in jail for the majority of the players), this headline would be the last the New York City stages would hear of *The Drag*. Mayor Walker had finally achieved his goal of keeping openly gay performers from presenting a piece that revolved around a community of queens and their party habits. *The Captive* and *Sex* were used as scapegoats to stem the support system of those involved with *The Drag*. Despite the censorship controversy that swirled around the production, *The Drag* provided many of the earliest instances of support for the gay community on a myriad of levels.

Mae West was often overheard discussing the fact that gay men were women trapped in a man’s body, and she even once warned an officer that if he were to hit a gay man it would be the same as hitting a woman. While Mae West’s stances towards homosexuality may seem somewhat dated by today’s standard, she changed the face of American theatre by exposing it, rather boldly one might add, to homosexuality and the concept of transgender individuals. *The Drag* not only openly dealt with gay themes, but it also provided the first instance of gay men playing gay men. In this vein, West’s treatment of homosexuality was genuine in a way that was rare for the time. Watts notes: “*The Drag* explored an issue very close to Mae, that of identity. *The Drag* castigates those who deny their true identities and celebrates those who embrace them” (87). Not only had Mae West written a work that confronted audiences with issues they rarely discussed openly, but she had also recruited the very “degenerates” the play was meant to

empower to play themselves. She was not convinced of the Freudian interpretation of homosexuality, and in fact, “favored Karl Heinrich Ulrich, a mid-century gay intellectual who advanced the theory that homosexuals represented an intermediate sex, possessing both male and female qualities” (Watts 82). As mentioned earlier, West identified with homosexual men in that she felt they shared the female experience, despite their bodily differences. Although West’s comments may seem far-fetched, or humorous, many Native American tribes openly acknowledged the existence of a third gender, or a *berdache*. These individuals were considered to have the spirits of both sexes, and were often elevated to a high status within the community as a result of their gender straddling, which translated in these societies as spiritual strength. The dominant culture of heterosexuality in America did not wish to recognize such individuals favorably, and as such were strictly against avenues through which these individuals had an opportunity to express their voice, lifestyle, or struggle. The same groups that were concerned with the suppression of homosexuality were also concerned with keeping women in their traditional roles within the fabric of American society. Societies predominated by upper-middle class white heterosexual men acted as the major force against such “vice”, and by virtue of their demographic make-up, they represented a common enemy for West and homosexuals.

In addition to being an individual out to change hearts and minds about the outsider status shared by any American that did not fit into the normative race, gender, and sexuality, Mae West was also an integral part in shaping the drag of today’s “Queen Culture”. In appearance she was always recognizable by her over-the-top glamour and

blazing sensuality. Unafraid to shy away from her female body, she used it to emphasize her already masterful command of signification, adding another layer of nuance to her double-entendres. This type of “act” was adopted by many of the drag queens she came in direct contact with, and such a practice began to take hold as the standard by which drag queens were judged. Soon this style became identifiable as camp, and although there has never been an indisputable clear starting point for camp, many, including Mae West herself, claim Ms. West as the inception of the style.

Watts notes that the gay subculture had, similar to Bert Williams as an African American performer or Mae West as a female performer, already adopted signification as a major method of communication. She mentions:

As an act of rebellion and to promote group solidarity, the gay community evolved complex and separate linguistic practices that relied intensely on double meaning. As a result, double entendre dominated drag humor, popularly referred to as “camp”. . . . West defined camp as “the kind of comedy where they imitate me. . . . Camp is bein’ funny and dishy and outrageous and sayin’ clever things”. . . . although she always claimed ascendancy, she found comradeship in the camping of drag queens. (Watts 87)

Even if the claim is made that Mae West did not provide the origin of camp, she can easily be credited with helping to shape the style, not to mention the overwhelming credit she deserves for exposing the style to American audiences.

Mae West was often embroiled in the controversy of censorship, but she herself was not a politically motivated individual. In fact, as noted by Mark Steyn’s article *Mae Days*, “the defining attribute of Mae West is not that she’s against censorship but that, in every case, she stands for self-reliance” (Steyn 42). Her reputation as a proponent of all

“unspoken voices” comes, certainly in part, from her use of signification and her willingness to expose audiences to non-traditional fare. She was not one to roll over and take what was given to her, but rather she made a career out of challenging societal norms and daring those around her to bring it to a halt. Even when being put to a halt was the reality facing her work, she weathered the storm with a level of grace and ingenuity that belied those working against her. West is famously noted for, when exiting the court room that sentenced her to fines and a short stint in jail for exposing audiences to indecency, saying loudly to reporters, “I expect it will be the making of me” (Watts 92). She was all too keenly aware the power that came from publicity, even when such publicity might be deemed negative. Despite the censorship of her work, Mae West’s *The Drag* was the first major step in American theatre towards the depiction of the homosexual community on stage. It was also the first instance of gay characters being given honest portrayals by the casting of gay performers, and her work ultimately laid the foundation for future artists who were proponents of the acceptance and understanding of gay and lesbian individuals. Although she was not a clear fighter in the ring for gay equality, she did as much as anyone to expose their lifestyle and struggle empathetically to American audiences.

Her masterful command of signification not only allowed her a lengthy and celebrated career, but it also firmly places her inside the struggle by all minorities to be allowed acceptance by mainstream American culture. Although she was a heterosexual white female with a solidarity to strengthen the state of affairs for women, her life and work helped extend the same fight to all minorities, particularly those who identified

themselves as homosexual. Mae West's legacy will always be one of an individual determined to reshape the societal restraints of a patriarchal society; however, history should not forget that she challenged not only the patriarchy's insistence upon "boys only", but also did much to belittle their "straight, white, non-immigrant boys only" mantra. Mae West has gone down in history as a purveyor of the perverse and propagator of the unspoken, but such a title only begins to scratch the surface of the advancements her career achieved for all those outside the normative culture. She was not the only female playwright to face the struggles of censorship, however.

Lillian Hellman's *The Children's Hour* (1934), much like Bourdet's *The Captive*, used the power of suggestion to create the "illicit" relationship at the center of the play. *The Children's Hour* follows two headmistresses of a school who are accused, wrongfully, of being involved in a lesbian relationship. The lie, sponsored and spread by a young girl in the school, tears down all the two built, and ultimately leads one of the women to confront her own sexuality and commit suicide in response to her self-actualization. The confrontation of her sexuality, however, is laced into the play, under the radar, masterfully by Hellman, who was careful to write *around* the new "padlock laws" that resulted from *The Captive*, *Sex*, and *The Drag*. In fact, the word lesbian does not appear in the drama, and Hellman herself was not a lesbian. Martha's confession concerning her sexuality reads:

KAREN: It's a lie. You're telling yourself a lie. We never thought of each other that way.

MARTHA: No, of course *you* didn't. But who says I didn't? I never felt that way about anybody but you. I've never loved a man-- I never knew why before. Maybe it's that. (Hellman 79)

By referring to lesbianism as “that way”, and “Maybe it’s *that*”, Hellman carefully avoids setting herself up for failure against the censors of Broadway. Tanfer Tunc, of Hacettepe University in Turkey, describes Hellman’s avoidance by saying:

Lesbian is the most powerful word in *The Children’s Hour*, yet it is never vocalised in the play. Its power therefore lies in suggestion and innuendo: the mere hint of “illicit activity” was enough to merit social and professional death in many parts of the US in the 1930s. In fact, “the L-word” was so revolting to contemporary audiences that Hellman believed including it in her dialogue would compromise the success of her play. Consequently, Martha’s lesbianism is socially constructed and Karen’s heterosexuality is socially deconstructed through a smear campaign that centres on whispering, euphemisms and the horror of possibility. (Tunc 46-47)

The Children’s Hour was Hellman’s big break, and the show, despite its content, ran for almost two years. It was widely praised as a literary masterpiece, and as she was careful to avoid any language that would put her in direct conflict with the new legislation, critics and audience members alike were able to overlook what only a few years earlier had marked *The Drag* as dangerous. Hellman’s text, however, would not manage to escape the thrashing of a censor all together. While Broadway audience’s may have developed a higher level of tolerance for the careful treatment of “illicit activity”, Hollywood was quickly overtaking Broadway as America’s hotbed of censorship struggles.

Hellman’s critical success with *The Children’s Hour* inspired William Wyler, in 1936, to turn her stage play into a script for the silver screen. Unfortunately, the censors in place for screenplays would not overlook so easily the lesbian relationship hinted at in *The Children’s Hour*. In his article *Second Chances: The Remake of Lillian Hellman’s The Children’s Hour*, Brett Westbrook writes:

The Hays Office would not allow Wyler or United Artists to make reference to the original play in any advertising or the film, and they forced a title change. No screen credit was given to Hellman along the lines of “based on the play by Lillian Hellman.” Hellman wrote the screenplay herself, changing the whispered rumor of a lesbian relationship between the two teachers to an illicit, though heterosexual, affair between one of the teachers and her colleague’s fiancé. (Westbrook 169)

Not only was Hellman forced to remove any reference, subtle as though the suggestion may have been, to lesbianism, but she was also denied equal treatment when it came to crediting her original work. Despite Hellman’s own heterosexuality in her personal life, she was still experiencing what it felt like to be a victim of censorship, simply because of the subject matter on which she chose to focus. Carl Rollyson, in *On Lillian Hellman:*

The Legacy, states:

Because the real issue for Hellman was injustice, not lesbianism, Hellman believed that her play could be successfully adapted for the screen without introducing the subject of Martha’s sexuality-- a subject that Hollywood movies of the 1930s could not address because of censorship. By changing the focus to a heterosexual triangle... Hellman’s adaptation of *The Children’s Hour*, retitled *These Three*, maintains the play’s main theme: how both individuals and society can be unreasonable and even irrational in condemning those perceived as violating society’s standards. (Rollyson 5)

It is incredibly intriguing, and even ironic, that a play with such a theme would be forced to bow to censorship. The above-stated theme draws allusions back to the day when Mayor Walker chose to ignore his own tribunal tasked with passing judgement on a play’s subject matter, and proceed with raiding and prosecuting the players and producers. Although Hellman was quite clever about ensuring her play would succeed on the Broadway stage, she was still cornered into altering her play in order that the whispered lesbian relationship entirely disappeared. Westbrook notes Wyler’s own

misgivings about his 1936 film version of the play: “Because of the major changes forced on William Wyler when he made Lillian Hellman’s smash Broadway play *The Children’s Hour* into the film *These Three*, the director commented, ‘Miss Hellman’s play has not yet been filmed’” (Westbrook 169). Fortunately, Wyler would not have to go through the rest of his life feeling as though he had bastardized Hellman’s play, and in 1961 he remade the film, this time giving full credit to Hellman’s original work.

