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Gay Outlaws: The Alpine County Project Reconsidered

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GAY OUTLAWS: THE ALPINE COUNTY PROJECT RECONSIDERED

A Thesis Presented

by

JACOB D. CARTER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

June 2015

Department of History

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ABSTRACT

GAY OUTLAWS: THE ALPINE COUNTY PROJECT RECONSIDERED

June 2015

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Controversial from the beginning, the Alpine County project (1969-1971), a genuine, albeit unsuccessful, effort put forth by gay radicals to establish a self-governing separatist community in rural California, is a grossly misunderstood event in United States history. Contemporary historical interpretations hold that the project was primarily either a well-conspired hoax devised by Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front (LA-GLF) to attract mainstream media coverage of Gay Liberation, or a misguided effort toward systemic reform. However, evidence indicates that, for gay separatists who supported it, the project was an effort to achieve collective self-determination by creating a geographic haven for a budding gay counterculture.

Differing from other historical scholarship that has treated the Alpine project within broader conceptual or regional contexts, this study examined the project from the perspective of the gay separatists who initiated or influenced the

endeavor. The overall historical problem to resolve was whether the project was a hoax, tactic to achieve systemic reform, or part of a genuine effort toward gay separatism. Methodology consisted primarily of archival research and an extensive literature review. Research revealed that the Alpine project was a manifestation of gay cultural nationalism and movement toward greater self-determination.

This thesis contributes toward a more complete understanding of the history of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) people and their experiences by offering explanations of how the Alpine project came to be marginalized in the contemporary LGBT historical narrative. This thesis also provides a greater understanding of gay separatism, which to date has not attracted a significant amount of scholarship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Controversial from the beginning, the Alpine County project (circa 1969-1971), a genuine, albeit unsuccessful, effort put forth by gay radicals to establish a self-governing separatist community in rural California, is a grossly misunderstood event in United States history. Contemporary historical interpretations hold that the project was primarily either a well-conspired hoax devised by Los Angeles Gay Liberation Front (LA-GLF) to attract mainstream media coverage of Gay Liberation, or a misguided effort toward systemic reform. However, the radicals who initiated the project were ultimately motivated by desire for collective gay self-determination.

Gay separatism is best conceptualized on a continuum and exists both as concrete strategy and an abstract idea. The prevailing belief among gay separatists was that freedom for homosexuals was not possible within larger U.S. society and that it was therefore necessary to create liberated gay defined spheres. At its most extreme, the strategy involved both physical and psychological separation from the dominant society. Milder forms of separatism, when enacted, tended to serve pragmatic purposes and not involve complete withdrawal from the larger society.

Carl Wittman articulated rationale for separatism in *A Gay Manifesto*¹ by asserting that the sexual and gender roles society had created were inherently oppressive to all genders and therefore needed to be abandoned. Wittman referred to San Francisco as a “refugee camp for homosexuals”² and called upon his “brothers” to make a complete break from heterosexual traditions and institutions. Wittman explained, “our first job is to free ourselves; that means clearing our heads of the garbage that’s been poured into them,”³ and asserted that it was necessary to “stop mimicking straights, stop censoring ourselves.”⁴ As an alternative, Wittman proposed a “pluralistic, rolefree social structure... defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values.”⁵

Craig Schoonmaker of the New York City based Homosexuals Intransigent!

(HI!) collective described gay separatism as:

the move to create districts where we constitute the population and determine the institutions... a political doctrine sprung from desperation. Had society been tolerant of homosexuality all along, we who have become separatists might never have seen the need to do so. Perhaps we should therefore be glad that society has been intolerant, for only that intolerance has enabled us to revolt and set ourselves enough apart to realize that the minor changes we might have accepted really won't do: society is based on heterosexuality, and that simply isn't good enuf.⁶

¹ Wittman’s manifesto was sometimes printed under the title *Refugees from America: A Gay Manifesto* in the underground press.

² Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Source Book of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, ed. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997), 380.

³ *Ibid.*, 381.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 382.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 383.

⁶ L. Craig Schoonmaker, ed., *The Best of HI!* (L.C. Schoonmaker, 1979), 3.

Described as a hero of Gay Liberation by fellow Beatnik Allen Ginsberg,⁷ author William S. Burroughs incorporated themes of gay separatism and militancy into his 1971 fictional novel *The Wild Boys: A Book of the Dead* and later works as well. Burroughs periodically discussed separatism in interviews with various gay and gay-friendly publications throughout the 1970s.⁸ Burroughs asserted the following during one such interview:

Now, since we've been forced into the same position as Jews perhaps we should enact the same strategy. We should try to get our own state like Israel... I believe that Gays should be allowed to live in an all-Gay community. This would be a very healthy thing. There could be a Gay laundry and a Gay restaurant and a Gay everything. If this could extend through our society, where people associated with only the people he wanted to associate with, this would be a great source of harmony.⁹

In addition to the rationales expressed by Wittman, Schoonmaker, and Burroughs, *HI!* circulated leaflets that included the following more formalized definition of gay separatism:

Homosexual separatism is a move first to evacuate people from the loneliness of isolation in a hostile environment; second, to end the violence to our individual and collective psyche done by heterosexual pressures; and third, to reform the world we live in so that it is truly a Gay world and not merely a distorted remnant and reflection of the straight world.¹⁰

The following more concise explanation of the concept was printed in *I Am: Oracle of Gay Emmaus*, the Emmaus House newsletter: "We must get outside the system of mechanized insanity and we must manifest our own world."¹¹

⁷ Winston Leyland, ed., *Gay Sunshine Interviews* (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1979), 13, 124.

⁸ Sylvère Lotringer, ed., *Burroughs Live: The Collected Interviews of William S. Burroughs, 1960-1997* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); Leyland, *Gay Sunshine Interviews*, 10-23, 124.

⁹ Leyland, *Gay Sunshine Interviews*, 22-23.

¹⁰ Schoonmaker, *The Best of HI!*, 6.

¹¹ Quoted in J. Todd Ormsbee, *The Meaning of Gay: Interaction Publicity and Community among Homosexual Men in 1960s San Francisco* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 281.

Traces of the ideology of gay separatism date back at least to the nineteenth century. Walt Whitman drafted the following circa 1860:

I dreamed in a dream of a city where all the
men were like brothers,
O I saw them tenderly love each other—I
often saw them, in numbers, walking
hand in hand;
I dreamed that was the city of robust
friends—Nothing was greater there
than ~~the quality of~~ manly love—it led
the rest,
It was seen every hour in the actions of the
men of that city, and in all their looks
and words.—¹²

For another early example, while working on a ranch in the Carson River Valley during the early 1930s, Harry Hay envisioned a farming team made up entirely of gay men in reaction to overt anti-gay rhetoric expressed by fellow members of the Industrial Workers of the World.¹³ However, despite earlier visions, gay separatism did not begin to materialize into any sort of concrete strategy until the 1960s. Continuing through the 1970s, separatist and quasi-separatist communities, communes, and collectives were established in several states.

Separatism never gained majority favor among the gay population of the United States. However, as Gay Liberation advanced, some of the voices in the movement's leadership saw pragmatic value in the concept and began to endorse it as an interim strategy. For example, Washington D.C. activist Frank Kameny expressed:

I'm opposed to separatism as an ultimate goal, and tend to be an integrationist or assimilationist. But I've changed my views somewhat on this in recent years, and I feel sometimes that as an interim measure, separatism may help

¹² Walt Whitman, untitled image, The Walt Whitman Archive, accessed May 22, 2014: <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/archive2/manuscripts/moss/063.html>.

¹³ Stuart Timmons, *The Trouble With Harry Hay: Founder of the Modern Gay Movement* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1990), 54, 274.

the community get itself together in order to ultimately achieve the goals that permit an eventual integration.¹⁴

Craig Rodwell, owner of New York City's Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookstore explained:

Separatism is not the answer but should be tried. We need to get Gay people together. In unity, there is strength. I'm not really for a melting-pot society where everybody sort of blends into everybody else. I really envision a world of very diverse communities with mutual respect for each other. And I see nothing wrong with ghettos, for example, either. An exclusive ghetto isn't good. But we all live in some kind of ghetto, whether it's the church on the corner or a ghetto of the mind. I would like a Gay community within a larger community.¹⁵

Lesbian separatism, which dwarfed gay separatism by comparison during the 1970s, was primarily a reaction to social and economic inequalities linked to institutionalized sexism. As Gay Liberation progressed, gays and lesbians began to pursue divergent courses of activism to confront grievances that varied from one another. For this reason, lesbian separatism and gay separatism should be viewed as distinct from one another.¹⁶

Don Jackson first presented a proposal for the Alpine County project, also known informally as "Stonewall Nation," at the West Coast Gay Liberation Conference held in Berkeley, California, on December 28, 1969. Jackson's proposal consisted of an initial plan for a few hundred participating individuals - a population numerically sufficient to constitute a new voting majority - to settle in sparsely populated Alpine County, California. Once a new voting majority was established, the existing local government would be recalled and replaced with a gay and lesbian

¹⁴ Kay Tobin and Randy Wicker, *The Gay Crusaders* (New York: Paperback Library, 1972), 227.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Moira Rachel Kenney, *Mapping Gay L.A. The Intersection of Place and Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 117-138.

administration. A distinct gay and lesbian oriented counterculture would then be constructed in the county's borders.¹⁷

The project was fraught with controversy from the beginning; many aspects of which remain unsettled. While the majority of Gay Liberation activists considered the idea misguided at best or lunacy at worst, others seriously believed in Jackson's vision and devoted considerable time and effort toward making it a reality. Some Gay Liberation groups throughout the nation endorsed the project. Others condemned the project, and gay separatism, as counter-revolutionary or offered no official opinion for or against it. Some Alpine County residents were indifferent to the possibility while others viewed the project as a plan for a hostile take-over and prepared to enact counter measures to resist it. Though the project was short lived and never progressed beyond the planning and preparation stages, it did capture media attention throughout the United States and helped raise social consciousness of the Gay Liberation movement of the 1970s.

Very little historical scholarship has been devoted to the Alpine project and more broadly, to gay separatism. Don Teal addressed the project at length in *The Gay Militants: How Gay Liberation Began in America, 1969-1971*. Published in 1971, just two years after the Stonewall riots, Teal's chronicle documented the radicalism that was a feature of early Gay Liberation and contains the earliest assessment of the Alpine project. Teal described the endeavor as a "gay takeover to establish a

¹⁷ Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons, *Gay LA: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 178; "Alpine Liberation," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers, 87-2, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (GLC 10), Gay and Lesbian Center, San Francisco Public Library; Don Jackson, "Brother Don Has A Dream," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

counterculture, a refuge for persecuted homosexuals, and a gay tourist mecca.”¹⁸

Following Teal’s chronicle, the Alpine project disappeared from secondary literature for approximately two decades prior to being reintroduced as a marginal topic.¹⁹

Focusing on the LA-GLF media strategy, Mark Thompson referred to the project as “elaborate fiction”²⁰ in “This Gay Tribe: A Brief History of Fairies.”

Thompson indicated that the project nonetheless was inspirational to other gay and lesbian separatist projects undertaken during the 1970s.²¹

Rodger Streitmatter focused on the support the project received from the underground press in *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America*.

Streitmatter agreed with Teal’s assessment of the project as a sincere effort to create a gay society separate from the non-gay majority. In addition, Streitmatter noted that the plan had since become “...the makings of gay mythology. The gay and lesbian community ultimately came to think of the idea as nothing more than a joke.”²²

Lillian Faderman and Stuart Timmons provided an analysis of the project in *Gay L.A.: A History of Sexual Outlaws, Power Politics, and Lipstick Lesbians* that focused primarily on the activity of LA-GLF and the media hoax facilitated by Morris Kight. Emphasizing the project’s potential to aid systemic reform, Faderman and Timmons concluded that the strategy “tested the limits of democracy”²³ by challenging the establishment to mean what it said about working within the system.²⁴

¹⁸ Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants* (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), 314.