Wyler’s 1961 film played a large part in the revamping of Hollywood’s censorship codes, and as a result of several movie houses threatening to release the film without the Hays Office stamp of approval, the current rating system was developed. Although it would be nearly thirty years after the original production on her work, the play ultimately had a major effect on the culture of homosexual censorship in America.

These three plays, though not the entire picture, shed light onto America’s early treatment of homosexuality. The 1920s and 1930s were, as far as the cultural expression of homosexuality is concerned, more about exposure than anything else. Despite the entities that were set on keeping any mention of homosexuality off the American stage, these plays indicate this period was marked by the careful emergence of those who supported shedding light onto homosexuals and the struggles they faced in their day-to-day doings. Although the next two decades would be dominated by a war and a political witch hunt, these works set the stage, so to speak, for the emergence of a homosexual community.

CHAPTER III

THE STONEWALL BUBBLE: THE EMERGENCE OF SEXUAL IDENTITY AS THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTIC OF A COMMUNITY

The progress of the roaring twenties was brought to a standstill by the crippling effects of an economic depression, and our country's focus on progressive issues, such as gender/sexuality equality, would wane for the next thirty years. Following the depression America entered a major world war, and upon returning to the home front our men and women faced a culture clash, the likes of which the country had not seen since the days of speakeasies and rum runners. The witch hunt of McCarthyism had begun during the war and was in full swing by the late 40s/early 50s, directly threatening anyone who would dare argue progressive stances rather than tow party lines. This era had a particularly negative effect on those in the entertainment industry, as the leading designers, directors, filmmakers, and actors of the day account for some of the loudest dissenting opinions towards certain political stances taken by the American government. In her exploration of gender politics during the McCarthy era Milly S. Barranger writes:

[T]he politics of tyranny that infected the cultural landscape at mid-twentieth century reminds us of the potential for a return to wholesale abridgments of civil liberties and for the abuse of government power that effectively suppressed dissenting voices fifty years ago. Moreover, those

artists of stage and film that defied congressional committees on un-American activities remind us of the personal, artistic, and cultural costs to an America enthralled by extremism. (Barranger xvi)

It was a time marked by fear, intimidation, and the splintering of cohesive artistic communities as names began to be named, regardless of their actual affiliation with Communism or the Communist Party. With so much political turmoil and certain politicians scapegoating anyone who held cultural views that challenged the normative expression of American identity, there was little hope that major headwind would be made in the fight for marriage equality. Such a fight had yet to even receive a moniker suggesting goals as clear as equality amongst marriage laws. The next thirty years, however, would set the stage for the rise of the modern argument for marriage equality by encouraging a major change amongst gay and lesbian artists, namely their interest in cultivating a community to call their own. Two particular artistic collectives, Caffè Cino and WOW Cafe, and one particular police raid on a bar, the incident at Stonewall Inn in 1969, created a tri-force of social upheaval by encouraging a spirit of community amongst gay and lesbian Americans, particularly New Yorkers, and even more particularly, theatre artists.

Noting both the incredible upheaval caused by the Stonewall riots as well as the monumental role Caffè Cino played in the cultivation of a gay artistic community, John M. Clum writes, “We define the starting point for contemporary lesbian and gay drama as the Stonewall Riots on June, 1969, though in America the pioneers of openly gay drama were already working in venues like the Caffè Cino in Greenwich Village” (Clum 1). Opened in December of 1958, Caffè Cino, a coffee shop owned and operated by Joseph

Cino, would spur a momentous change in the fabric of American theatre, both culturally and economically. The mounting commercial pressures of Broadway, and even Off-Broadway, kept many plays dealing with “fringe” issues at bay, creating an atmosphere in which only the shows expressing support for normative culture could succeed financially. To combat such pressures, plays began to be staged in venues outside the traditional spaces. Stephen J. Bottoms notes such a shift saying, “The emerging coffeehouse culture in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s provided new platforms for painters, poets, and musicians, and it was natural enough that plays, too, began to be mounted” (Bottoms 40).

The stage at Caffè Cino was barely large enough to hold more than two actors, but this did not stop Joseph Cino from actively pursuing playwrights to premiere their work at his coffeehouse. Although the earliest stagings were retellings of classics, it would not be long before Caffè Cino gained a reputation as the place to be for up-and-coming writers, particularly those who identified as homosexual. In her shared memorial for Doric Wilson and Lanford Wilson, Martha E. Stone notes, “His [Doric Wilson] one-act play *The Madness of Lady Bright* recounts drag queen Leslie Bright’s loneliness and horror at growing old. It ran for 205 performances in 1964, put Caffè Cino on the map, and prepared the way for other gay-themed plays” (Stone 8). It is interesting to note that forty years after Mae West’s *The Drag* was censored from the stages of New York City, it would be another play centering on the life and experiences of a drag queen that would solidify Cino’s collective and provide weight to the Off-Off Broadway movement.

What began as an “emerging coffeehouse culture” quickly developed into a full blown movement of theatrical expression that had traditionally been relegated to the

fringes. Once Caffè Cino opened its doors to playwrights, several other coffee shops began to stage new work. In less than five years the spark started by Joseph Cino became a full-fledged forest fire of fringe theatre, the likes of which could not be ignored by the populace of New York City. Papers began to write sections devoted specifically to reviewing “café drama”, a moniker that became necessary after the explosion of coffeehouses catering to new work developed an entire network of theatre artists, many of whom as gays and lesbians were enjoying their first experience with relative fame and acceptance. Although Joseph Cino’s collective was pivotal in the careers of many gay and lesbian theatre artists, Caffè Cino’s significance should not be reduced solely to a portion of “gay history”. Along with Doric Wilson and Lanford Wilson, Caffè Cino also began the careers of playwrights such as Bob Dahdah, Robert Patrick, Sam Shepard, not to mention a host of technicians, musicians, actors and directors, not all of whom identified as homosexual. It is also responsible for the spawning of several other collectives and performance groups, namely Ellen Stewart’s La Mama Experimental Theatre Club.

Before long, the movement inspired a host of other businesses to open their doors to theatre artists and their fledgling plays, a move that made the title “café drama” a term no longer able to encompass the entire range of fare offered. In response to Greenwich Village’s theatrical explosion the name Off-Off Broadway began to appear, language much better suited to explain what the area could offer to a theatre-going audience. In fact, it was Ellen Stewart herself who would proclaim Caffè Cino as the place where Off-Off production began. While it would be presumptuous to assume that the Off-Off

Broadway movement was a product solely realized by the work of gay and lesbian theatre artists, it cannot be ignored that Off-Off Broadway originated from Greenwich Village, a hub of fringe theatres that offered the earliest instances of a “safe-space” mentality for homosexuals in New York City.

Although Caffè Cino had found its footing as the hub for the avant-garde and spawned a theatrical revolution that did indeed foster more homosexual artists than ever before, Clum correctly points out that history marks the Stonewall Inn riots of June 1969 as the inception of the modern gay political movement. Before delving into the many changes produced by the events of that June week, it becomes necessary to elucidate the situation in which the patrons, employees, and owners of the Stonewall Inn found themselves.

The pervading culture of McCarthyism had marked a number of populaces as destructive to American ideals, figures that should be avoided at all costs and who should be considered a security threat to all Americans as well as the freedom this country expresses as its utmost virtue. Homosexuals were one of those select populaces, and with the same fervor that Communists and Anarchists were hunted, tracked, “outed”, and debased, so too were known homosexuals identified, followed, “outed”, and harassed by the American government. Naturally, this created an underground subculture of homosexual social interaction, the only way in which women and men who identified as gay saw themselves capable of operating within the American fabric.

The early “padlock laws” that threatened Mae West and any theatres of the 1920s that would present gay-themed work were still in place, and there were others that

discouraged business owners from opening their doors to homosexuals. Some laws were vaguely directed toward homosexuals, such as a law declaring if you were found to be wearing three or more pieces of “opposite-gendered” clothing, you could be arrested by the police. Other laws carried a more directly discriminative tone, regulating the amount of time you could be witnessed touching a member of the same sex, or what type of dancing was allowed between same sex individuals on the dance floor. As soon as you were found to have violated any such law, you could be legally arrested and detained, not to mention becoming the subject of illegal, but rarely reported, police brutality. Due to laws such as these (and the ever-present force of undercover plainclothes police), no respectable business owners wanted the hassle of trying to open their doors to a specifically homosexual clientele. This truth relegated the business of “gay night life” to the seedier organizations New York City housed, primarily the Italian Mafia.

Stonewall Inn was purchased by the Mafia in 1966, a crime organization already made famous for their ability to subvert law enforcement agencies and the laws they purported to enforce. The establishment was opened without a liquor license, but this hurdle was overcome by tagging the bar as a private “bottle club”. The liquor bottles were mislabeled purposely at these private clubs, an act that avoided the need for a legal license to distribute alcohol. With a clear penchant for bending the rules, the Mafia served as the perfect “family” to run bars that would openly cater to the “degenerate” clientele other businesses wanted no part of serving. Along with such ownership, however, came the inevitable downsides. Although the Mafia’s relative control over the police force, bought with bribes and payoffs, kept the bar from being shut down or too

violently raided (the bartenders were often warned of raids and the raids would often be mere walkthroughs resulting in verbal abuse alone), it did not mean the bar was a safe place. Despite the reputation Stonewall Inn had for catering to the gay community, it was public knowledge that the Mafia men despised the degenerates that kept their bar afloat, only one amongst a myriad of issues problematic for activists like Craig Rodwell.

Craig Rodwell, one of the most prolific and recognizable names in the modern gay liberation movement, once blamed Stonewall Inn for the rising hepatitis epidemic. In his work *Stonewall*, Martin Duberman discusses the incident, noting:

When a hepatitis epidemic broke out among gay men early in 1969, Craig printed an angry article in his newsletter, *New York Hymnal*, blaming the epidemic on the unsterile drinking glasses at the Stonewall Inn. And he was probably right. Stonewall had no running water behind the bar; a returned glass was simply run through one of two stagnant vats of water kept underneath the bar, refilled, and then served to the next customer. (Duberman 181)

It was knowledge of unsanitary practices such as these, as well as his distaste for the fact that the Mafia publicly denounced homosexuality, that fueled Rodwell's rising anger towards the lack of social acceptance of homosexuals.

Despite the fact that there were organizations already in place who supposedly fought for gay equality, almost all of them were bent on the assimilation of gays into normative culture rather than defining a shift in said culture that allowed homosexuals to express themselves as they saw fit. Preferring the term homophile over homosexual, an attempt to divert attention from "gayness" as purely a sexual expression, these organizations were notorious for discouraging any attempt at protest, favoring education and patience as their tools for change. Craig Rodwell, a leading force in several such

organizations, as well as the head of his own group, Homophile Youth Movement, had spent a good portion of his life fighting alongside those who believed the best bet for acceptance was through education and assimilation. All of this would change, however, in the wee hours of June 28, 1969, after a less-than-routine police raid was conducted on the Stonewall Inn.

Although there are many conflicting reports as to both why and how the raid was conducted, the fact remains that at approximately 1:20 a.m. on the morning of June 28, 1969 a police raid occurred at the Stonewall Inn. Unlike previous raids however, the ownership of the bar was not tipped off by the 6th Precinct, the police division that routinely staged minimally invasive raids in exchange for their hefty payoff. In fact, the 6th Precinct was unaware of the raid, headed by the First Division, until moments before it occurred. Although there were copious rumors surrounding the reasoning behind the raid, Duberman cites an eyewitness report that suggests the raid was actually conducted in part by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. He writes:

Ryder Fitzgerald, a sometime carpenter who had helped remodel the Stonewall interior. . . . was privy the day after the raid to a revealing conversation. . . . Putting Stonewall under surveillance, BATF then discovered the bar's corrupt alliance with the 6th Precinct. Thus when the feds decided to launch a raid on Stonewall, they deliberately kept the local police in the dark until the unavoidable last minute. (Duberman 194)

While history has a funny way of being coy with the truth of matters, the inciting incident fares little importance next to the outcome.

Unlike most of the raids conducted by the 6th Precinct, the First Division was highly interested in making arrests, and as they began to lead queens and other “degenerates” breaking the “appropriate gendered clothing” mandate away in handcuffs,

the crowd forming outside the bar began to jeer at the police force. Several accounts differ as to where the chaos began, and Duberman astutely notes, “Craig Rodwell’s view probably comes closest to the truth: ‘A number of incidents were happening simultaneously. There was no one thing that happened or one person, there was just... a flash of group-- of mass-- anger’” (Duberman 197). This moment serves to highlight an important concept surrounding the subjects of study: the creation of collective communal agreement on the issue of equal treatment under the law is of tantamount importance when it comes to adjusting both the cultural and legal code. This period is marked by the rising tide of a gay and lesbian community, and this moment marks one of the most provocative instances of the formation of such community. No moment that Duberman recounts serves to highlight the creation of community against opposition better than the image of citizens using tactical strategy on those trained best in such crowd control:

The TPF [Tactical Patrol Force] was a highly trained, crack riot-control unit. . . . wearing helmets with visors, carrying assorted weapons, including billy clubs and tear gas, it’s two dozen members all seemed massively proportioned. There were a formidable sight as, linked arm in arm, they came up Christopher Street in a wedge formation that resembled (by design) a Roman legion. . . . hundreds of others scattered to avoid billy clubs but then raced around the block, doubled back behind the troopers, and pelted them with debris. When the cops realized that a considerable crowd had simply re-formed to their rear, they flailed out angrily against anyone who came within striking distance. But the protesters would not be cowed. The pattern repeated itself several times: the TPF would disperse the jeering mob only to have it reform behind them, yelling taunts, tossing bottles and bricks, setting fires in trash cans. When the police whirled around to reverse direction at one point, they found themselves face to face with their worst nightmare: a chorus line of mocking queens, their arms clasped round each other, kicking their heels in the air Rockettes-style and singing at the tops of their sardonic voices:

*“We are the Stonewall girls
We wear our hair in curls*

*We wear no underwear
 We show our pubic hair..
 We wear our dungarees
 Above our nelly knees!"*

It was a deliciously witty, contemptuous counterpoint to the TPF's brute force, a tactic that transformed an otherwise traditionally macho eye-for-an-eye combat and that provided at least the glimpse of a different and revelatory kind of consciousness. (Duberman 200-201)

The chorus line of queens serves as the perfect metaphorical image for the bonds of community that were built as a result of the raid on the Stonewall Inn. Not only was the irony of the TPF being beaten by their own tactics an excellent expression of solidarity, but more importantly, the image of drag queens locked arm in arm marching towards the police chanting over and over "we", "we", "we", still stands today as a source of encouragement and pride in self and community for those who identify as homosexual. The chaos of the raid would not end that night, however, and the resulting tumult of the following days fed upon and grew what Duberman described as "a different and revelatory kind of consciousness" (201).

Craig Rodwell, having recognized the magnitude of the moment, was unable to keep himself away from the ruckus. The following day brought a larger crowd to Christopher Street than even the night before, as news of the previous evening's raid spread. Rodwell had a major hand in this dissemination of information by immediately alerting news media when the riots began, as well organizing two person teams to scour the nearby neighborhoods the next morning with his signature tool: an informative pamphlet. As the crowds grew, the police force was increasingly overwhelmed, and before long the protesters managed to blockade a few streets off from traffic. One

moment of particular interest arose when, “On nearby Gay Street, three or four cars filled with a wedding party were stopped in their tracks for a while; someone in the crowd shouted, ‘We have the right to marry, too!’ . . . finally the wedding party was allowed to proceed” writes Duberman (204). Little did that someone know just how poignant their comment would be when considered retrospectively. Although that individual most likely did not have a long-term logistical plan concerned with tackling marriage equality legislation, the comment highlights the importance of the moment when gays and lesbians of New York City decided they would no longer be relegated to the sidelines of society.

Craig Rodwell had served inside several homophile organizations, as well as creating his own, the Homophile Youth Movement. There are those who argue that the events which occurred at Stonewall Inn were not the inception of the modern gay movement, suggesting that the riot’s cultural myth has overshadowed the work homophile organizations already had underway. Michael Bronski, Professor of Gender Studies at Dartmouth College, calls the myth into question:

Stonewall, or rather the myth of Stonewall, has become an intrinsic part of our history. It is a milestone and touchstone of gay freedom and revolution, but it has also become a millstone weighing us down with its historical burden. Have we, as a community, given such incredible weight to Stonewall, and turned it into a sentimental story of self-assertion, that we have actually distorted what it actually means, or might mean?
(Bronski 16)

His assertion carries weight, for indeed several such organizations did exist before the riots occurred, and to forget their contribution is to remove a piece of history that should

remain present. The presence of such history, however, should only strengthen the idea of Stonewall as the inception of a new era in the movement for homosexual equality.

Many homophile organizations, staying true to their mantra of education over action, did not condone the activity on Christopher Street, and the Mattachine Society went as far as to write a message onto the side of Stonewall Inn's facade: We homosexuals plead with our people to please help maintain peaceful and quiet conduct on the streets of the village. Although these organizations were already present, they did not have an interest in violent activism, but were rather more concerned with acceptance through assimilation into normative culture. Bronski's question becomes more convoluted as his own words seem to support the exact assertion he is fighting against: "Stonewall was, in a very real sense, both a continuation of this [homophile organization's] work as well as a radical break from it, as it brought the very idea of homosexuality from the realm of the private into the public world of the street and used anger, not reason, as its impetus" (Bronski 18). Although he is correct in identifying Stonewall as one point in a long line of important history, it would seem that even he cannot escape the reality that the raid on Stonewall Inn, and the riots that followed, were characterized by a different kind of force than previously employed by the homophile movement. Such a unique force must be what Duberman was hoping to capture with the phrase, "a different and revelatory kind of consciousness" (201).

Eric Orner, in an illustrated essay for *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, reveals how, as a young child, the events at Stonewall did not seem to hold much weight in his world. Having only been 5 years old, Stonewall was not looming large in his consciousness, and

the first “gay event” that did hold weight was the assassination of Harvey Milk. Orner describes feeling somewhat ashamed that he did not understand the importance of Stonewall at the time it occurred, but he now seems to have bought into the myth: “Maybe generations from now Stonewall will be forgotten. I bet not though, because people are sentimental. I think it’s more likely that, assuming the survival of gay men and lesbians (something which as a Jew of German heritage, I never do), the shrine-like nature of that spot in Greenwich Village will only grow with time. A place where the drag queens led us out of Egypt” (Orner 47). To describe Stonewall in such biblical proportions is the exact kind of attitude Michael Bronski seems concerned about encouraging for fear that it will somehow lessen the surrounding moments of historical importance. The fact remains, however, that for Eric Orner, and many other homosexuals, the Stonewall Inn has become something of a “shrine”. The question remains then, why did the events at Stonewall Inn reach mythic status?

Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crago in their comparative-historical analysis of Stonewall alongside four other earlier events of a similar nature, write: “Claims about the historical importance of Stonewall continue, even though historians of sexuality have challenged the novelty of the events at Stonewall Inn. The Stonewall riots did not mark the origin of gay liberation. . . . They were not the first time gays fought back against police; nor was the raid at Stonewall Inn the first to generate political organizing” (724-725). They too seek out an answer to the question about how and why Stonewall became such a recognizable moment in history, and their reasoning sheds light onto the many factors surrounding the rise of the Stonewall myth.

It would seem sentimentality is not the leading force behind the elevation of the Stonewall myth. Armstrong and Crag identify four factors that must come together for any event, gay-inspired or otherwise, for said event to become a part of a populace's collective memory. The first of these, commemorability, simply refers to the recognition by a group of people that an event has occurred which would be worthwhile to commemorate. Second, said event must have mnemonic capacity, or rather, there must be what Armstrong and Crag call a "commemorative vehicle" (726). This vehicle must be of some magnitude however, or else it is destined to fail. Commemorative vehicles can range from statues and plaques to parades and picnics, but simply having the capacity to commemorate an event does not ensure the event's entrance into collective memory. Third, they speak of resonance, or a group's response to the commemoration. Not only must the event inspire commemoration, require individuals with the organizing capacity to create a commemorative vehicle, speak deeply to those for whom the commemoration is for, but it must also, fourth, become institutionalized, which is to say its resonance must reach beyond just the populace for which it is intended. Armstrong and Crag point out, "Designing public commemorative rituals to fit with media routines may also contribute to survival by ensuring periodic revisiting of the story" (727). Their study points out four other events prior to the raid on the Stonewall Inn that could easily have had the same cultural significance if they had not failed to achieve a spot in America's, primarily gay Americans, collective memory. Although their study argues that the Stonewall riots were no more or less important than similar moments that occurred

directly before Stonewall, it is interesting to inspect Craig Rodwell's involvement in the Stonewall riots against these four factors.

The Stonewall Riots conveniently occurred only days prior to the yearly demonstration of protest against inequality outside Independence Hall called the Annual Reminder, an event Craig Rodwell began four years before the riots occurred. This year, however, he would attend it with a force of young men and women compelled to participate after the events of June 28 at Stonewall Inn. As has been previously noted, Rodwell was already well versed in community organizing and information dissemination before the Stonewall riots. These skills would prove invaluable in the days directly after the riots, and upon closer inspection it becomes clear that Rodwell had a hand in pulling together all of the four factors Armstrong and Crag identified. "The demonstration in front of Independence Hall began in much the way it had in previous years. . . . but the events at Stonewall had had their effect. After a half hour of marching quietly in single file, two of the women suddenly broke ranks and started to walk together holding hands" writes Duberman (209-210). Craig Rodwell found himself elated by the public show of affection, "but Frank Kameny, the Washington, D.C., leader who had long considered himself to be in charge of the demonstration, had quite a different reaction... yelling 'None of that! None of that!' Kameny came up behind the two women and angrily broke their hands apart. Craig instantly hit the ceiling" (Duberman 210). Fueled by the very recent riots, Craig Rodwell was thoroughly angered that someone within their own movement would still condemn such displays. When a reporter was speaking with Kameny shortly after he broke the two women apart, Rodwell interrupted the interview

with a burst of fiery language calling for new leadership in the gay movement. Whatever similarities he had with other members of the homophile movement were lost, either in this moment or possibly the moment he noticed the uneasy stirring around the Stonewall Inn. Either way, Craig Rodwell was no longer interested in business as usual.

On the bus ride home from Independence Hall the arguing was heated as Rodwell tried to impress upon the other leaders of the movement how important it was for them to seize the moment with fervor instead of keeping on track with their typical tools for change.

As the contention continued, it became clear to Craig that this would be the final Reminder-- that a new day had dawned, which required different tactics, a different format. Yet it saddened him to think that a common enterprise of five years standing would pass from the scene without any immediate replacement in sight. And then it came to him. Why shouldn't there be an immediate replacement? Didn't the events at Stonewall themselves require commemoration? Maybe the Annual Reminder simply ought to be moved to New York-- but, unlike the Reminder, be designed not as a silent plea for rights but as an overt demand for them. Craig thought of the name right then and there: Christopher Street Liberation Day. (Duberman 210-211)

Exactly as Armstrong and Cragge point out, the first step was for someone to recognize the opportunity for commemorability, and who better to recognize it than someone who was already well trained in the creation of commemorative vehicles. Not only did Rodwell recognize the event's commemorability and organize the first commemorative vehicle, but much in the same way he alerted news outlets to the riots as soon as they begun, Rodwell also used media routines to his advantage to help institutionalize the event's commemoration. The resonance was already present, Greenwich Village still buzzing

over the recent raids. Suddenly, all four elements required to emblazon and event into collective memory were present at the heart of a gay event unlike ever before in history.

Although the Stonewall riot's connection to theatre is tenuous, it cannot be ignored. More than that, it must be examined. Despite the claims made by scholars such as Bronski, Armstrong, and Crage, it would seem that the Stonewall riots do indeed mark the inception of a new kind of consciousness: No longer would the homophile organizations reign dominant, and liberation, not assimilation, moved to the forefront of goals for activists like Craig Rodwell.

It is no mistake that within only a few years of Joseph Cino cultivating a community of gay artists in Greenwich Village there would be an event that marked the coming together of the Greenwich Village gay community at large. Only a few years after the Caffè Cino took root, during 1967, the "padlock laws" generated to keep homosexuality off American stage were removed from the law books. It may be true that history has elevated the mythic status of Stonewall above its actual reality, but it cannot be denied that, in the same way Joseph Cino set out to advance the opportunities of gay theatre artists, Craig Rodwell set out to advance the opportunities of gays, no matter what their chosen field. These two men existed in the same place, at the same time, and to deny the intertwining of their goals is to ignore the nature of the late 1960s for homosexuals: across the board these men and women were no longer interested in being on the sidelines, and they recognized the best way to achieve equality was to band together, both artistically and socially. It is curious, however, to note that these two

figures are both men, and almost the entirety of the crowd at Stonewall Inn were men.

Where, then, do women fit into this history?

Jill Dolan's *Theatre & Sexuality* points out that while, "gradually, white gay men writing gay plays saw their work successfully produced in mainstream forums... no commercial counterpart existed at the time to tell the story of lesbian lives of those LGBTQ people of colour" (Dolan 22). Kate Davy, another leading mind and pen in both the realm of theatre and sexuality, particularly feminist theory, shares an illuminating quote:

Theater scholar David Savran made this point in a provocative essay on theater as "the queerest art." He identified the emergence of "the new American queer theater" in such contexts as Broadway and beyond: "The new queer theater has done little to redress the long history of the exclusion of women as playwrights, directors, and designers in prestigious commercial venues . . . almost invariably gay men have achieved levels of visibility and power in theater that are routinely denied to women. (Davy 3)

It would seem for all the fervor, passion, and excitement for equality the queens of Stonewall riled up with their chorus line kicks and taunting songs, women were still subject to being denied opportunity based on their gender, let alone their sexuality. Caffé Cino had done more than ever before to provide gay men an outlet through which to express themselves and develop a community, and the rising awareness of the queens who fought back at Stonewall provided young, more effeminate, gay men with the semblance of role models. Lesbian women, however, did not have the same level of success through the 1970s. Owing to this fact, Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw, two women in a lesbian relationship, fresh back from touring the 1978 European theatre festival circuit, set out to change what Caffé Cino and the Stonewall riots had not.

In an effort to provide a forum through which women's voices, particularly women, of all races, who identified as lesbian or queer and of color, Weaver and Shaw created Women's One World festival in October of 1980. Kate Davy describes the collective in her essay *Reading Past the Heterosexual Imperative* saying, "An unmistakable specificity is evident in pieces performed at WOW-- the address is clearly lesbian. Freely borrowing from popular culture forms, WOW artists produce pieces based on scenarios from familiar, recognizable entertainment genres. In this work, they construct subcultural, under-the-text imagery, metaphors, and conventions derived from lesbian culture" (Davy 136).

Several of the companies Weaver and Shaw toured with during their stint in Europe were highly interested in participating in such an event, but would have to do so by their own means; WOW operated on a seemingly non-existent budget and could not afford to subsidize any portion of their European companions' expenses. Despite the challenges, however, the first WOW festival did occur and it ushered in a new era for lesbian artists in the same way Joseph Cino's Caffè Cino had provided a place for gay men nearly two decades earlier. Jill Dolan underscores the importance of the collective describing it as, "a vital proving ground for a generation of lesbian performers" (Dolan 27). Again along similar lines as Caffè Cino, the WOW collective, "staged on a microlevel that which remained unimaginable on a macro one. In doing so, the collective fulfilled a promise axiomatic to the project of avant-garde art and performance: to alter consciousness, to shift the paradigm under which consciousness operates" (Davy 21).

Such an attitude aligns perfectly with the “different and revelatory kind of consciousness” Duberman cites the Stonewall riots as having ushered into existence (201).