¹⁹ Teal, 312-320.

²⁰ Mark Thompson, “This Gay Tribe: A Brief History of Faeries,” in *Gay Spirit Myth and Meaning*, ed. Mark Thompson (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1987), 262.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Rodger Streitmatter, *Voices of Revolution: The Dissident Press in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 249, 247-249.

²³ Faderman and Timmons, 178.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 177-179.

Emily K. Hobson concluded, in a study of the influence of socialism on radical gay and lesbian politics, that the project was a strategy to achieve Gay Liberation goals by asserting “white male” notions of progress by “overtaking land,”²⁵ and “colonizing the U.S. West.”²⁶ Hobson indicated that the project was reformist in nature because it involved working through the existing economic and political system rather than in opposition to it.²⁷

Yuki Takauchi examined ways that the project, contrary to accusations that it was based on a fundamentally “racist” strategy, actually sought to forge solidarity with other minority groups in “Paradox of Identity-based Multi-front Politics: Gay Liberation in California during the 1970s.” Similar to Hobson, and Faderman and Timmons, Takauchi concluded that the project was a reformist effort.²⁸

In contrast to Hobson and Takauchi who both maintained that inclusion within the established political system was the project’s ultimate goal, Colin R. Johnson argued in “‘Homosexuals From Haystacks’ Gay Liberation and the Specter of a Queer Majority in Rural California, circa 1970” that the project is historically significant because it constitutes the debut of the idea “queer majoritarianism.”²⁹ It can be argued that the project was reformist in the sense that it involved strategic use of the U.S. political and legal system to exert control over a specific geopolitical

²⁵ Emily K. Hobson, “Imagining Alliance: Queer Anti-imperialism and Race in California, 1966-1990” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 2009), 125, accessed October 7, 2014: <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15799coll127/id/263861>.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120-132.

²⁸ Yuki Takauchi, “Paradox of Identity-based Multi-front Politics: Gay Liberation in California during the 1970s,” *Pacific and American Studies*, V.14, March 2014, 79-94, accessed October 7, 2014: <http://www.cpas.c.u-tokyo.ac.jp/pub/pas14.pdf>.

²⁹ Colin R. Johnson, “‘Homosexuals From Haystacks’ Gay Liberation and the Specter of a Queer Majority in Rural California, circa 1970,” in *Subalternity and Difference: Investigations From the North and the South*, ed. Gyanendra Pandey (London: Routledge, 2011), 53.

region within the nation. However, reformist aspects of the strategy were secondary to the initial goal of establishing a haven for a gay counterculture. Johnson's perspective is notable in this regard because it corresponds with the mindset of the radicals who first envisioned the project.³⁰

Adding to the previously mentioned perspectives, the following work examines the project from the perspective of the Gay separatists who directly or indirectly contributed to making it a reality. This work will show that the venture was an effort to achieve collective self-determination by creating a geographic haven for a budding gay counterculture. This work will also provide a greater understanding of gay separatism, which to date has not attracted a significant amount of scholarship, and offer explanations of how the Alpine project came to be marginalized in the contemporary LGBT historical narrative.

The work presented here focuses primarily on the actions of gay separatists in relation to the Alpine project during the timeframe in-which it was active, 1969 through 1971. In order to address the project in a complete historical context, some parallel topics require brief mention and/or concise description. However, any parallel topic introduced is explored only to the extent in which it relates to the Alpine project. For example, as previously noted, lesbian separatism constitutes a divergent path and therefore is not elaborated on extensively. This work is not intended to be a comprehensive study of gay history. Nor is it intended to provide in-depth historical

³⁰ Johnson, "Homosexuals from Haystacks," 41-56.

analysis of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT)³¹ sexuality, gender expression, spirituality, or radical politics.

The following section, “The Gay Bay: Separatism in San Francisco’s Gay Subculture,” identifies historical factors that shaped the distinct gay subculture of San Francisco and created an environment in which separatist ideology could develop. Factors spanning from the California Gold Rush through the 1960s counterculture are explored.

The third section, “Going Their Own Way” provides a narrative of the steps proponents took to develop the project before eventually abandoning it due to insurmountable obstacles. The perspective of gay separatists is emphasized. Analysis of the actions taken by proponents indicates that the project was a legitimate endeavor.

The fourth section, “Opposition and Disintegration,” examines the obstacles proponents encountered that undermined the project and ultimately led to its demise. The role publicity, misperceptions of gay separatism, volatile aspects of New Left politics, mission drift, shifts in the gay counterculture, and deception played in undermining the project are assessed.

As previously indicated, perceptions of the Alpine County project as a primarily reformist effort, or a well conspired hoax to entice media coverage of Gay Liberation, predominate contemporary historical interpretations of the project. In order to understand the sharp contrast between contemporary historical perspectives

³¹ Note regarding semantics and terminology: The concept of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community is relatively recent and had not materialized during the years that the Alpine project was underway. Likewise, the “LGBT” acronym was non-existent and therefore is only applied in reference to more contemporary contexts throughout this paper.

and the vision imagined by gay separatists, it is necessary to examine how LGBT history evolved as a sub-discipline in relation to influential, simultaneously occurring, sociopolitical circumstances. Therefore, a historiographic analysis is provided in the final section, “Conclusion: Austerity versus Authenticity,” that explains how the project came to be perceived as a hoax or reform effort, rather than the quest for self-determination gay radicals originally envisioned it as.

CHAPTER 2

THE GAY BAY: SEPARATISM AND SAN FRANCISCO'S GAY SUBCULTURE

As of the late 1960s, San Francisco had already experienced periodic waves of gay migration. The California Gold Rush initiated a period of rapid population growth that resulted in a highly disproportionate male to female ratio in the city. Not surprisingly, San Francisco developed a strong homosocial culture. According to one variation of a local folk ditty:

The miners came in forty-nine, the whores in fifty-one,
In between was born the breed that's called the native son.³²

San Francisco continued to function as a busy port city after the Gold Rush ended. Consistent with similar patterns in other transportation and transient hubs, greater anonymity contributed to less motivation to conform to social and behavioral norms. Though vice laws existed and occasional arrests were made from the 1860s through the turn of the century, no significant effort was made, nor was there much incentive, to eliminate variant behaviors, including homosexuality, which had become part of the city's reputation. Liquor, gambling, and prostitution thrived in the brothels and saloons of the city's Barbary Coast. Oscar Wilde noted in 1891: "It is an odd

³² Allan Berube, *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 46; Nan Alamilla Boyd, *Wide Open Town: A History of Queer San Francisco to 1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 26-27; Stuart Loomis, March 15, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, 1991-24, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, accessed May 30, 2013: <http://www.glbthistory.org/Gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=135>.

thing, but everyone who disappears is said to have been seen at San Francisco. It must be a delightful city, and possess all the attractions of the next world."³³ The sex trade included a ring of homosexuals who operated out of a Turkish bath. Other male prostitutes worked independently in select mixed saloons – social divides based on sexual orientation were not as pronounced compared to later years. By the time of the Spanish-American War, police were periodically raiding homosexual bars in the city.³⁴

Efforts among homosexuals in the United States to organize as a means to achieve social and political goals date back at least to the early 1920s. While serving with the Army of Occupation in Coblenz, Germany following World War I, Henry Gerber made several trips to Berlin and was impressed by the city's vibrant gay subculture. Simultaneously, Gerber became familiar with sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld's research and was inspired by the World League for Sexual Reform's effort to repeal anti-homosexual German laws. Gerber returned to Chicago after serving and founded the Society for Human Rights in 1924. The organization encountered numerous formidable barriers and was short lived. Nonetheless, Society for Human Rights indirectly served as a source of inspiration for later organizing. Harry Hay learned of the Society's brief existence through a causal relationship with Champ Simmons, whom he met in Los Angeles in 1929. Simmons's former lover had been a member of the organization. Hay was immediately inspired by the idea of

³³ Berube, *My Desire for History*, 46.

³⁴ Boyd, 26; Ormsbee, 306; Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), 155; Allen Berube, May 6, 1979 episode of *The Gay Life*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, accessed October 12, 2014: <http://www.glbthistory.org/gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=18>; Max Kirkeberg, April 5, 1981 episode of *The Gay Life*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, 1991-24, accessed October 22, 2014: <http://www.glbthistory.org/gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=143>.

homosexuals organizing for political purposes, though he did not act on it for several years.³⁵

Harry Hay spent time in San Francisco during his youth and explored the city's homosexual underground. Hay saw homosexuality as a unique way of being human and believed that homosexuals possessed unique qualities to offer humanity. Decades later, Hay declared that gays were "a separate people whose time has come"³⁶ called on gay people to maximize differences between themselves and the non-gay majority.³⁷

A large number of men and women discharged from military bases in the San Francisco Bay Area during World War II under policies that barred homosexuals from military service remained in the city. For some, this was a matter of choice but others simply found themselves destitute. Others completed tours of duty and chose to return to San Francisco and establish new lives rather than returning to their hometowns.³⁸

An organic intellectual, labor activist, and former Communist Party member, Harry Hay used Marxist theory to develop and then promote a revolutionary idea that homosexuals constituted an oppressed cultural minority. Hay and his cohorts used the Communist Party as an organizational model on which to found the Mattachine

³⁵ John Loughery, *The Other Side of Silence: Men's Lives and Gay Identities: A Twentieth Century History*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 53-55, 225; Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company 1976) 581-91; Will Roscoe, "Chronology," in *Radically Gay: Gay Liberation in the Words of Its Founder*, ed. Will Roscoe (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996) 355; Peter Hennen, *Faeries, Bears, and Leathermen: Men in Community Queering the Masculine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008) 65.

³⁶ Harry Hay, "A Separate People Whose Time Has Come," in *Gay Spirit Myth and Meaning*, ed. Mark Thompson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 279.

³⁷ Hay, "A Separate People Whose Time Has Come," *Gay Spirit*, 279-291.

³⁸ Boyd, 168-171; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, accessed April 15, 2013: <http://www.glbthistory.org/Gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=52>.

Foundation in 1950. Members of Mattachine founded the ONE Institute in Los Angeles during 1952 to provide education and enlightenment on the subject of homosexuality. The Institute established the first community based archive in the United States to serve a gay constituency and published a magazine for national distribution; *ONE: A Homosexual Viewpoint*.³⁹

Only a few years after Mattachine was founded its leaders, Harry Hay among them, ceded leadership to a more conservative middle-class wing of the Foundation angered by a hostile testimony the organization's attorney gave before the House of Un-American activities. The Mattachine Foundation was renamed the Mattachine Society and the organization's new president, Hal Call, moved the headquarters from Los Angeles to San Francisco. The organization proliferated and by the middle of the 1960s most major cities in the United States had a chapter of the Mattachine Society. Hay's vision for Mattachine was more radical than that of successive, assimilation inclined leaders who chose to present an image of homosexuals as similar to rather than distinct from mainstream Americans.⁴⁰

While Mattachine was re-grouping, eight women in the San Francisco Bay Area formed a social group for lesbians as an alternative to the local bar culture. Their efforts independently gave rise to the lesbian equivalent of Mattachine Society in 1955. The founders gradually opened the group to new female membership and expanded the organization's mission to include political advocacy for lesbians. Acting partially on inspiration from a poem written by Pierre Louys as a tribute to

³⁹ Roscoe, "Mattachine 1948-1953," in *Radically Gay*, 35-60; Timmons, 107-120; Loughery, 226-237.

⁴⁰ Katz, 611-632; Hennen, 66-67; Boyd, 165-68; Ormsbee, 306-307.

Sappho titled “The Songs of Bilitis,” the founding members named the group Daughters of Bilitis.⁴¹

ONE, Mattachine, and Daughters of Bilitis, strived to improve the lives of homosexuals primarily through legal aid and reform, education, individual enlightenment, and cultivated political alliances. These tactics and organizations constitute the homophile movement. ONE, Mattachine, and Daughters of Bilitis each produced their own publication which provided isolated individuals, and gay and lesbian communities throughout the nation, with greater means to connect with one another. ONE’s Supreme Court victory over the U.S. Postal Service in 1958 secured the right of homophile organizations to distribute material by mail.⁴²

During the 1959 San Francisco mayoral election, candidate Russell Wolden accused his incumbent opponent George Christopher, of permitting homosexuals to establish a haven in the city. Homosexuality was periodically made a political issue in other U.S. cities during the 1950s and 1960s. However, unlike in other cities, the potential of gay political power was coming to be realized in San Francisco. The 1959 California Supreme Court ruling in *Vallerga v. Department of Alcohol Beverage Control* affirmed homosexuals’ right to assemble, and repeal of California’s vagrancy laws in 1961 reduced grounds for arbitrary arrest leading to greater gay visibility in the city.⁴³

⁴¹ Boyd, 168-171; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*.

⁴² W. Dorr Legg, interview by Jim Kepner, November 30, 1976 episode of *IMRU*, Kevin Burke Sound Recordings, 1999-51, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society, accessed May 12, 2012: <http://www.glbthistory.org/gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=363>; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*; Loughery, 234-37; Boyd, 172; Hennen, 67.

⁴³ Boyd, 204-218; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983) 123.

Jose Sarria, a performer at the Black Cat Lounge, ran unsuccessfully for San Francisco City Supervisor in 1961 thus becoming the first openly gay candidate to run for public office. During live performances, Sarria frequently made empowering political statements and spoke of the need for gay people to unite. Aware that election was unlikely, Sarria later claimed, “I ran for one reason. I ran to prove to the then gay people that I had the right to run for public office. That I had the right that anybody else had to do anything within the law; the fact that I was gay did not restrict me.”⁴⁴ Perceiving the Mattachine Society as elitist and ineffective, Sarria co-founded the League of Civil Education, an organization that strongly encouraged participation in the political process, as an alternative. Reflecting on collective achievements years later, Sarria quipped, “It took people like Michelle to sit before two hundred fifty people and sign a book of registry to prove to the dizzy queens that when you registered to vote you, didn’t have to say that you were gay or not.”⁴⁵ Though intended humorously, Sarria’s statement reflects the distrust of the democratic process and perceived lack of rights prevalent among gay populations of the early 1960s.⁴⁶

Gay community organizing was underway in the San Francisco Bay Area prior to the Alpine project. During the 1960s, Bay Area organizations initiated efforts to manufacture a more well-rounded gay community. Gay community was originally conceived of as a political block by Bay Area activists, but the idea was expanded to

⁴⁴ Jose Sarria, Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ *Word Is Out: Stories of Some of Our Lives*, directed by Nancy Adair, Andrew Brown, Rob Epstein (1977; Milliarium Zero, 2010), DVD; Ormsbee, 32; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*.

meet other needs. Community based services formed during the 1960s included, picnics, drag balls, dances, information sessions and series, health initiatives, and hotlines.⁴⁷

Another feature that made San Francisco's developing gay subculture unique in comparison to other cities was the Beatnik influence. Beatniks varied in terms of individual sexual inclinations. Nonetheless, homosocial ideals were a common theme in Beat literature. The Beatniks collectively resided in San Francisco for an extended period of time and inadvertently created a small yet influential gay counterculture that rejected the drag and camp popular in the larger gay subculture at the time and celebrated homosocial ideals. The space occupied by the Beatniks and their followers overlapped with gay spaces in San Francisco's North Beach.⁴⁸

By the mid-1960s, San Francisco's gay subculture was gaining national influence. *Life* magazine referred San Francisco as the "Gay Capital of America"⁴⁹ in a June 1964 article, "Homosexuality in America." The article featured a photograph taken inside an infamous San Francisco leather bar, The Tool Box. The photograph showed denim and leather clad patrons standing beneath a mural featuring several hyper-masculine men. According to Jack Fritscher, former editor-in-chief of *Drummer Magazine*, the feature "was like an engraved invitation sent out to all the masculine identified homosexuals in America. That here was a place to come and to be accepted and to do your thing."⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Ormsbee, 294-295, 305, 307.

⁴⁸ D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 181; Boyd, 123-125.

⁴⁹ Cited in Ormsbee, 307.

⁵⁰ Jack Fritscher, interview, January 14, 2014, OUTSpoken: Oral History from LGBTQ Pioneers, accessed April 6, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/c1250>; "Homosexuality in America," *Life*, June 26, 1964, 66.

A police raid on a Council on Religion and the Homosexual fund-raiser ball at California Hall on January 1, 1965 had a galvanizing effect on the San Francisco gay and lesbian community and enhanced cooperation between among advocacy groups. Lawyers, ministers, and many non-gay individuals were attending the event at the time of the raid, which bolstered both sympathy and outrage that extended beyond the gay community.⁵¹

Gay community organizing continued to advance in the late 1960s. The Society for Individual Rights (SIR) opened the city's first gay community center, Community House, on April 17, 1966. Nonetheless, San Francisco was not a utopia of tolerance. Anti-gay violence was frequently reported in the local gay press during the late 1960s. Herbert Gold noted in his introduction to *The Records of the Sexual Freedom League*: "Naturally, life near the dock of the bay is not all hearts, flowers, and painful urination. There's trouble too. San Franciscans are not sugar coated people immune to the sickness of America."⁵²

Glide Memorial Methodist Church worked to shift the negativity associated with homosexuality through outreach, charity, sermons, and community engagement. Under the leadership of Reverend Cecil Williams, an African-American minister and civil rights activist from Kansas City, the Church actively sought gay, lesbian, and transgender worshippers. Glide spear-headed campaigns to help gay street youth and held symposiums and information sessions to educate the public on gay issues.

⁵¹ Boyd, 231-236; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*.

⁵² Herbert Gold, Introduction to *The Records of the San Francisco Sexual Freedom League*, Valerie Alison and Jefferson F. Poland and (London: The Olympia Press, 1971), 4; Ormsbee, 23, 92, 95, 139-140; Boyd, 200-236; Panel on San Francisco Gay History, 1950-1965, April 12, 1980 episode of *The Gay Life*.

Williams spoke at gay rights meetings and wrote articles for gay publications through the 1960s. At “The Lifestyle of the Homosexual” conference in October of 1968, Williams gave a pro-gay speech on the church’s role in supporting homosexuals. Williams believed that the greatest contribution a minority could make was to embrace its differences. During a 1968 sermon, Williams declared “It’s time that homosexuals begin to understand themselves more, begin to accept themselves more, and say to the world, including their parents: ‘I’m a homosexual and I’m proud of it.’”⁵³ One of Glide’s greatest contributions was simply providing meeting space needed for organizing. Vanguard, an outreach program for gay street youth, held many events at Glide as did SIR before the organization established Community House.⁵⁴

Despite homophile efforts, sociopolitical conditions remained harsh overall for gay and lesbian individuals during the middle to late twentieth century. As of 1969, private homosexual acts were illegal in every state in the nation except Illinois. Entrapment and police harassment was common. Organized religion condemned homosexuals thus contributing to social stigma. Homosexuality was classified as a mental illness by the American Psychiatric Association and subject to various forms of aversion therapy, including shock treatment and/or psychopharmacological interventions that induced nausea or mimicked drowning sensations. Carl Wittman described these conditions in a section of *A Gay Manifesto* titled “On Oppression”:

We are attacked, beaten, castrated and left dead time and time again. There are half a dozen known unsolved slayings in San Francisco parks in the last few years. “Punks,” often of minority groups who look around for someone under them socially, feel encouraged to beat up on “queens” and cops look the other

⁵³ Ormsbee, 273.

⁵⁴ Ormsbee, 132, 158, 273; Harry Hay, “Calling One Another Into Being,” in *Radically Gay*, 166.

way. That used to be called lynching... Cops in most cities have harassed our meeting places: bars and baths and parks. They set up entrapment squads. A Berkeley brother was slain by a cop in April when he tried to split after finding out that the trick who was making advances to him was a cop. Cities set up 'pervert' registration, which if nothing else scares our brothers deeper into the closet... One of the most vicious slurs on us is the blame for prison 'gang rapes.' These rapes are invariably done by people who consider themselves straight. The victims of these rapes are us and straights who can't defend themselves. The press campaign to link prison rapes with homosexuality is an attempt to make straights fear and despise us, so they can oppress us more... Discrimination against Gays is blatant, if we open our eyes. Homosexual relationships are illegal, and even if these laws are not regularly enforced, they encourage and enforce closet queenery. The bulk of the social work psychiatric field looks upon homosexuality as a problem, and treats us as sick. Employers let it be known that our skills are acceptable as long as our sexuality is hidden. Big business and government are particularly notorious offenders.⁵⁵

By the end of the 1960s, a new movement, Gay Liberation, overshadowed and soon replaced the homophile movement. A new generation influenced by second wave feminism, civil rights activism, and the anti-war movement, brought new ideology and strategies to the cause. Unlike the homophile movement strategy that consisted mostly of working within the existing system to produce social change, Gay Liberation prioritized radical change to the system itself. Consistent with the broader New Left counterculture of the 1960s, contingents of gay men and lesbian women left the east and relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area, thus initiating another wave of gay migration to the region that continued through the 1970s. Many brought with

⁵⁵ Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto," 384; *Stonewall Uprising*, directed by Kate Davis and David Heilbroner (2010; First Run Feature, 2011) DVD; Don Jackson, "Gays Say They Ain't Guil-tay!" *Berkeley Barb*, October 23- 28, 1969, 6; "A Clockwork Banana," 1973 episode of *The Gay Liberation Show*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, 1991-24, The Gay Liberation Show Composite Tape Part Two, accessed May 12, 2012: <http://www.glbthistory.org/Gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=3>; Don Jackson, interview, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives, November 30, 1986; Don Jackson, "Dachau in America," in *Gay Roots: Twenty Years of Gay Sunshine: An Anthology of Gay History, Sex, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Winston Leyland (San Francisco: Gay Sunshine Press, 1991), 264-266.

them education and experience in parallel social movements. One such individual was Carl Wittman⁵⁶, author of *A Gay Manifesto*.⁵⁷

Born a “red diaper baby” on February 23, 1943, in New Jersey, Carl Wittman was described by a former lover as a “genuine radical.”⁵⁸ Wittman was active in both the Civil Rights movement and Students for a Democratic Society prior to his participation in Gay Liberation. While attending Swarthmore College from 1960 to 1964, Wittman traveled to multiple campuses organizing demonstrations to protest the economic conditions experienced by African-Americans in Chester, Pennsylvania. Wittman rose to national leadership in SDS and co-authored "An Interracial Movement of the Poor?" in 1963 with Tom Hayden. After graduating in the summer of 1964, Wittman worked on Students for Democratic Society's Economic Research and Action Project (ERAP) initiatives in Newark and Hoboken, New Jersey.⁵⁹

As Wittman learned, gay men had a difficult time gaining acceptance from New Left peers. While active in SDS, Wittman hid his orientation from fellow members. Tom Hayden, who had announced that drugs and homosexuality were taboo for ERAP participants, eventually realized Wittman was gay and distanced himself from him. In a misguided effort to cope with his homosexuality, Wittman married Mimi Feingold in 1966 on the farm of New Left elder Dave Dellinger. Wittman left SDS in 1966 and the couple relocated to San Francisco the following

⁵⁶ Source material examined and cited does not conclusively specify if, or to what extent, Wittman was directly involved in the Alpine project. However, circumstantial evidence strongly indicates that at the very least, Wittman influenced the separatist ideology on which the project was based.

⁵⁷ Ormsbee, 86-101.