WOW was markedly modern in its break from the homophile movement’s insistence on assimilation, a mark important in understanding the shift in tone this period marks for the LGBTQ equality movement. Figures such as Craig Rodwell embody the transitional period in which the ideals of the previous homophile movement collided with the fresh take on homosexual equality, while Weaver and Shaw’s collective demonstrates how, in only two decades, the transition was virtually complete. By the 1980s there were no longer more than traces of assimilationist policy, and WOW shows how the ideals of “out and proud” were not only well underway, but also the preferred type of activism amongst the homosexual community. While it is unfortunate that it took another decade for something as vital as WOW to emerge, this fact clearly owes to gender discrimination more than it does discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Both theatre collectives, Joseph Cino’s Caffè Cino and Weaver and Shaw’s WOW, hold their place in history as the earliest successful collectives to offer opportunities to LGBTQ artists, and by no coincidence these two collectives bookend one of the most important events in LGBTQ history. It should come as no surprise that the riots at Stonewall fall between the emergence of these two performance groups. While the riots themselves were not an act of staged live theatre, they were an act of political theatre, and they did represent a shift in the goals of the equality movement: in order to achieve equality a community must be built, organized, and bent on demanding equal treatment by society and under the law. These two theatre collectives played an instrumental role in

building community for gay and lesbian artists, and the Stonewall riots, despite their mythic retellings, represent a moment in history when LGBTQ peoples came together to demand they not be relegated to the dark underbelly of society. The mid 1960s to the mid 1980s are a period characterized by the emergence and cultivation of an LGBTQ community, not to mention the term LGBTQ itself. Before the mid 80s the term “gay community” was in popular use, and nearing the end of the 1980s the term LGBT emerged. The Q, standing for queer, became a popular addition by the end of the 1990s. This shift in vernacular demonstrates clearly the affect this time period had on the cultivation of a community for homosexuals, an element whose presence was absolutely vital to the rise of the argument for marriage equality in the following decades.

CHAPTER IV

THE PERFORMANCE OF POLICY: MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Despite the enormous contribution made towards equality for homosexuals by figures such as Joseph Cino, Mae West, Lillian Hellman, Craig Rodwell and others, none were too concerned with marriage laws. These men and women were on the early front lines of equality within American stage work and society at large, and as such, marriage equality was not a high priority. Before such issues could be tackled it would be necessary to explore and expose the struggle of homosexuals, much like Mae West's *The Drag*. It would be necessary to mobilize groups of committed activists who would demand equal treatment for homosexuals. Today Craig Rodwell can be credited with doing just that, and inspiring others to continue such organizational work. It would be necessary to cultivate a community willing to live their lives "out and proud", something Caffe Cino and WOW Cafe helped accomplish in Greenwich Village. The work of these artists and activists set the stage for the possibility of marriage equality legislation in the opening decades of the 21st century.

The men and women discussed in the preceding chapters did not have the luxury of relative acceptance that homosexuals enjoy today. Although the word "relative" should be strongly emphasized in order that no gravity be taken from hate crimes that still

occur, it is important to understand what our predecessors went through to secure such a relative freedom. In *Why Marriage?* George Chauncy states: “The place of lesbians and gay men in American society has dramatically changed in the last half century. The change has been so profound that the harsh discrimination once faced by gay people has virtually disappeared from popular memory. That history bears repeating, since its legacy shapes today’s debate over marriage” (Chauncy 5). It can be easy to see situations such as the 2011 Chick-fil-A controversy and feel shell shocked about the state of affairs in America. Any time two opposing forces manage to put hundreds of thousands of people on the street, all across the country, with picket signs, demanding their point of view be seen and heard, it is easy to assume the country is in the midst of a “cultural war” of sorts. Perhaps it is, but it is important to note, however, that no riots broke out during the National Kiss In, an event in which homosexuals gathered in front of Chick-fil-A stores around the nation to express their solidarity of disagreement with the CEO’s comments about support for traditional marriage. No rioting occurred during the conservative faith-based movement, Chick-fil-A Appreciation Day, either, a response crafted by Mike Huckabee to combat the media attention received by the Kiss In.

In short, the tide of violence seems to be turning slowly in favor of tolerance, regardless of whether or not the issue of equality is any less hotly debated. As such, it can be easy for LGBTQ individuals of the younger generations to forgo any concern with this history, having spent their lives in this new relative freedom. George Chauncy points out:

Although most people recognize that gay life was difficult before the growth of the gay movement in the 1970s, they often have only the vaguest sense of why: that gay people were scorned and ridiculed, made to feel ashamed, afraid, and alone. But antigay discrimination was much more systematic and powerful than this. Fifty years ago there was no *Will & Grace*, no *Philadelphia*. . . . In fact Hollywood films were prohibited from including lesbian or gay characters, discussing gay themes, or even inferring the existence of homosexuality. . . . censorship extended to the stage as well. . . . Fifty years ago, no openly gay people worked for the federal government. . . . Fifty years ago, countless teachers, hospital workers, and other state and municipal employees also lost their jobs as a result of official policy. . . . Fifty years ago there were no gay business associations or gay bars advertising in newspapers. . . . Fifty years ago, elected officials did not court the gay vote and the nation's mayors did not proclaim LGBT pride week. . . . Fifty years ago there was no mass LGBT movement. In fact, the handful of early activists risked everything to speak up for their rights. . . . Fifty years ago no state had a gay rights law. . . . Fifty years ago, more than half of the nation's states, including New York, Michigan, and California, enacted laws authorizing the police to force persons who were convicted of certain sexual offenses, including sodomy-- or in some states, merely being suspected of being "sexual deviants"-- to undergo psychiatric examinations. . . . Fifty years ago, in other words, homosexuals were not just ridiculed and scorned. They were systematically denied their civil rights: their right to free assembly, to patronize public accommodations, to free speech, to a form of intimacy of their own choosing. And they confronted a degree of policing and harassment that is almost unimaginable to us today. (Chauncy 5-11)

Despite the grueling account of what has come before, Chauncy does not seem intent on scaring people, but rather he seems to intimately understand the pitfalls of forgetting history, especially when that history tells a tale of "systematic" oppression. "Forget not from whence you came, lest you should forget to where you were going" seems much more appropriate to describe Chauncy's outlook on the history behind the equality movement. Without remembrance of this history, there is the possibility that all the progress already made by those who blazed the trail of homosexual equality will be lost.

The previous chapters have already explored how the American stage had a major hand in helping expose the life struggle of homosexuals as well as helping to cultivate a community of their own. The stage, however, has not relinquished its position at the helm of social examination and exploration when it comes to equality. In fact, the American stage has seen an insurgence of plays dealing with issues of equality for homosexuals since the turn of the new century. Unlike their predecessors, however, these plays take the approach of specificity as their tool for change. While Mae West's *The Drag* was mostly concerned with the exposure of the lifestyle in a broad sense, and while Bourdet's *The Captive* and Hellman's *The Children's Hour* were forced to cleverly lace their intended subject matter under the surface of their text, more recent texts have shown an inclination to directly explore, and even attack, specific situations where inequality remains present. Shows such as *Next Fall* (2009), *Standing on Ceremony* (2011), and *8* (2011) demonstrate the value of the stage in identifying areas of the legal code that propagate inequality, humanizing the equal rights movement by identifying common variables between homo- and heterosexuals, and in some cases, as is true with *8*, disseminating vital information that could turn the tide of support for what is already one of the most contentious areas of American politics.

Next Fall, written by Geoffrey Nauffts, and first staged Off-Broadway in 2009, serves as a prime example for the shifting nature of LGBTQ drama since the turn of the century. The show, while predominantly concerned with the convergence of homosexuality and faith, does not miss an opportunity to point out a specific legal right denied to significant others of the same sex: the right to be present at a loved one's death

bed. *Next Fall* follows two men in a committed relationship, Adam and Luke, one of whom grapples with faith, while the other is a devout atheist. When an unfortunate car accident lands Luke unconscious in a hospital bed, the members of his life that would typically stay segregated from one another become thrown together and are forced to confront issues that always laid latent. The play hinges on questions about the intersection of belief and homosexuality, but in a climactic moment during the sixth scene of the second act the text reads:

BUTCH: He wants more time, Arlene. With Luke. He wants more of it.

ARLENE: Time?

ADAM: Look, I don't wanna play this game anymore.

BUTCH: What game?

ADAM: You know what game I'm talking about.

BUTCH: There's a game?

ADAM: Yes and I'm not playing it.

ARLENE: Butch, maybe we should--

BUTCH: I wasn't aware of any game, Arlene, were you?

ADAM: Ten minutes... Just give me ten more minutes and I'll be out of here.

BUTCH: Ten minutes?

ARLENE: Come on, Butch. We can--

BUTCH: I'm not going anywhere.

ADAM: (*exploding*) I WANT MORE TIME, ALRIGHT?! I'M NOT ASKING ASKING ANYMORE, I'M TELLING YOU. (*Holly rushes in from the hallway*) Now I've been trying to be decent about all this, but none of you are making it easy.

BUTCH: Who the heck is this guy?

ARLENE: Butch, please.

BUTCH: Walking in here like he owns the place.

ARLENE: Let's just--

BUTCH: I don't even know who you are, son.

ADAM: You don't know who I am?

HOLLY: Okay, everybody--

BUTCH: I could have your ass thrown out of here.

ADAM: I'm sure you could.

BUTCH: And there wouldn't be a damn thing you could do about it.
(Nauffts 64-65)

The game Adam refers to, and Butch pretends to remain ignorant of, is of course Adam's relationship to Butch's son, Luke. While the issue of visitation rights does not find itself at the center of this work, it is a powerful moment that transcends the issues of faith and relationships found at the heart of the piece. Butch makes Adam keenly aware of the fact that he has no right to be present, despite the four years that Adam has spent as Luke's partner.

While the careful dance Adam does around the "game" does seem to harken back somewhat to the power of suggestion utilized by Bourdet and Hellman in their works *The Captive* and *The Children's Hour*, respectively, there is no question about Adam and Luke's homosexuality in *Next Fall*. This moment is meant as a direct attack on the situation same-sex significant others can find themselves in during the end of their loved one's life. Unlike the debate that swirled around Terry Schiavo and her family from 1994 to 2005, which concerned whether it should be the parental unit or the significant other who has the right to make decisions about "pulling the plug", there is no question about who holds the reins of Luke's life or any decisions concerning who should or can be present. While this text does not make marriage equality the sole focus of its argument, it does demonstrate a shift from the vague to the specific. The emotional dynamic of Adam's struggle to be near his loved one helps put a human face on a particular inequality that homosexual couples face in society. By inserting this moment into his text, Nauffts has subtly identified a particular area that could be corrected by legislation,

Other texts in recent years, however, have tackled marriage equality as their primary agenda.