⁵⁸ D. E. Mungello, “A Spirit of the 60's,” *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, May-June 2008, V. 15, Issue 3, 20-22.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

year. Wittman's attraction to men continued to manifest and despite an open relationship with Feingold, his marriage disintegrated.⁶⁰

Carl Wittman shared early drafts of an essay containing his vision of Gay Liberation, which he developed into *A Gay Manifesto*. First published in December of 1969 as *Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto*, Carl Wittman's vision became a guiding standard for Gay Liberation.⁶¹ Wittman advocated both ideological and physical separation from heterosexual society in the pages of the manifesto. Wittman noted:

But we know we are radical, in that we know the system that we're under now is a direct source of oppression, and it's not a question of getting our share of the pie. The pie is rotten.⁶²

Wittman argued in the pages of the manifesto that existing gay ghettos were exploitive and bred self-hatred:

We stagnate here, accepting the status quo... Landlords find they can charge exorbitant rents and get away with it, because of the limited area which is safe to live in openly. Mafia control of bars and baths in NYC is only one example of outside money controlling our institutions for their profit. In San Francisco the Tavern Guild favors maintaining the ghetto, for it is through ghetto culture that they make a buck. We crowd their bars not because of their merit but because of the absence of any other social institution. The Guild has refused to let us collect defense funds or pass out Gay Liberation literature in their bars - need we ask why?

Police or con men who shake down the straight Gay in return for not revealing him; the bookstores and movie makers who keep raising prices because they are the only outlet for pornography; heads of 'modeling' agencies and other pimps who exploit both the hustlers and the johns - these are the parasites who flourish in the ghetto... Capitalists make money off of us, cops patrol us, government tolerates us as long as we shut up, and daily we work for and pay taxes to those who oppress us.⁶³

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Teal, 111.

⁶² Wittman, "A Gay Manifesto," 387.

⁶³ Ibid., 386-387.

Wittman specified a need for initial tactical and strategic independence, as well as physical and ideological distinction, from other movement groups as well:

Right now the bulk of our work has to be among ourselves - self educating, fending off attacks, and building free territory. Thus basically we have to have a Gay/straight vision of the world until the oppression of Gays is ended. ...because radicals are doing somebody else's thing, they tend to avoid issues which affect them directly, and see us as jeopardizing their 'work' with other groups (workers, blacks). Some years ago a dignitary of SDS on a community organization project announced at an initial staff meeting that there would be no homosexuality (or dope) on the project. And recently in New York, a movement group which had a coffee-house get-together after a political rally told the Gays to leave when they started dancing together.⁶⁴

Wittman rationalized that "a free territory" was essential:

To be a free territory, we must govern ourselves, set up our own institutions, defend ourselves, and use our won energies to improve our lives. The emergence of Gay Liberation communes, and our own paper is a good start. The talk about Gay Liberation coffee shop/dance hall should be acted upon. Rural retreats, political action offices, food cooperatives, a free school, unalienating bars and after hours places - they must be developed if we are to have even the shadow of a free territory.⁶⁵

Wittman also emphasized the need for unity within the gay community. For example, Wittman stressed, "closet queens are our brothers, and must be defended against attacks by straight people."⁶⁶ Wittman also urged as much cooperation as possible with homophile groups because "reformist or pokey as they sometimes are, they are our brothers... Do not attack them in straight or mixed company."⁶⁷

Though Carl Wittman's rhetoric reflects the mindset of gay separatists, it was Don Jackson who first conceived of the plan to subvert Alpine County. Born February 19, 1932, and raised in Bakersfield, California, Jackson attended San Jose State College where he majored in social science. Despite involvement in a series of

⁶⁴ Ibid., 387-388.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 387.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 383.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 388.

casual relationships as a young adult, Jackson claimed he was largely unaware of society's antipathy toward homosexuality until well into his early twenties. After graduating in 1955, Jackson accepted a job with a telegraph company and remained in San Francisco for a few years before returning to Bakersfield. Jackson remained in Bakersfield for "three or four years" before moving back to San Francisco.⁶⁸

Jackson converted to St. Priapus worship during his late twenties. While traveling through Gaeta, Italy during 1959, Jackson happened upon a local celebration honoring St. Cosmos, also known as St. Priapus. Fascinated, Jackson was drawn into the festivities and initiated into the order. Jackson reported that he was ordained during the celebration by local men at the feast of St. Cosmos but admitted not knowing what authority the individuals had to do so.⁶⁹

Don Jackson was aware of the Mattachine Society but denied any participation in the homophile movement other than reading *ONE* magazine. Jackson reported that he "gradually drifted into" Gay Liberation in 1968 as a result of a growing awareness and sense of outrage over the institutionalized and systematic abuse of homosexuals taking place on multiple fronts.⁷⁰ The following excerpt from an article Jackson wrote for the *Berkeley Barb* in 1969 reveals both his passion and vision:

I started crying when I thought of a dear friend, he was a boy from a share-cropper family in Oklahoma. Since he was a little boy, his sole life ambition was to be a doctor. At 16, he left home with 75 cents and the clothes he was wearing and went to Dallas to become a doctor. His immense determination conquered the odds against him.

⁶⁸ Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

⁶⁹ Ibid; Andy Nyberg, "St. Priapus Church -The Organ-ized Religion" *The Advocate*, September 1983.

⁷⁰ Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

Last year, malnourished and cold, he died in the garage where he lived. His death certificate said that he died from a self-administered dose of a downer.

In truth, he was murdered by the heterosexual establishment. His life was destroyed when they revoked his medical license because a credit bureau snoop reported that he was having an “immoral and perverted relationship” with his roommate.

My tears of sorrow turned to tears of rage when I thought of the great injustices perpetuated against my people. That night, I cried myself to sleep, and vowed I would spend the rest of my life working to end this hideous injustice. That night, I dreamed that my friend was standing by my bed.

He said “Don’t cry child.” He took me by the hand and said “Come, I will show you a place.” Then we were on a mountain top. I looked down into the little valley and saw the tightly clustered town on a little river, its pastel colored buildings glowing in the brilliant sun.

The next morning I conceived the idea of a Gay colony, and of Gay nationalism as a quicker way to freedom.⁷¹

Jackson’s early gay activism consisted of writing angry letters to doctors, ministers, and the police. Jackson progressed to regularly contributing articles to the newly emerged gay or countercultural print media which included publications such as *Vector*, *The Advocate*, *Gay Sunshine*, and *Berkeley Barb*. Jackson joined the Committee for Homosexual Freedom in 1969 and the same year became the West Coast liaison for the New York based publication *Gay Power*. In effect, Jackson established himself as a full time independent reporter for the underground gay press.⁷²

Jackson wrote “Reflections on the N.Y. Riots” for *The Advocate* in reference to the Stonewall riots. In the article, Jackson cautioned of the consequences additional riots could have for participants and the gay subculture as a whole. However, Jackson

⁷¹ Don Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

⁷² Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to *Gay Power*, International Gay Information Center collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Don Jackson essays, folder 28, Charles Thorp Papers.

conceded that additional riots were probable inevitable given the volatile circumstances. Jackson's prediction soon proved correct. On October 31, 1969, a demonstration organized by GLF to protest a derogatory article printed in the *Examiner* escalated into a riot after a member of the newspaper's staff dumped a bag of printer ink out a second story office window onto protesters below.⁷³

After the *Examiner* riot, Jackson returned to southern California and sought out veteran activist Don Slater. Slater had been instrumental in launching *ONE: A Homosexual Viewpoint* magazine and ONE Institute. Slater referred Jackson to prominent anti-war activist Morris Kight. Originally from east Texas, Kight moved to Los Angeles where, prior to "coming out" in 1969, he functioned as an underground social services coordinator and crisis worker for gay men. Kight bailed men out of jail and helped them find lawyers, in addition to providing informal counseling sessions and general support during times of crisis. Kight organized a ring of male nurses to treat venereal disease, resulting in his Bunker Hill bungalow becoming informally known as the "clap shack."⁷⁴ Despite Kight's reservations, Jackson succeeded in convincing him to leave the anti-war movement and devote his energy to Gay Liberation instead.⁷⁵

Don Jackson's agitator style drew scorn from facets of "the establishment." On February 23, 1970, Jackson and Morris Kight tacked a bill for ninety billion

⁷³ Don Jackson, "Reflections on N.Y. Riots," *The Advocate*, October 1969, 10, 33; Ormsbee, 102, 120; Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom*, 22.

⁷⁴ Mary Ann Cherry, "Who Was Morris Kight," *Morris Kight* (blog), accessed May 30, 2013: <http://morriskight.blogspot.com/2012/10/normal-0-false-false-false-en-us-x-none.html>.

⁷⁵ Dudley Clendinen and Adam Nagourney, *Out For Good: The Struggle to Build a Gay Rights Movement in America* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1999), 37-38; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Mary Ann Cherry, "Brother Don had a Dream," *Morris Kight* (blog), accessed January 26, 2013: <http://morriskight.blogspot.com/search?updated-min=2011-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&updated-max=2012-01-01T00:00:00-08:00&max-results=1>.

dollars - restitution for the executions of nine million homosexuals instigated by the clergy - onto the door of the First Congressional Church in Los Angeles during a protest against the Church.⁷⁶ Bakersfield City Councilman Walter F. Heisey proposed an ordinance in March of 1970 to restrict “bizarre personages”⁷⁷ by requiring reporters to obtain discretionary approval of the Chief of Police during a mayoral declared emergency, which could be issued by the Mayor at will for any reason. When rebuked for the proposal during a council meeting, Heisey clarified that his motivation was to exclude “odd-ball reporters”⁷⁸ indicating Jackson specifically.

By the 1960s, West Hollywood had become one of the centers of counterculture. During the early twentieth century, the film industry brought artists from Europe to the Los Angeles area who carried with them the permissive attitude toward homosexuality perpetuated in Weimar Germany. Decades later, hippies and the rock and roll music scene moved into clubs abandoned by Hollywood stars. Disinvestment resulted in cheap apartments and available commercial real estate that gay residents and entrepreneurs took advantage of. In Los Angeles an overt gay presence on Santa Monica Boulevard fostered an open rather than assimilated gay subculture. West Hollywood was unincorporated until 1984 and therefore beyond reach of Los Angeles Police Department, which increased its harassment in response to the growing gay visibility. Offices of the Los Angeles Free Press served as an early site for gay organizing and an unofficial headquarters for the local counterculture scene.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Teal, 281-282.

⁷⁷ “Bizarre Personages Banished,” Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Faderman and Timmons, 42-48; Kenney, 38-39.

Don Jackson and Morris Kight called the first meeting of LA-GLF by posting an ad in *Los Angeles Free Press*. The ad mentioned a series of brutal crackdowns by the Los Angeles police known as the “reign of terror” and described the need for more effective leadership and organizing. Fifteen people showed up for the first meeting of LA-GLF, which was held at the Homosexual Information Center in North Hollywood. Harry Hay, Jim Kepner, Angela Keyes Douglas, Don Slater, Morris Kight, and Don Jackson were among the attendees. A second meeting was held one week later, after which a core group, committed to avoiding the factionalism that had paralyzed east coast GLF groups, formed and LA-GLF began to mobilize.⁸⁰

When reflecting on the era during a joint interview, Allen Ginsburg and William S. Burroughs described the entire 1960s was a spiritual movement. Similarly, Don Jackson and other influential figures of Gay Liberation saw the movement as a spiritual one. Their conclusions were not reached in a vacuum. Spiritualism and experimentation with unconventional religious practices was a feature of 1960s counterculture, especially in the San Francisco Bay Area. Examples are abundant. Glide Memorial Church supported Gay Liberation in San Francisco. Reverend Troy Perry founded the gay centered Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in Los Angeles during 1968 and supported Gay Liberation in multiple cities including San Francisco. Leo Laurence described a sexual experience at an altar in an article printed in the *Berkeley Barb*. Emmaus House, located in a church on Polk Street, worked to build a spiritual community of gay men.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Clendinen and Nagourney, 37-38; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Teal, 109.

⁸¹ Timothy Miller, *The Hippies and American Values* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2011) 33-34, 138; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Jerry Aronson, Director, *The Life and Times of Allen Ginsberg* (1994; New Yorker Video, 2007) DVD; Ormsbee, 132, 199, 215-216.

The following excerpt printed in the October 1, 1969, edition of the *San Francisco Free Press* captures the spiritual counterculture's ideal vision of:

'a new society of men and women who have enough love in their hearts to accept anybody different from themselves. There is a movement. The movement. It is made up mostly of young people who are aware that our society is sick and must be made into the new mold of the Aquarian Age.'⁸²

Another radical alternative spiritual group active in the Bay Area was the Psychedelic Venus Church (PVC), founded by John Jefferson "Jeff" Poland. Jeff Poland became active in the sexual revolution while attending San Francisco State College during the early 1960s. Poland also volunteered with the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and spent the summer of 1963 in Louisiana registering African-American voters. Afterwards, Poland moved to New York City and co-founded the League for Sexual Freedom, later the Sexual Freedom League (SFL), with Leo F. Koch. Original members of the League of Sexual Freedom included Beatnik poets Allen Ginsberg and Peter Orlovsky, and homophile activist Franklin Kameny. Poland returned to the West Coast in 1965 and formed a SFL chapter in San Francisco. In August of the same year, Poland and two female friends attracted national press coverage by swimming naked at Aquatic Park to protest California's prohibition of nude beaches.⁸³

In 1966 the San Francisco chapter of the SFL began holding nude parties and orgies, which had the unanticipated effect of attracting a large middle-class following. As a result, Poland became disenchanted with the League, which he saw increasingly as an extension of bourgeois hedonism. Poland reacted by increasing his participation in other countercultural events taking place in the Bay Area. Inspired by the Berkeley

⁸² Quoted in Ormsbee, 215.

⁸³ Linda Grant, *Sexing the Millennium* (New York: Grove Press, 1994), 139-146.

Free Speech Movement, Poland legally changed his name to “Jefferson Fuck Poland.”⁸⁴

Poland was drawn to the Shiva Fellowship, a Bay Area sect that worshipped Shiva, the Hindu deity of destruction and regeneration. Under the leadership of Rev. Wilbur “Willie” Leo Minzey, the Shiva Fellowship held worship in Golden Gate Park every Sunday. Worship consisted of ritualistic singing, dancing, chanting, and praying, plus cannabis, wine, and LSD use. Minzey was arrested on April 16, 1969 and charged with distributing marijuana to minors at one of the public worship services. Conviction and a prison sentence followed. Without Minzey the Shiva Fellowship fell into disarray and worshippers turned to Poland for leadership. Poland and "Mother Boats," a male member of the SFL, transformed the fellowship into the Psychedelic Venus Church (PVC) devoted to the Venus-Aphrodite sex goddess. PVC membership cost five dollars per year and the church mailed two joints of marijuana, plus a letter from Poland to new converts once membership payment was received.⁸⁵

PVC combined a cannabis Eucharist with a nude party at which bisexuality was encouraged. Genital Sacrifice was held during the seasonal equinoxes and solstices. The ritual involved one stripped and blindfolded sacrificial male and female lying on an altar with warm honey smeared on their genitals. After invocation of Kali and Shiva, worshippers lined up and took turns licking the honey off the genitals of

⁸⁴ Karla Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 195; Grant, 139-146.

⁸⁵ R. Stuart, “Entheogenic Sects and Psychedelic Religions,” *MAPS*, V. 12, N. 1, Spring 2002, 20-21, accessed October 31, 2013: <http://www.maps.org/news-letters/v12n1/12117stu.pdf>; Michael Marinacci, “Sex Drugs and Hindu Gods: The story of the Psychedelic Venus Church,” (1998), accessed November 1, 2013: http://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/Revealing_the_truth/conversations/topics/1668?var=1; Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 197; Miller, 28; Chas S. Clifton, *Her Hidden Children: The Rise of Wicca and Paganism in America* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 148-150.

the sacrificed. Cannabis and nude dancing to psychedelic rock music followed the rituals.⁸⁶

In June of 1970, Poland demonstrated solidarity with Gay Liberation in an article he wrote for the *Berkeley Barb* titled “So Try It!!!” In the article Poland argued that homosexuality helped reform because it offered an alternative to the “patriarchal patterns of male-female heterosexuality.”⁸⁷

Karla Jay met Jeff Poland in Los Angeles at the city’s first Gay Pride March during the summer of 1970. Jay described Poland as “a gentle looking young man with a slight build, long dark hair, and a black beard ...wearing nothing but a lacey pair of red underwear.”⁸⁸ Jay later visited Poland who was living in the Church, which was located on Market Street in a run-down area of Oakland. Jay described the Church as a second story loft furnished only with “old mattresses, stained gym mats, and worn sleeping bags.”⁸⁹ Religious status provides tax exemptions and constitutionally protected privileges. Jay speculated that “Making the PVC a religion probably protected the gatherings from police raids and the group’s income from the Internal Revenue Service; calling the PVC a ‘religion’ entitled group members to constitutional privileges – and deductions.”⁹⁰

During the spring of 1969, Carl Wittman shared a draft of *A Gay Manifesto* with fellow members of the Committee for Homosexual Freedom (CHF.) CHF was formed after the termination of Gale Whittington by States Line Steamship Company. Leo Laurence, editor of *Vector*, publication of Society for Individual Rights, recruited

⁸⁶ Stuart, 20-21; Marinacci, “Sex Drugs and Hindu Gods: The story of the Psychedelic Venus Church.”

⁸⁷ Miller, 28, 134.

⁸⁸ Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 195.

⁸⁹ Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 196.

⁹⁰ Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 195-196.

Whittington to pose as a model for a fashion article. Without either of their knowledge, the hired photographer provided the *Berkeley Barb* with an informal slightly risqué photograph of Laurence and Whittington embracing. *Berkeley Barb* in turn used the photograph as an accompanying illustration for an interview Laurence had provided on the rise of gay militancy. The article made Whittington's sexuality common knowledge and he was hence dismissed by State Line immediately after the corresponding issue of the *Berkeley Barb* was released. CHF picketed States Line daily during lunch hour for several weeks. States Line never admitted any wrong doing and Whittington was not reinstated. However, support for the cause created momentum. Over the course of several months, CHF took similar action against other local companies that practiced employment discrimination against gays.⁹¹

Though remembered primarily for its direct action protests, CHF included an intellectual component that perpetuated a separatist ideology. CHF members included Dunbar Aitkens, former editor of the Berkeley student engineering newspaper *Particle*, Charles Thorp, a dynamic student at San Francisco State, *Gay Power* reporter Don Jackson, Morgan Pinney, associate professor at San Francisco State, Carl Wittman, and less notorious college educated student activists. CHF intellectuals cultivated a gay-centered view of the world by operating from a position in which gay perspective was assumed to be the norm. The consensus was that liberation could not occur within the larger culture created by an oppressive heterosexual society.

Therefore an alternative gay culture needed be developed. Thus unique gay thought

⁹¹ Gale Chester Whittington, interview by Nate Klarfeld, *Stonewall Live!* (blog), February 3, 2011, accessed January 22, 2014: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/stonewalllive/2011/02/04/gale-chester-whittington-author-of-beyond-normal-t>; Teal, 45-49; Gale Chester Whittington, *Beyond Normal: The Birth of Gay Pride* (U.S.A.: Booklocker.com, INC. 2010), 108-119.

and expression was encouraged. CHF sought to gather art and science manuscripts for a magazine it planned to title *Free Particle*. The rationale was that encouragement of gay intellectual achievement would strengthen collective identity and aid development of a distinct gay culture.⁹²

A similar phenomenon gained momentum on the east coast following the Stonewall riots of June 1969. Gay Liberationists set-up several living collectives that served as live-in think-tanks, work sites for activists, and laboratories for experimenting with alternative ways of living and expressing oneself; thus perpetuating gays' perceptions of themselves as a distinct people. However, San Francisco was a unique environment. Gay men who relocated to the San Francisco Bay Area during the 1960s brought with them emotional baggage secondary to hardships experienced during their lives elsewhere, but also utopian dreams and hope of a much better life. Some of these gay immigrants brought education as well as practical knowledge and experience in social organizing, thus forming a concentration of idealism, labor, and intellectual capital in a city that already had a long established homosocial culture. Also significant is the fact that, as a result of relocation, most of the gay immigrants to the city were less subject to familial and community pressures to conform to conventional social expectations.⁹³

⁹² Thorp Notebook - Free Particle, folder 12, Charles Thorp Papers; Morgan Pinney, "Gay Liberation; A Movement Without a Model," folder 21, Charles Thorp Papers; Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 118-135; Meredith May, "BERKELEY / 40 years on, Free Speechers talk all they want," *SFGate*, October 11, 2004, accessed April 24, 2014: <http://www.sfgate.com/education/article/BERKELEY-40-years-on-Free-Speechers-talk-all-2718252.php>; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Ormsbee, 257-261; "Corvallis, Oregon State University gay activism 1969-2004," *OUTHISTORY.org*, accessed March 29, 2014: http://outhistory.org/oldwiki/Corvallis_Oregon_State_University_gay_activism_1969-2004.

Gary Alinder advocated for development of a localized gay mercantile economy in an article, "Alternative Culture," printed in the November 15-30, 1969 edition of *San Francisco Free Press*. Alinder reasoned:

The Capitalist establishment controls money and as long as we are dependent on their cash we shall be dependent on them. Food, shelter, clothing are real needs, and as long as we live in an urban capitalist country we will probably need small amounts of cash. Our goal should be to reduce to almost nothing our living expenses. In other words, to reduce to a minimum the energy we must sell them. The more of us who can free ourselves from their "jobs," the stronger will be our community. ...we've got a lot to learn. Like how to live in communes to reduce rent and get to know each other better. Or like how to get cheap but healthy food. Like making and sharing our clothing. Like organizing more free music, dances; parties, films. Like sponsoring and using free services such as Free clinics, Switchboards, crash pads, alternative media. Like forming more communes to provide specialized services to the community. Some people envision an interlocking network of such communes. If this develops we'll need to give the straight world almost none of our energy.⁹⁴

George Harris, also known as "Hibiscus," founder of the gay theater troop The Cockettes and one of the founding members of CHF, resided in Kaliflower Commune during the same time period in which Alinder wrote "Alternative Culture." The Kaliflower Commune participated in a network of approximately three hundred Bay Area communes that traded goods and services without monetary exchange. This practice was driven in part by countercultural beliefs that participation in U.S. capitalism contributed to unpopular actions such the Vietnam War, conscription, and economic oppression. Harris's connection to the communal network and CHF

⁹³ John Kenoble, "Somewhere In The Right Direction: Testimony of My Experience in a Gay Male Living Collective," in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (U.S.A.: Douglas, 1972), 301-315; Ron Auerbacher, interview, January 7, 2014, *OUTSpoken*, accessed October 13, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/ch5u>; Jason Victor Serinus, interview, January 14, 2014, *OUTSpoken*, accessed October 13, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/c21aq>; Nestor Latronico, interview, May 1, 2014, *OUTSpoken*, accessed October 13, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/c21aq>; Teal, 160-162; Ormsbee, 86-101.

⁹⁴ Quoted in Teal, 57-58.

demonstrates early Gay Liberation's ideological and geographic proximity to the 1960s counterculture.⁹⁵

According to Leo Laurence, the Black Panther Party helped, supported, and trained members of CHF, which further indicates that early Gay Liberation, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, were intricately link to New Left radicalism. Cooperation between early Gay Liberation groups and the Black Panthers on the West Coast is further supported by Karla Jay who revealed that members of the Black Panther Party visited Venice-GLF and spoke of armed revolution. Don Jackson later noted in a letter to Stan Williams: "Strangely, it is the most radical blood-in the streets papers that are friendly to us, papers which are controlled by Weathermen and Maoists. These papers have never been friendly to Gay Lib."⁹⁶ New Left organizations generally were not friendly to Gay Liberation. These Bay Area examples therefore represent exceptions.⁹⁷

CHF sponsored a well-attended symposium in the Bay Area the week of Thanksgiving 1969 followed by a second one December 26th, 27th, 29th, and 30th of 1969.

⁹⁵ *The Cockettes*, Bill Weber and David Weissman (2002; U.S.A.: Strand Releasing, 2003) DVD; Whittington, *Beyond Normal*, 118.