On June 14, 2010 *Standing on Ceremony*, a collection of short plays dealing with a myriad of angles on the issue of marriage equality, premiered in New York City. The New York Theatre Workshop commissioned thirteen well-known playwrights, including Paul Rudnick, Moisés Kaufman, Wendy MacLeod, and Mo'Nique, among others, to respond in any way they saw fit to the issue of marriage equality. What emerged was a poignant, “cross-section of the varied, often conflicting attitudes toward gay marriage among contemporary American queers” (Fitzgerald 121). The power of this collection stems from its acknowledgement of the fact that marriage equality is not the endgame all in the homosexual activist community hope for.

Yasmin Nair provides an enlightening point of view in the introduction to a collection of essays entitled *Against Equality*, a text devoted to sharing dissenting opinions on marriage equality from homosexual men and women. She writes:

[The year] 2008 saw a spate of suicides by teens who killed themselves after relentless bullying by peers for supposedly being gay. This led straights and gays alike to assert that the legalization of gay marriage would remove the stigma of being gay by conferring normality upon queer/queer-identified teens. . . . But if we follow this idea to its logical end, it becomes apparent that what appears to be a wish to bestow dignity upon queers is in fact deeply rooted in fear and loathing of the unmarried and a neoliberal belief that the addition of private rights tied to the state's munificence will end all social problems. . . . Yet surely if a teen is unhappy or commits suicide because he/she is gay and cannot bear to live in a homophobic world, or because he/she is relentlessly taunted by peers for looking/acting gay, surely the problem, the very great problem, lies in the shocking cruelty of a world that will not tolerate any deviation from a norm. When we decide that the solution to such cruelty is to ensure that queer/queer-seeming teens should appear normal via gay marriage, are we not explicitly condoning and even

creating a world where discrimination is acceptable? Are we not explicitly telling queer teens and adults that non-conformity can and should lead to death? (Nair 3)

Much like the concerns about the “myth” of Stonewall overriding the actual events that transpired, Nair worries that a hyper-focus on marriage equality as the final stamp of full equality for LGBTQ individuals will diminish a broad range of issues such individuals find themselves confronted with. *Standing on Ceremony*, while clearly an event created by and for proponents of equality, did not shy away from including short plays that challenged marriage equality as the final step in securing full equal treatment under the law.

London Mosquitos, the short play contributed to *Standing on Ceremony* by Moisés Kaufman, provides a clear-cut argument advocating that marriage equality not be viewed as the event that would mark the culmination of the gay rights movement. The piece centers on Joe, who delivers a eulogy for his recently deceased partner, not husband, of almost fifty years. Over the course of his delivery, Joe offers two important thoughts about the nature of same-sex partnering, and the possible pitfalls arising from same-sex marriage. Kaufman pens:

When this whole “marriage conversation” started and our friends began getting married, I asked him about it: Should we get married? He didn’t reply, he just turned and walked out of the room. Every time I tried to bring it up, he’d get upset and storm out. Finally I told him: I don’t care much one way or another, but why don’t you want to get married? Paul yelled at me and said, “If we married now, we’d be having our one year anniversary next year. What would that say about the last forty-five years? That we were just messing around? Messing around for all that time?” He said, “I stopped messing around with you the night I kissed you! NO! We can’t erase history that way!” He was right of course. My Paul. Marriage is not about contracts. It’s about witnessing! I have been so

fortunate in my life to be able to witness Paul for so long!” (Kaufman 10-11)

With marriage equality legislation being such a hot-button issue, it can be easy to dismiss the idea that anyone in the LGBTQ community would be against the prospect of marriage equality, but as Kaufman points out, marriage equality legislation is a much more complex issue than it may seem on the surface. There are those inside the LGBTQ community that view marriage equality as a return to the homophile agenda of the early 1920s and 1930s: Assimilation into normative culture favored over acceptance of the already present sub-culture.

By allowing homosexuals to marry, the worry becomes that the unions already created between LGBTQ individuals, no matter what degree of legality is present, if any, become insignificant. Kaufman paints a clear picture of a possible pitfall stemming from marriage equality legislation when he muses about marriage restarting the “counter” on Joe’s relationship with Paul. If the State only recognizes their relationship from the moment of exchanged vows, what is to be understood about all the previous years spent together? Do those years become relegated to the sidelines, seemingly less significant than the years in which their union was legally recognized? It is questions such as these that continue to fuel the debate over marriage equality, even amongst those who identify as homosexual.

These questions, however, are doubly important because they are questions that heterosexual couples can ask about their relationships and choice to marry as well. In this way it connects Joe and Paul’s sentiment with every American wondering about the prospects of marriage, and allows a subtle way for heterosexual audience members to

identify themselves with a homosexual couple. Despite this invitation for heterosexual audience members to identify with their homosexual counterparts, however, Kaufman does not attempt to equate homo- and heterosexuality with one another entirely. In fact, the most direct attack Kaufman takes against marriage equality comes later in the piece when Joe states clearly: “We’re always gaining things. Small and large victories. But each triumph has a price. We get aids medications, but our fighting spirit ceases to soar. We get to come out of the closet, but we lose the clandestine and secret habits of the past, we get marriage but we lose the habit of inventing our own unions” (Kaufman 11).

Although LGBTQ men and women would still have the choice to remain unmarried, it seems that Kaufman worries that legalizing gay marriage would promote assimilation into normative culture, resulting in the loss of individuality and pride. For Kaufman, this does not appear as a step up, but rather a step sideways. Commenting on the power of Kaufman’s play to treat marriage equality as a separate issue, rather than the culminating head of the LGBTQ movement, Nair states, “Without fanfare, Kaufman’s play quietly dismissed the link between same-sex marriage and its most common discursive companions, progress and gay self-affirmation” (Nair). The majority of *Standing on Ceremony* is populated with texts that satirically advocate for the acceptance of marriage equality, but by including Kaufman’s play, the overall collection becomes a fuller representation of the range of sentiment surrounding the issue, and challenges the audience to truly consider what marriage equality could mean for LGBTQ individuals.

Many of the other short plays in *Standing on Ceremony* did not focus on the possibilities of repercussions should national marriage equality legislation become a

reality, but rather attempted to connect audience members to the “ridiculousness” of the present inequality. Jordan Harrison’s *The Revision* is centered around two gay men, Nate and Wallace, attempting to reach a consensus on the wording of their marriage vows. Wallace prefers something “traditional”, but with each attempt to read Nate his thoughts, Nate offers a bitter dose of reality cloaked in side-splitting satire. When Wallace recites “lawfully wedded husband” Nate points out that they would be misleading their guests to suggest this marriage ceremony has wedded them by law. He would rather opt for “lawfully civil-unioned or domestic partnered”, and when Wallace uses the age old “for richer or poorer” Nate cannot help but point out that the law will not allow for any “pooling of wealth”. The resulting line becomes “for better or worse, through the rising and falling of our individualized fiscal portfolios”, and the game goes on, slowly picking apart the “traditional” vows and pointing out the ways in which such vows do not apply to the current legal state for LGBTQ individuals. After all is said and done, and Wallace has appeased Nate’s desire for accuracy, the vows read:

Do you, Nathan Phillip Percy, take Wallace Walker to be your lawfully civil-unioned or domestic partnered partner, to have and to hold from this day forward, through the rising and falling of your individualized fiscal portfolios, in accordance with the stipulations of your respective health-care providers, with best wishes for each other’s continued existence, and do you promise, in the eyes of God and the ever shifting whims of state and federal constitutional law, to cherish him for the rest of your days?
(Harrison 7)

Despite the abundant opportunities for laughs within this text, not to mention just within these vows, the wording does a two-fold trick on exposing inequality. First and foremost, it highlights the disparity between traditional and same-sex partnerships. By pointing out that the partnership is not a marriage, that the union does not mean finances can be

pooled, that health-care facilities will not recognize the union, and by connecting those facts to the “ever changing whims of federal and constitutional law”, Harrison identifies for the audience where within the legal code there is room for improvement, where inclusivity is concerned. His examination is two-fold, however, for he does not fail to include certain parts of the vows that would apply to all, no matter their sexual orientation.

Lying underneath the bold statements about the disparity of healthcare and financial options made available to LGBTQ partnerships versus heterosexual ones, Harrison includes phrases that appeal to any person’s sensibilities about the love between two people. If you remove from the revised vows any satirical reference to the legal code, the vows read “Do you, Nathan Phillip Percy, take Wallace Walker, to have and to hold from this day forward, with best wishes for each other’s continued existence, and do you promise in the eyes of God to cherish him for the rest of your days?”. All the while the audience is being presented with the gaps between marriage and domestic partnership, they are also subtly being fed language that indicates these two men have the same desires as any other couple in America wishing to state publicly their intention of spending their lives together. It identifies them as “normal Americans” despite their sexual orientation placing them outside normative culture. *Standing on Ceremony* provides the American stages with a diverse look into the cultural views surrounding marriage equality legislation, and even more so than *Next Fall*, these texts point out specific areas of the legal code which propagate inequality, while simultaneously warning

that marriage equality is the not only route through which to adjust the disparities between homo- and heterosexuals.

The present legal reality for marriage in America is still resting upon a definition that calls marriage the union of one man to one woman. To date, twelve states have legalized same sex unions, and while this may seem like an incredible step forward for homosexual equality, it is important to remember that the other thirty-eight states either have statutes or constitutional amendments that ban same-sex marriage. One state in particular, California, has taken an interesting route during its struggles to find a common ground on the issue.