⁹⁶ Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front (GLF), Los Angeles Records, Coll2012.031, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*; Karla Jay, interview, March 14, 2014, *OUTSpoken: Oral History From LGBTQ Pioneers*, accessed October, 18, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/c1250>; *Stonewall Live!* (blog), February 3, 2011, accessed January 22, 2014: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/stonewalllive/2011/02/04/gale-chester-whittington-author-of-beyond-normal-t>.

Both events included sessions devoted to communal living and separatism. Reporting on the December symposium, Jim Kepner noted that the communal living workshop generated much excitement.⁹⁸

Jim Kepner and Don Jackson both reported that the possibility of violent resistance was discussed by conference attendees. One faction endorsed the idea of armed struggle, a second opposed, and a third supported violence only as a defensive measure.

Leo Laurence warned that Gay Liberation could trigger a backlash and predicted that it might be necessary for gays to stockpile weapons and ammunition for defense against law enforcement. However, “Jim” of a New York City GLF group described the talk of weapons and revolution as nothing more than “masochistic fantasy.”⁹⁹ Fantasy based rhetoric or genuine resolve, talk of violence and revolution does not indicate a high degree of motivation among conference attendees to work within the system as has been implied; quite the opposite.¹⁰⁰

Multiple historical factors, spanning more than a century, made San Francisco the center of a distinct gay subculture. The California Gold Rush attracted a large male immigrant population to the region, which yielded a high male to female ratio in the Bay Area, resulting in a geographically isolated permissive homosocial environment. Over successive decades, shipping, wartime mobilization and discharges, the Beatnik influence, and gay migrations reinforced the city’s

⁹⁸ “Registration Form,” “Attention Gay Community,” folder 12, Charles Thorp Papers; Jim Kepner, “Symposium Explores Gay Arts, Crafts, Life Style,” *The Advocate*, March 1970, 6; Teal, 109-111; “Symposium,” Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

⁹⁹ Quoted in Teal, 110.

¹⁰⁰ Teal, 109-111; “Symposium,” Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

homosocial culture. The 1960s counterculture and spirit of revolution proceeding years of systemic abuse radicalized significant numbers of gay men in the San Francisco Bay Area, many of whom concluded that reform within the system was not possible. Such conditions made the Bay Area an epicenter for gay separatism.

CHAPTER 3

GAYS GOING THEIR OWN WAY

Don Jackson formally presented a proposal for the Alpine County project on December 28, 1969, at the West Coast Gay Liberation Conference that Carl Wittman coordinated with militant gay groups in the San Francisco Bay area and Los Angeles. The conference was scheduled in the middle of a four-day gay arts and science symposium sponsored by *Free Particle*. Held at Sherwood Forest, a gay student center in Berkeley, California, the event was intended to promote gay solidarity and organizing.¹⁰¹

Jackson's plan consisted of groups of individuals discreetly settling in Alpine County, until sufficient numbers had been reached to comprise a new voting majority in the sparsely populated region of the state. Once a new voting majority was established, the existing local government would be recalled and replaced with an elected gay and lesbian administration.¹⁰² Jackson envisioned:

A place where there is no job discrimination, police harassment or prejudice. A place where love rules instead of hate. A beautiful valley in the mountains, remote enough from the cities so that we will not be hassled, yet close enough so that transportation is rapid. A place where a Gay government can build the base for a flourishing Gay counter-culture and city... It would mean Gay territory. It would mean a Gay government, a Gay civil service, a county welfare department which made public assistance payments to the refugees

¹⁰¹ "Registration Form," "Attention Gay Community," and Leo E. Laurence, "Homogeneous Homosexuals," clipping from *Berkeley Tribe*, December 19, 1969, folder 12, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁰² Faderman and Timmons, 178; "Alpine Liberation," Charles Thorp Papers.

from persecution and prejudice. It could mean the establishment of the world's first Gay university, partially paid for by the state under the California Community College Act. It could mean the establishment of the world's first museum of Gay arts, sciences and history, paid for with public funds. Housing could be erected under public housing laws with funds furnished mostly by the state and federal governments. A free county health service and hospital could provide for our sick... The colony could become the Gay symbol of liberty, a world center for the Gay counter-culture, and a shining symbol of hope to all Gay people in the world.¹⁰³

The reaction among conference attendees was mixed. Morris Kight opposed the idea claiming the project would reinforce stereotypes imposed by the dominate culture. Kight later admitted: "I thought they were all crazy. We can't do that, we can't go into the country. We'd starve to death. I pooh-poohed it. I didn't say that publicly. It was just my private thing."¹⁰⁴ However, the idea did attract supporters.¹⁰⁵

Alpine County was selected primarily because its low population made a political take-over a realistically attainable goal. After decades of stagnation, Alpine's population grew from 397 in 1960, to 484 in 1970, secondary to Bear Valley and Kirkwood ski resort developments. The bulk of the county's two million dollar annual revenue was reportedly derived from the state and federal government. Most of the employed Alpine residents worked for the county government, which maintained a court house, jail, museum, and elementary school. An influx of approximately 243 participants would create a raw population majority. A new law had recently shortened voting requirements from one year of residency to ninety days.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Don Jackson, "Brother Don Has A Dream," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁰⁴ Quoted in Cherry, "Brother Don Had a Dream."

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., Faderman and Timmons, 177; "A gay 'nation' in the Sierras?" *The Advocate*, November 11-24, 1970;" Miller, 134; Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Martin Saint John, "Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?" *The Advocate*, March 3-16, 1971.

Alpine County also had an economic base with some potential for further development. Businesses in Markleeville during 1970 consisted of only two motels, two restaurants, one laundry, a liquor store, general store, gas station, real estate office, Bank of America, and post office. As an impoverished locality, the county qualified for additional subsidies. Expanding agriculture in the Carson River Valley, establishing a university, and bringing health services to the county were options for further economic development project planners considered. However, planners realized that tourism presented the most economic potential.¹⁰⁷

Proximity to Nevada was another factor that made Alpine County appealing. Initial organizers dreamed of eventually attracting sufficient numbers of recruits to constitute the numeric majority needed to take over the state of Nevada. Additionally, the County's newspaper, the *Alpine Beacon*, was owned by a gay resident of the Bay Area who disliked the Alpine government and could be courted as an ally.¹⁰⁸

Following the conference, Don Jackson returned to southern California and continued reporting while simultaneously promoting the idea for the project. Jackson and other proponents genuinely believed that the Alpine project was a quicker way to achieve Gay Liberation. For example, a gay voting majority would have some control over local law enforcement through an elected sheriff, while a gay district attorney

¹⁰⁶ United States Census Bureau, "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990," accessed March 31, 2014: <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ca190090.txt>; "A Gay Nation in the Sierras," *The Advocate*, November 11-24, 1970; "Alpine Report," Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Faderman and Timmons, 178; Teal, 312-320; Alpine County Chamber of Commerce, "The History of Alpine County," accessed May 31, 2013: <http://www.alpinecounty.com/history.html>; "Alpine Liberation," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁰⁷ Don Jackson, interview, 1986; "Help Build the Stonewall Nation," "Alpine County Information Statistics, ETC." folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Don Jackson, interview, 1986; "Suggested Agenda and Some Ideas," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

and superior court judge could exercise discretionary powers over what crimes to prosecute. If successful, the strategy might compel society to implement reforms in order to prevent similar takeovers of other localities.¹⁰⁹

Karla Jay noted in her memoir *Tales of the Lavender Menace*:

The fastest way to achieve true liberation, or so we believed, would be to find a place where we could all move and become the majority. Then we could pass laws that would benefit our way of life. Alpine would become the first American queer county... In some ways this was our cleverest idea... Instead of trying to tackle the entire United States, we could transform one corner of it. Since we looked just like everyone else... the locals would never catch on until we already owned much of the property.¹¹⁰

Stan Williams of Gay Nationalists Society and LA-GLF was responsible for coordination efforts in the Los Angeles area. However, it was Morris Kight who was ultimately in control in Los Angeles, not Williams. By late summer of 1970, Kight and another former anti-war activist, Don Kilhefner, had established informal leadership roles in LA-GLF. Kilhefner, raised in an Amish Mennonite community in Pennsylvania, left his home at the age of seventeen to attend Howard University. Kilhefner “came out” while studying cultural history at Howard and was active in anti-war campaigns and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee for Civil Rights. Kilhefner joined the Peace Corp after graduation, served in Ethiopia, then settled in the Los Angeles area where he developed a reputation for shouting down anti-gay opponents at demonstrations and carrying a copy of Mao Tse-tung’s *Little Red Book*.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁹ Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; “Help Build the Stonewall Nation,” Charles Thorp Papers; Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

¹¹⁰ Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 213.

¹¹¹ Timmons, 257-258; Clendinen and Nagourney, 82-83; Kenney, 82, 166-174; “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

After demonstrating an initial lack of enthusiasm, Kight and Kilhefner declared their support for the Alpine project on behalf of LA-GLF. The years 1970-1971 were a very active time for LA-GLF, a period informally known as “A Demonstration a Day.”¹¹² Despite the activity, lack of mainstream media coverage had limited the social impact of Gay Liberation. Kight’s idea was to capitalize on Jackson’s vision by using it to entice the mainstream media into covering Gay Liberation. Unaware of Kight’s true motive, Don Jackson reluctantly went along with the plan to seek publicity for the project.¹¹³

While LA-GLF leaders sought to exploit Jackson’s vision for publicity, genuine supporters in the San Francisco Bay Area earnestly devoted time and effort to developing it. During September of 1970, John Moore of Berkeley distributed copies of Jackson’s “Brother Don Has A Dream” essay.¹¹⁴ Charles Thorp, twenty year old Secretary of CHF and founding member of SF-GLF, helped organize Bay Area Gays for Unity and Nationalism (BAGFUN) to aid the project. “Anywhere else, we would have to create from the ruins of heterosexual society... but here is open land,” Thorp expressed.¹¹⁵

A meeting agenda indicates the breadth of idealism and planning discussed by BAGFUN. The possibility of building a tent city on national forest land as a temporary means of coping with the housing shortage was discussed. Much of Alpine County is in the Toibe National Forest; beyond the jurisdiction of local law

¹¹² Quoted in Fader and Timmons, 177.

¹¹³ Faderman and Timmons, 176-180; Jay, *Tales of the Lavender Menace*, 213; Clendinen and Nagourney, 82-83; Mark Thompson, ed., *Long Road to Freedom*, 40; Cherry, “Brother Don had a Dream;” Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹¹⁴ John Moore, Letter to Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles September 28, 1970, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹¹⁵ Untitled clipping from *Daily Californian*, October 21, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

enforcement and County agencies from which harassment was expected. Distrust of the County administration, prompted mention that at least one participant should become a registrar of voters. Gay youths were discussed as well. More specifically, whether the gay county in planning should assume responsibility for gay children in state institutions. A moral obligation for the children was noted since “nobody else wants them” plus associated financial incentives. Local activists were aware that homelessness was a growing problem among gay men in the San Francisco Bay Area. Therefore it is not surprising that the possibility of a “County Crash Pad to provide free housing and food for our poor” was considered.¹¹⁶ Other items of consideration pertained to addressing the type of city collectively desired including location, whether or not automobiles should be permitted, and “non-discrimination of Gay women.”¹¹⁷

The leadership of BAGFUN favored establishing an underground government and seeking diplomatic recognition from Algeria. The Algerian government had demonstrated sympathy toward revolutionary groups by serving as somewhat of a haven for exiled Black Panthers and providing refuge for Eldridge Cleaver and Timothy Leary. BAGFUN members understood that diplomatic recognition from an established government would yield some political clout, enhance public relations, and generate publicity.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ “Suggested Agenda & Some Ideas” folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.; Don Jackson interview, 1986; David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2004), 106-110; Don Jackson, “Liberty and Gays,” Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

¹¹⁸ Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Karla Jay, interview, 2014.