Since the turn of the new century, both American society and drama have taken a more pointed focus on specific legal inequalities. Events in California, and Dustin Lance Black's play *8* that document those events, embody the ways in which society is grappling with the definition of marriage and all who are allowed to marry. Black, best known for his screenplay *Milk*, saw an opportunity to expose to the nation what happened behind the closed doors of Judge Vaughn Walker's courtroom during August of 2010. Judge Walker was tasked with ruling on the constitutionality of California's Proposition 8. Using the actual transcripts from the 2010 hearings, Black crafted a stage play, *8*, with the goal of revealing to the nation the incredible weight of the proceedings. More than any other American play, *8* grapples with the legal ramifications surrounding the attempt to define marriage.

May 15, 2008 marks the day the California Supreme Court ruled that laws aimed towards LGBTQ citizens should be subject to strong judicial review, while

simultaneously stating that marriage is a fundamental right promised by the constitution. This ruling overturned previous bans on same-sex marriage, sending those who are opposed to the idea into a frenzy of political maneuvering in an attempt to re-establish such a ban. During the November 2008 elections, California added to its ballot a proposition for a constitutional amendment that would define marriage as specifically occurring only between one man and one woman. This proposition was known as Prop 8, and opponents to gay marriage stopped at nothing to see the ballot initiative was passed. Commercials were released that warned parents if Prop 8 did not pass their children would become subject to being taught about gay marriage in their schools. Black chronicles several of these derisive television ads in 8, using them to highlight the volatile nature of the debate surrounding marriage equality in California during 2008. The ads are so blatantly crafted to inspire fear, that Black chooses to use one as the opening image of his work:

(YES ON 8 AD featuring a FRIGHTENED MOTHER and her DAUGHTER):

YOUNG GIRL: Mom, guess what I learned in school today?

MOM: What Sweetie?

YOUNG GIRL: I learned a prince can marry a prince, and I can marry a princess one day.

(MOM IS SHOCKED)

ANNOUNCER: Think it can't happen? It's already happened. When Massachusetts legalized gay marriage, schools began teaching second graders that boys can marry boys. The courts ruled that parents have no right to object.

(CLOSE ON: THE FRIGHTENED MOTHER)

WOMAN'S VOICE: Under California law, public schools instruct kids about marriage. Teaching children about gay marriage will happen here unless we pass Proposition 8. Yes on 8. (Black 1)

Proposition 8 was crafted in response to the 2008 decision by the California Supreme Court that stated statutes discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation were unconstitutional. Attempting to stem the tide of same-sex marriages resulting from the May, 2008 court ruling, a petition was circulated, and enough signatures were gathered to merit putting Prop 8 onto the 2008 ballot.

The November, 2008 elections saw the passing of Prop 8 by popular vote, and suddenly all future marriages between same-sex couples were halted, while those who had already married in the small window of time between the enactment of the State Supreme Court's ruling in June, and the passing of Prop 8 in November, began to worry about the validity of their unions. In May of 2009, the state courts upheld Prop 8, but ruled that any same-sex marriages already in existence would remain legal and valid. While this obviously solved the smaller problem, those who had already married could stay so, it also confirmed the validity of Prop 8 as it would apply to all future wedding hopefuls. Prop 8 was now out of the hands of California courts, but this did not stop advocates for the overturning of Prop 8 from seeking hearings with higher courts.

Judge Vaughn Walker of the U.S. District Court heard arguments in the case of *Perry v. Schwarzenegger* in August of 2010. He ruled, in 2010, that Prop 8 was indeed unconstitutional, as it violated the federal constitution's Equal Protection Clause. Judge Walker's ruling was reviewed and on February 7, 2012 it was upheld by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, slating the case to be heard before the highest American court, the United States Supreme Court. On March 26, 2013 oral arguments were heard before the Supreme Court, with a projected ruling in June 2013. Judge Walker's August 2010

ruling set in motion a chain of events that could very likely lead to the overturning of California's attempt to bar any future same-sex marriages from occurring in their state. Despite attempts made by advocacy groups and media outlets to open the proceedings to the public, Judge Walker's courtroom remained closed off from the press and spectators. With such a monumental ruling occurring, there were few who did not avidly wish to know what took place during the August proceedings, and Dustin Lance Black utilized the American stage to answer the questions concerning the nature and content of the hearing.

Several factors contributed to making *Perry vs. Schwarzenegger* (now *Hollingsworth vs. Perry*) a case of historical importance. To begin, many of the witnesses for the defense refused to take the stand after their deposition. Similar to his inclusion of the "Yes on 8" ads, Black expertly weaves video reenactments of deposition tapes into the narrative of his work:

(The VIDEO SCREENS light up again. This time with a video reenactment of DR. TAM's deposition. We hear MR. BOIES off screen)

MR. BOIES (V.O.): What is your relationship to the Traditional Family Coalition?

DR. TAM: I am the executive director of Traditional Family Coalition.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): This is an email that you wrote on May 15, 2008, correct?

DR. TAM: Yes.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): And the last sentence of this says: "We can't lose the battle for Proposition 8, or God's definition of marriage will be permanently erased in California." Was that your motivation for participating with ProtectMarriage.com in promoting Proposition 8?

DR. TAM: Uhm, the other reason is I think it's very important that our children won't grow up to fantasize or think about, should I marry Jane or John when I grow up?

MR. BOIES (V.O.): You then go on to say: “What will be next? On their agenda list is legalizing having sex with children.” And this was something that you were putting out in order to convince people to vote for Proposition 8, correct?

DR. TAM: Uh-huh. Yes.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): And the last sentence says: “If sexual orientation is characterized as a civil right, then so would pedophilia, polygamy, and incest.” Do you agree with that, sir?

DR. TAM: Yes, I agree.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): And that’s what you were telling people in order to convince them to vote for Proposition 8, correct?

DR. TAM: Yes.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): Let me go down to point four where you say that: “Countries that legalized same-sex marriage saw alarming moral decline.” You believe that after the Netherlands legalized same-sex marriage, the Netherlands went on after that to legalize incest and polygamy? Who told you that, sir?

DR. TAM: It’s in the internet.

MR. BOIES (V.O.): In the internet?

DR. TAM: Yeah.

MR. BOIES: And you just put it out there to convince voters to vote for Proposition 8?

DR. TAM: Yes.

(Silence. Then the VIDEO MONITORS go off. MR. BOIES, still facing the audience, finishes his interview with the PRESS)

MR. BOIES: After his deposition, Dr. Tam chose to avoid the subpoenas compelling him to appear in court under oath. In effect, Dr. Tam went on the lam, refusing to testify. And after our depositions of their potential witnesses were complete, only two-- **two** were still willing to testify. (Black 33-35)

By including portions of deposition tapes, Black strengthens his argument that to be anti-marriage equality is to be steeped in bigotry. What was simply a missing face at trial, a name crossed off the witness list, becomes something much more powerful in Black’s text. He also uses this particular bit of footage to subtly emphasize the trickery opponents of marriage equality engaged in during the 2008 elections. By including Dr.

Tam's deposition and a portion of a press interview with Mr. Boies, Black's audience is forced to confront the fact that particular institutions do not feel bound by truth during elections, and will promote their positions with little regard to the consequences of spreading false information.

Dr. Tam's deposition serves a secondary purpose in that it is used to emphasize how the nature of the marriage equality argument rests on definitions of marriage. All that Dr. Tam says seems infused by his leadership role in the Traditional Family Coalition and his belief that God has a particular definition of marriage. Without ever having to name the bigotry as religious, Black marks Dr. Tam as firmly rooted inside religious tradition, subtly emphasizing the role religious authorities have attempted to play in the debate over marriage equality. Although Dr. Tam's false statement about the Netherlands legalizing polygamy and incest after legalizing same-sex marriage was never heard at trial, Black does not hesitate to provide his audience with such moments. They may not be moments that occurred in court, but depositions such as these were certainly an underlying factor at work in the overall outcome of the case. Black ensures they are not lost to time by including them in his drama.

Black's inclusion of materials that support his narrative but that were not actual transcripts remains masterful, but it is his use of said transcripts that truly provides the American people with an enlightening look into the case. In one of the most stunning exchanges from the trial, Judge Walker questions the defense attorney, Mr. Cooper:

JUDGE WALKER: Let me throw in a question here. Assume I agree with you that the state's interest in marriage is essentially procreative. How does permitting same-sex marriages impair or adversely affect that interest?

MR. COOPER: Your Honor, that gets to the fundamental disagreement here. They say it's not enough for opposite-sex unions to further and advance these vital state interests; that we have to prove that including same-sex unions into the definition of marriage would actually harm those interests. That is not the equal protection construct--

JUDGE WALKER: I'm asking you to tell me how it would harm opposite-sex marriages.

MR. COOPER: All right.

JUDGE WALKER: All right. Let's play on the same playing field for once, okay?

MR COOPER: Your Honor... my answer is: *(a long pause)* I don't know... I don't know.

(The air goes out of the room)

JUDGE WALKER: Does that mean-- does that mean if this is not determined to be subject to rational basis review... you lose?

MR. COOPER: No, your Honor.

JUDGE WALKER: Just haven't figured out how you're going to win on that basis yet? (Black 24-25)

The defense was only able to produce one witness considered an expert on marriage, David Blankenhorn, willing to take the stand in opposition to Prop 8, and under cross examination he was unable to produce any evidence that same-sex marriage would detract from the overall institution of marriage. In fact, when asked about a statement from his book *Future of Marriage* that seems to support the idea that marriage equality is a progressive step forward for America, he confirmed his earlier assertions. Despite being, or possibly because he was, the star witness for the defense, he provided one of the most compelling moments of support for marriage equality. Owing to the closed nature of the court room, however, such a monumental moment could easily escape into the annals of history without examination, or even exposure. Hoping to avoid the loss of what could become a historically significant moment in America's legal history, Dustin Lance Black includes this portion of cross-examination into his work:

MR. BOIES: And you say: "In that sense insofar as we are a nation founded on this principle, we would be **more**, emphasize **more**, American on the day we permitted same-sex marriage than we were on the day before." -- And you wrote those words, did you not, sir?