LA-GLF released a statement to the mainstream press in October 1970 providing an overview of the project. The press release stated that “a county in California where two hundred Gays would constitute a majority of registered voters”¹¹⁹ was the target but did not specifically mention Alpine. The *San Francisco Examiner* claimed shortly thereafter that LA-GLF confirmed that Alpine County was the target. Prior news reports were sparse and with a few exceptions, largely confined to the underground press.¹²⁰

Both the United Press International and Associated Press picked up the story and the project drew national attention. LA-GLF held a press conference on October 20, 1970, at which Don Kilhefner reported that the first group of 250-300 participants were planning to relocate in Alpine County on January 1, 1971, and establish residency. “We will recall all elected officials in Alpine County, and immediately have a new election in which homosexuals will be elected to all the elective offices in the county,”¹²¹ Kilhefner announced. California law mandated specific professional qualifications for certain county officials. Therefore, two attorneys were required; one to serve as district attorney and the other Superior Court judge. A medical doctor was needed to serve as health officer, a registered civil engineer for road commissioner, and four credentialed teachers to comprise the school board. Kilhefner reported two doctors, two lawyers and several teachers had committed to the project, but that two nurses and a civil engineer were still needed. Kilhefner claimed that four dwellings

¹¹⁹ “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

¹²⁰ Faderman and Timmons, 177-179; Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

¹²¹ “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

plus a ranch had been looked at but admitted that housing was in short and stressed that accommodations would amount to communal living during the early stages.¹²²

Conspiring leadership circle aside, there were plenty of individuals associated with LA-GLF who took the project seriously.¹²³ In his later expose, Rod Gibson wrote:

I wanted to move there myself because it appeared to be an opportunity to start something fresh and alive for the Gay community, a chance to show the world what we can do and why so many thought that it would be necessary to do it... I saw the validity of providing this refuge from harassment, especially after reviewing some of the pleading letters of support for the project plans.¹²⁴

A member of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Community Church who owned a cabin and five acre lot in Alpine County compiled a report describing the county's geography, infrastructure, economy, laws, and perspective of residents. According to the *Alpine Report*, eighty-five to ninety percent of the land was administered by the National Forest Service and U.S. Department of Agriculture. Despite a short growing season and only one to one and a half percent of the land being suitable for agriculture, the author was optimistic that with careful management, the "land could be made to yield sufficient food stuffs to support a community of our size."¹²⁵

The *Alpine Report* identified Alpine residents and officials who were friendly to the project and those who were hostile. Persons identified as hostile included realtor Chris Mann; Bear Valley Developer Bruce Orvis; County Sheriff Stuart Merrill; the unnamed editor of the Markleeville newspaper, *Alpine Beacon*; a local post mistress referred to as "Mrs. Brown," who reportedly met the author with a

¹²² Ibid.; Faderman and Timmons, 177-179; Cherry, "Brother Don Had a Dream."

¹²³ Cherry, "Brother Don Had A Dream;" Faderman and Timmons, 178.

¹²⁴ Cherry, "Brother Don Had A Dream;" Faderman and Timmons, 178. Saint John, "Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?"

¹²⁵ "Alpine Report," Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Teal, 316.

shotgun and claimed, “We’re going to stop you... Stop you with a shotgun if we have to.”¹²⁶ The report warned that Registrar of Voters and Deputy Registrar of Voters, “Mr. Covington” and “Mrs. Burke,” were hostile and would probably attempt to sabotage a re-call election. Persons identified as “friends” included Gary Merrill, son of Sheriff Stuart Merrill; owner of Woodfords County Store; “Mr. Clary,” School Superintendent; Chuck Butler, Markleeville store employee; June Barrett, Director of Department of County Welfare.¹²⁷

Publicity forced project volunteers to quickly assess the progress that had been made. According to findings summarized in a LA-GLF memo, 479 persons, average age of twenty-six, described as “tough enough to withstand the rigors of outdoor living”¹²⁸ under vigilante threat had signed up for relocation including some “older people”¹²⁹ described as experts in agronomy, ecology, and other specializations. Two doctors, two attorneys, and two voting registrars were among the volunteers. Distinguished professors were reportedly willing to resign held positions in order to contribute to the development of the proposed Gay Institute of Alpine County but no names, disciplines, or affiliations were noted in the corresponding document. Organizers admitted this was the project’s weakest program. A trade school addition specializing in ecology, agronomy, and museum curatorship was reportedly discussed but no concrete decisions had been made. The possible lease of a ranch northwest of Markleeville equipped with running water but no power was noted. For power, gasoline operated portable generators were pledged along with

¹²⁶ “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Randy Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

transportation thereof from Los Angeles. However, since “neighbors might misunderstand the purchase of gasoline in bulk,” arrangements would need to be made to obtain fuel from a source outside of Alpine County.¹³⁰

According to the *Alpine Report*, Alpine residents feared rapid military style take-over, “mass rape of their young,” ousting of heterosexuals, violence, drugs, crime, ecological ruin, adverse publicity, and influx of “hippie type degenerates who would sponge off the Co. Welfare and do nothing for the Co.” Passive threats of vigilante violence were made by county residents, e.g. “Kilhefner ought to be shot;” “Well, you know my boys are pretty good with their deer rifles.” The author of the report suggested sending “articulate straight looking people”¹³¹ to engage in direct dialogue and assure residents that no harm would come to them as a way to ease tensions. The advice was apparently heeded. “Scouting parties”¹³² visited Alpine County periodically during the autumn of 1970; occasionally distributing literature and attempting to engage residents.¹³³

Scouting party members reported “considerable hostility” from Alpine residents.¹³⁴ The hostile reaction was based on more than antipathy toward homosexuals. County residents were also concerned over the broader, long term consequences of radical groups such as GLF, Weathermen, or the Black Panthers

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹³² Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹³³ Ibid.; “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Teal, 317.

¹³⁴ Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

taking over a civilian locality, thus gaining control of a branch of law enforcement with the right to stockpile weapons.¹³⁵

Based on information provided by Don Kilhefner, *The Advocate* reported that project organizers had developed a three-point plan to counter resistance among Alpine residents. The first consisted of opening dialogue with county residents, which Kilhefner described as “Simply getting Gay people to sit down with some of the residents up there and explain what we’re doing, why we’re there, who we are, and explain to them that we are no threat to them.”¹³⁶ The second, contingent on the failure of the first, involved use of legal interventions or “taking it to court if any roadblocks are put in our way. We already have lawyers looking into this,”¹³⁷ Kilhefner claimed. Don Jackson had consulted an ACLU attorney for legal advice pertaining to the project. Regarding the third option, Kilhefner asserted: “if there is any other harassment of us – by vigilante groups, say, or whatever, we intend to use self-defense. If necessary, we will defend ourselves.”¹³⁸

During the last week of October 1970, unknown individual(s) altered street signs throughout Alpine County. A highway sign was changed from "Watch for deer" to "Watch for deer—hit a queer." Likewise, the sign for the main thoroughfare of Markleeville was altered from thruway to "Gay-way." Graffiti symbolically renamed the local tavern "Fairyland Bar."¹³⁹ Similarly, “Queer County”¹⁴⁰ was added to a sign identifying the Alpine county line. Reflecting the hostility of some of the County

¹³⁵ Johnson, “Homosexuals from Haystacks,” 50-51.

¹³⁶ “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid;” Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

¹³⁹ “Gay Mecca No. 1.” *TIME*. November, 2, 1970.

¹⁴⁰ Teal, 318.

residents, the bar of the Alpine Hotel displayed a hand-written sign announcing “HOMO HUNTING LISCENSES SOLD HERE.”¹⁴¹

On October 27, 1970, Dr. Carl McIntire announced that Christians would be dispatched to Alpine County in trailers to establish residency and work as missionaries in order to “help maintain responsible authority”¹⁴² should a gay invasion commence.

McIntire, a sixty-four year old fundamentalist Christian radio evangelist, had a history of creating contention. His opposition to theological liberalism led to him being deposed as a minister of the United Presbyterian Church in 1936. As a pro-war organizer, McIntire staged Vietnam victory rallies in Washington on April 4th and October 3rd of 1970. At a meeting of the American Council of Christian Churches in Pasadena, California October 28-30, 1970, McIntire caused an altercation by attempting to assume presidency of the organization through parliamentary maneuver. McIntire’s actions prompted the council to vote the Bible Presbyterian Church, of which he was moderator, out of the organization. *Twentieth Century Reformation Hour*, McIntire’s radio program, aired five times a week on over six hundred radio stations in the United States and Canada.¹⁴³

McIntire declared that “homosexuality must be met by the Gospel” and that any “attempt to dignify and legalize it” would corrupt society. Capitalizing on public fears, McIntire claimed, “A new order, after they have repudiated our system of

¹⁴¹ Teal, 317-318.

¹⁴² Andrew Schweizer, “Preacher out to stop Alpine takeover” *The Advocate*, November 25 - December 8, 1970.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*; “Gay vs Gospel,” clipping from *San Francisco Good Times*, October 30, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers; Faderman and Timmons, 179.

morality, could very well become the first U.S. atheist and Communist county.”¹⁴⁴

“The day of silence has passed, and it is unthinkable that the Christians of the United States should sit by and permit a county to become a homosexual estate to embarrass the nation before the world,”¹⁴⁵ McIntire proselytized.

Don Jackson commented that McIntire’s actions would eventually undermine his own agenda and rationalized that such antics could be advantageous to Gay Liberation. According to Jackson:

Huey [Newton] is a very astute tactician and is looking for ways to radicalize the conservative gays. The radical movement can increase its numbers greatly if it can get McIntire, Agnew, Bathroom Martha and other fascists to make a few more public remarks about degenerates, filth and sex perverts.¹⁴⁶

Mother Boats taunted that Gay Liberationists were intending to establish “new reformed churches that will accept people of all races and persuasions without prejudice and bigotry”¹⁴⁷ and were not in need of any help from McIntyre. The Orthodox Episcopal Church of God endorsed the Alpine project and promised to supply “freedom packages”¹⁴⁸ and establish a haven in the County to counter McIntire’s efforts. *SF Good Times* reported that the church had registered in Alpine County and could acquire property as a religious institution.¹⁴⁹

On November 1, 1970, approximately 125 people attended an organizational meeting at the LA-GLF offices. Five committees were formed and tasked with accumulating the resources required for the project to succeed.¹⁵⁰ Plans were made and put in motion. According to an extensive memo prepared signed by Randy Hurst,

¹⁴⁴ Schweizer, “Preacher out to stop Alpine takeover.”

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ “Gay vs Gospel,” Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁴⁷ “Gay Radical Says Alpine Indian Turf,” *Berkeley Barb*, October 30- November 5, 1970.

¹⁴⁸ “Gay vs Gospel,” Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.; “Gay Radical Says Alpine Indian Turf.”

¹⁵⁰ “Alpine Co. Here We Come!” *Front Lines*, December 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

funds were to be deposited in a bank account in San Francisco. At least two people would be designated to remain in San Francisco and Sacramento during the week to gather food, medical supplies, and other staples. A nutritionist was to prepare a list of high protein, nutrient rich food to be used as a guide. Project volunteers would register both Gay and Native American voters. All registration affidavits would then be filed at the same time. Ninety days later, an initiative for a county-wide election would be filed. Names of candidates would not be revealed until the time of filing in an effort to thwart any potential “repression.” A suggestion that the ousted administration be granted lifelong pensions is noted.¹⁵¹

LA-GLF volunteers designed and distributed flyers and buttons stating: “Come to Alpine County, the new Gay Mecca” and “Alpine County or Bust.”¹⁵² Publicity photographs were taken as well. One featured a long-haired young man with bare-feet, a guitar case, small dog, and a sign stating “Alpine County – or other appropriate destination”¹⁵³ hitch-hiking near a freeway entrance. Another one, designed as a “wanted” poster, stated: “WANTED FOR SEEKING REFUGE & FREEDOM” and featured six individuals posing in a pseudo western scene.¹⁵⁴

A project spokesperson(s) drafted a statement inviting law schools to study the situation as it unfolded. The author(s) contended that the project constituted an “unparalleled ‘laboratory’ for legal research”¹⁵⁵ due to legal complications ranging

¹⁵¹ Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁵² Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

¹⁵³ Hobson, 122.