MR. BLANKENHORN: I wrote those words

MR. BOIES: And you believe them **now**, correct?

MR. BLANKENHORN: (*a long beat, then*) That's correct.

MR. BOIES: (*considers, then*) Your Honor, I have no more questions.
(Black 47)

It would seem as though even the star witness for the defense was unable to make a claim as to why or how same-sex marriage would detract from heterosexual marriages.

This case signaled a landmark moment, and Dustin Lance Black, by utilizing the court transcripts, harnessed the power of the American stage to share this testimony. He did not stop with only one reading of his play, however. After the September 2011 premiere of *8* at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre in New York City, Black teamed up with activist organizations American Foundation for Equal Rights and Broadway Impact. Together they organized a reading of the text in California, casting major names such as Brad Pitt, George Clooney, Kevin Bacon, and Jane Lynch, among others. The reading was then broadcast to the nation, a move intended to launch the *8* campaign.

In order to disseminate information surrounding Judge Walker's closed court, the new coalition of artists and activists chose to showcase the play all over the nation. By making the rights to the text available to any major, or minor, theatre, as well as opening it up to universities, unitarian churches, and anyone else interested in disseminating the message, Dustin Lance Black and his team of committed activists were able to have at least one, and in many cases multiple, readings of the play in every state of the nation. The goal of the project was, of course, to spread the word about *Perry vs.*

Schwarzenegger, but the campaign also focused on raising funds for the American Foundation for Equal Rights, Broadway Impact, and other organizations committed to fighting for marriage equality.

The depiction of homosexuality on stage helps mark the slow march towards equality in American society. The 1920s and 1930s saw an increased exposure of the lifestyle and struggle of homosexuals on stage. Due to state laws and the specter of McCarthyism the 1940s and 1950s were largely a period of closeted activity and an absent or offstage presence in theatre. Then the 1960s to 1980s saw the cultivation of a homosexual community and an increased visibility on American stages. Works such as *Next Fall*, *Standing on Ceremony* and *8* demonstrate another incredible shift that has occurred in drama since the turn of the new century. What was once about exposure and community cultivation has, in the past decade, turned into a specific attack on areas of legislation that could be improved to aide in the overall equality extended to American homosexuals. The issue of marriage equality remains hotly debated, but stage artists have shown that, even amidst the technological revolution that compels all things forward into the digital age, their work can prove vital in efforts to reshape American equality.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The United States Supreme Court is expected to hand down their ruling on the constitutionality of Proposition 8 in June of this year, 2013. This ruling, along with an expected ruling on the constitutionality of particular portions of the Defense of Marriage Act, marks this Supreme Court as the first poised to possibly set federal precedents in favor of marriage equality. As this study points out, marriage equality is a multi-faceted issue, steeped in vigorous debate. There are those who see marriage equality as the ultimate degradation of traditional American marriage, and although it is not always the case, this view is often intertwined with particular religious beliefs. Some LGBTQ Americans view marriage equality as their ticket into normative culture, fawning over the larger symbolic impact of such legislation. Even if these two camps were the total culmination of all points of view surrounding the issue of marriage equality, the debate would still be difficult to navigate.

There are others, however, who do not identify as homosexual, nor do they root their legislative opinions in religious dogma, and yet still advocate for a civil union or domestic partnership compromise. Further still, are those who do identify as homosexual, but who do not view marriage equality as a positive step towards the

actualization of homosexuality equality, in that marriage, as a social institution, will not cease to have the potential for inequality. Regardless of the how the verdict of the court falls, the effect of the upcoming June ruling will be a mass reorganization of all camps entrenched in the marriage equality debate. There is no doubt that the American stage will be at the very heart of such a reorganization, as evidenced by the role it has already played shaping the debate over the past one hundred years.

Before any major inroads can be made into legislative equality, there must be the presence of popular equality for a group of people experiencing discrimination. Theatre has served, since the inception of the form, as a means by which to organize large populaces behind supporting a particular idea or thought. It is no coincidence that democracy and theatre spring forth from the same historical point, and the stage's natural ability to unify populations behind systems of government, religious ideals, solutions to societal concerns, etc., still remains its most powerful asset.

America, during the 1920s and 1930s, relegated homosexuals to the sidelines of society. To be found out as a homosexual meant certain hardship, no matter what station in society the individual held. Owing to this fact, homosexuality existed primarily as a game of whispers and secrets. Both Lillian Hellman and Edouard Bourdet understood this reality, and reflected the burden of silence placed upon homosexuals in *The Children's Hour* and *The Captive*. By dancing around an actual reference to homosexuality, these plays accurately embody the tradition of silence that influenced every aspect of 1920s and 1930s American homosexual culture. These texts also explore the possible negative ramifications of such silence, and in turn challenge audiences to

confront their own bias concerning sexual orientation. Not all shows during the period, however, focused on the quiet game.

Mae West's *The Drag* confronted homosexuality in a way the American stage had yet to experience, and her play proved so progressive that those who opposed free expression of homosexuality sought to, and achieved, censoring her show from Broadway. *The Drag* marked the first instance of openly gay male performers playing gay male roles, a decision West felt was vitally important to the success of her piece. It is hard to imagine, when considering the landscape of American theatre artists today, that even the American stage would not provide refuge for LGBTQ individuals. The normative culture of 1920s and 1930s America, however, still sought to suppress any expression of homosexuality. Despite the fact that the tour of *The Drag* was shut down, and the show was ultimately censored from appearing on a New York City stage, it still stands as one of the earliest instances of the American stage being utilized for activism in the vein of homosexual equality.

McCarthyism put a halt on several major avenues of progressive thought, the rising tide of acceptance for homosexuals one amongst them. It would not be long, however, before the cultural paradigm shifted, once again partially as a result of theatre activism. The pervading culture of anti-homosexuality would be permeated by the larger struggle for civil liberties during the 1960s-1980s. The emergence of Caffè Cino and WOW Cafe bookend the riots that took place at the Stonewall Inn, and this period serves as a perfect example of the next phase of homosexual equality in America.

In order for progress to be made, it became necessary to cultivate a homosexual community. Cultivation of such a group provided the general day-to-day support that comes from community, but more importantly, it began to form bonds of solidarity and trust amongst homosexuals. Without these bonds, there would not be an appropriate infrastructure for cultural progress to rest upon, and in fact it would be bonds such as these that made it possible for figures like Craig Rodwell to maximize the potential of progress. Certainly this period is marked by major advancements in the movement for homosexuality equality on a social front, but that does not minimize the importance of the theatre collectives, both pre- and post- Stonewall, that attempted to, for the first time, create spaces and provide resources devoted specifically to the advancement of homosexual artists. These resources would not only produce significant artists and artistry, but also served as an early means of political organizing, proving invaluable to the overall trajectory of homosexual equality.

Since the turn of the new century, the arc of homosexuality equality has continued to progress. While the previously aforementioned periods were directly responsible for recognition of the individual and the creation of communal spirit, the latest trend in American drama is to utilize the stage to express and explore specific instances in which homosexuals are denied equal treatment and rights. *Next Fall* highlights the ways in which American policy discriminates against homosexuals in hospitals, *Standing on Ceremony* showcases a myriad of perspectives on the subject of inequality, and 8 directly confronts the issue of marriage equality by utilizing actual testimony of the most recent judicial attempts to define marriage for America.

Although marriage equality is a relatively recent development in the movement to extend equal rights to individuals who identify as homosexual, the argument for such legislation rests upon a long legacy of theatrical activism. The American stage certainly cannot lay claim to being the only venue through which equality was sought, but it does play a vital role in the expression of the struggle for equality in popular culture. The trajectory of homosexual equality within the fabric of American performance and policy has, over the course of roughly the past one hundred years, trended towards the understanding and acceptance of individuals who identify as LGBTQ. The shows examined in this study demonstrate a move away from celebration of the lifestyle, the individual, or the community, and a shift towards an examination of how to create equality on a larger legislative scale.

Marriage equality remains a hotly debated issue, and no matter what the Supreme Court rules in June, America is likely to be engaged in some aspect of the debate for years to come. There is no way to do more than speculate on the future, but if the arc towards equality continues to follow the path this cross-section of American drama suggests, the American stage is likely to remain on the front lines of reshaping America's normative culture. This arc would suggest, if not in June, then in the near future, marriage equality will extend beyond American performance and become a part of American policy. To imagine the struggle complete at that point, however, is to ignore the reality that marriage equality will not necessarily serve as the culminating end point of the fight for homosexual equality.

If and when marriage equality legislation does become an American reality, the stage will still have its hands full exploring the ways in which society will deal with the ramifications of such a shift. Issues that naturally stem from marriage equality, such as divorce proceedings for homosexual couples, adoption and foster care, domestic spousal abuse, just to name a few, may become the focal point of gay American drama. The stage may also grapple with the emerging rift between LGBTQ Americans who do not wish to see marriage equality legislation pass and those who see such a viewpoint as “friendly fire”. Issues such as bullying, estate taxes, healthcare, and the myriad of other “gay issues” that already experience vocalization on the American stage could see an increased amount of attention paid. The American stage has proven to be an indispensable force on the side of progressive action, aiding in the exposure of the individual’s lifestyle, creation and cultivation of a homosexual community, and more recently, pointed explorations of specific legal disparities facing LGBTQ Americans. The modern American stage remains, to date, one of the strongest avenues for creating homosexual equality in this country, and its tradition of serving as a shaper of societal opinion and action, where issues of homosexual equality are concerned, will most certainly continue to be utilized by future artists.

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