¹⁵⁴ “WANTED For Seeking Refuge and Freedom,” ctn. 4, folder 5, Sexual Freedom League Records, BANC MSS 83/181 c, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁵⁵ “Statement to Law Schools,” box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

from “county character revisions, to building codes, to local autonomy, to the morals codes.”¹⁵⁶

Men and women throughout the nation wrote to LA-GLF asking to join the migration. Requests for information and pledges of support came from locations as distant as Hawaii and the Netherlands. On November 10, 1970, a “visiting brother from HSL”¹⁵⁷ (Homophile Social League)¹⁵⁸ attended a Washington DC GLF meeting to urge support for the project and personally pledged a twenty-dollar contribution.¹⁵⁹ Randy Hurst felt compelled to note in a LA-GLF memo that, “Each person will be coming entirely voluntarily and no one has told anyone to come: all coming in peace, but with pioneer courage.”¹⁶⁰

TIME magazine reported that GLF members were stockpiling food, negotiating land purchase, and signing up additional recruits. According to LA-GLF member Carolyn Weathers:

We were going to be like the pioneers in the covered wagons... People took it up as a great idea. There'd be a guy at GLF sewing blankets and quilts and people were sending food supplies and all this for when we took over Alpine County.¹⁶¹

Don Jackson eventually returned to San Francisco permanently and led project organizing efforts in the Bay Area in consultation with, but largely independent of, Los Angeles organizers. Jackson explained in a letter to Morris Kight, that he had re-envisioned the project to include other counterculture groups, such as the Shiva

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ “GLF Newsletter,” Gay Liberation Front Washington D.C., V.1, No.14, November 10, 1970, 4, accessed October 26, 2013: <http://www.rainbowhistory.org/pdf/gfl1.14.pdf>.

¹⁵⁸ “Timeline,” The Rainbow History Project, accessed October 26, 2013: <http://www.rainbowhistory.org/pdf/timeline.pdf>.

¹⁵⁹ “GLF Newsletter,” Gay Liberation Front Washington D.C.

¹⁶⁰ Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Correspondence and notes 1970, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁶¹ Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream;” “Gay Mecca No. 1.”

Fellowship and the *Good Times* Commune, which had expressed enthusiasm. “Now, I visualize it as a liberated territory, a bastion of liberty in the statist sea, based on the basic libertarian doctrine that a person has the right to do as he wishes so long as he doesn’t harm anyone else,” Jackson wrote.¹⁶² According to Jackson, the concept appealed to “tribal rural communes who are tired of being hassled by building and health inspectors, to street people who are tired of being hassled.” Jackson expressed belief that “high government officials” would not interfere because “they think they can get rid of a lot of troublemakers that way. All of the filthy hippies, queers and people that have sex in public and go nude will move up there they think.”¹⁶³

Jackson communicated his intention to enlist the help of the SIR Board of Directors in seeking commitment from the governor to call upon the National Guard to protect gay voting rights in Alpine County and guard against “violence and murder which has been threatened by the old-regime.” If that measure proved unsuccessful, Jackson suggested appealing directly to the Department of Justice for a force of U.S. Marshalls.¹⁶⁴

Jackson brought together a coalition consisting of members of SF-GLF, the Psychedelic Venus Church, BAGFUN, and the Sexual Freedom League to form the Alpine Liberation Front (ALF.) Jackson visualized ALF growing into a national organization. In a letter to Morris Kight, Jackson explained:

The liberation of Alpine for Gays will be only its first objective; it will go on to liberate other cities, counties and states for the people - counties for Indians, counties for hippies, counties for any oppressed people who want to free themselves from the oppression of the ancient regime. The Alpine Liberation Front can become a major thing in the history of the nation,

¹⁶² Don Jackson, Letter to Morris Kight, undated, courtesy of Mary Ann Cherry.

¹⁶³ Ibid.; “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

¹⁶⁴ Don Jackson, Letter to Morris Kight, undated, courtesy of Mary Ann Cherry.

creating liberated areas all over the country, “People’s Enclaves,” so to speak.¹⁶⁵

On November 24, 1970, approximately thirty individuals attended the founding meeting of ALF held at Glide Memorial. Steve Ginsburg, founder of Personal Rights in Defense and Education (PRIDE) in Los Angeles in 1966, chaired the meeting. PRIDE rejected the cultivation of respectability approach favored by homophile groups of the time and encouraged overt celebrations of gay male sexuality and militant activism. Ginsberg attended PRIDE management meetings dressed in full leather as a way of emphasizing both concepts.¹⁶⁶

ALF members rejected the idea of forming an all-gay county during the founding meeting in favor of a resolution presented by Jeff Poland to transform Alpine County into “a liberation enclave where ‘where people can do anything they wish, so long as they don’t hurt anyone.’”¹⁶⁷ The following week, ALF elected David Carpenter chairman. GLF unsuccessfully attempted to have Carpenter reinstated to a postal job from which he was fired after an investigation revealed that his spouse was a male impersonating a female and that the couple had been representing themselves as a married couple. ALF also established a message center under the direction of ALF finance committee chairman Alan Bernard, primarily for gathering and dispensing of information.¹⁶⁸

January 1, 1971, was the initial target date for settlement to commence.

However, Jim Kepner reported that January 1, 1971, “was a date pulled out of the

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ “Gay Message Center for Alpine Plan,” clipping from *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 25, 1970, “Alpine for All Swingers” clipping from *Berkeley Barb*, December 4, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers; “Alpine Liberation Front – Northern California Chapter” Sexual Freedom League Records; Faderman and Timmons, 155.

¹⁶⁷ Don Jackson, “Alpine for All Swingers,” Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.; Don Jackson, “Alpine News Round-up,” *San Francisco Gay Free Press*, undated.

hat.”¹⁶⁹ Kepner advised arriving in late spring instead and cautioned that “No one should arrive in January unless prepared for severe climate change and probably no accommodations.”¹⁷⁰

Morris Kight made arrangements for a twelve person delegation consisting of LA-GLF members, reporters, and one alleged FBI informant, to visit Alpine County during the week of Thanksgiving 1970. Rob Gibson later admitted:

I foolishly went along because I still saw a chance for success. I was asked by others in the group to appear in Alpine County over Thanksgiving weekend to arrange for a town hall meeting in December. I had reservations about putting myself and the others in the party in that kind of jeopardy and also about having to tell more lies to dupe more people.¹⁷¹

The timing of the trip to Alpine County was not coincidental. Holidays typically yield slow news days. Therefore, coordinating the trip during the Thanksgiving holiday increased the chances of better news media coverage. The trip also coincided with the People’s Revolutionary Constitutional Convention in Washington D.C. A separate delegation traveled to Washington D.C. to represent LA-GLF at the convention. Over the course of a weekend, Kight coordinated media coverage of both events from his home.¹⁷²

Per Kight’s arrangements, the delegation set forth for a three day visit to Alpine County. The *San Francisco Examiner* dubbed the delegation the “Alpine County Penetration Committee.”¹⁷³ Committee members took temperature readings and collected soil samples, most likely for dramatic effect. However, architectural

¹⁶⁹ Memo to Donn Teal, November 24, 1970, quoted in Teal, 317.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Saint John, “Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?”

¹⁷² Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

¹⁷³ “No One to Listen: Gays’ Outline for Invasion,” clipping from *San Francisco Examiner*, November 27, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

firm Ladd & Kelsey noted in its subcontract proposal that soil analysis might be required under “extreme conditions.”¹⁷⁴ June Hurre, Steve Morrison Beckwith, and Rob Gibson of LA-GLF attempted to meet with Sheriff Stuart Merrill to schedule a town meeting for December 18, 1970, intended to maintain peace between LA-GLF and Alpine County residents, but learned that Merrill was out of town for the day. The three posed for photographs in front of the Alpine County Courthouse and walked through Markleeville, stopping along the way to speak with residents. Merrill returned and met with Hurre, Beckwith, and Gibson outside of a gas station in Markleeville. Merrill asserted that the proposed town meeting was not possible because such an event would attract “other undesirables”¹⁷⁵ and warned that any large crowd that arrived in the county would be disbursed. Merrill later explained to the press that he feared such a meeting “might get out of hand.”¹⁷⁶

By the end of November 1970, a combined total of 1,179 individuals from across the nation had reportedly committed to relocating to Alpine County. LA-GLF advised participants to prepare for harsh winters in the Sierra-Nevada Mountains.¹⁷⁷

According to an activities statement prepared by Alan Bernard on behalf of ALF, 128 people with a combined total of approximately \$250,000 of investment capital were prepared to invest in the project. Bernard reported proposing lease options to absentee Alpine County ranch owners on a sixty-forty percentage

¹⁷⁴ Ladd & Kelsey, Architects, Letter to Economic Research Associates, December 2, 1970, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁷⁵ “Markleeville Gets Look at Real, Live GLFers,” *The Advocate*, December 23-January 5, 1971.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Faderman and Timmons, 178-179; Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream;” “No One to Listen: Gays’ Outline for Invasion,” Charles Thorp Papers; “The Gay Scouting Party,” clipping, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers; Ellen Shumsky, “Alpine project off? Only till snow melts,” *The Advocate*, January 6-19, 1970.

¹⁷⁷ Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream;” Faderman and Timmons, 178; Ellen Shumsky, “Alpine project off? Only till snow melts,” *The Advocate*, January 6-19, 1970; “Markleeville Gets Look at Real, Live GLFers.”

commission basis. Bernard admitted not knowing how potentially profitable the ranches were but indicated that the matter was being researched. According to Don Jackson, the leasing option idea was generally accepted by ALF because it allowed for possible conversion to a co-operative ownership system. Bernard reportedly communicated with nine business owners in Markleeville regarding similar arrangements. Based on the percentage of business concerns prepared to sell, Bernard predicted that others would inevitably follow.¹⁷⁸

Dana Rohrabacher wrote to LA-GLF on behalf of the California Libertarian Alliance providing suggestions and offering to personally help with the project. Rohrabacher cautioned that any reliance on state welfare would undermine the concept of “just let us live our life”¹⁷⁹ because “it would then add the corollary ‘at your expense.’”¹⁸⁰ Rohrabacher advised:

Your main resources are the freedom you offer plus the environment you are locating in. The economic goods are perfect for some kind of a combination ski gambling resort. Things like heated pools under domes in big hotels with ski slopes, gambling, and male & female prostitutes. Music and wild times attracts alot of people with alot of money. There is of course one major problem that is all of this would take a huge capital investment. Now that you people have had such national publicity maybe such funds would be available by investors even if they have shady backgrounds.¹⁸¹

On December 2, 1970, Economic Research Associates (ERA) offered LA-GLF a thirty-five thousand dollar development proposal. ERA was the same well-known firm that designed Disney World, Mineral King, and Busch Gardens. The proposal included a fifteen thousand dollar subcontractor’s fee for architectural firm

¹⁷⁸ Alan Bernard “Statement of Activities,” Sexual Freedom League Records; Don Jackson, “Alpine News Round-up;” Mother Boats, “ALPLIB for Washos Too,” clipping from *Berkeley Barb*, December 11-17, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

¹⁷⁹ Dana Rohrabacher, Letter to LA-GLF, December 1, 1970, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

Ladd & Kelsey Architects, and three thousand dollars for a ski consultant. ERA required a five thousand dollar deposit and estimated that the plan would take sixteen weeks to complete. ERA's proposal consisted of four phases: "Preliminary Site Selection and Evaluation," "Market Analysis and Preliminary Physical Planning," "Preliminary Feasibility Analysis," and "Detailed Financial Analysis."¹⁸²

Robert Humphries, Director of United States Mission, saw the project as an opportunity to develop a gay society independent of the influence of oppressive religion. Under Humphries's leadership, the Mission promoted the project as an exercise of religious freedom. In a statement, the Mission announced:

We are going into the good land of Alpine County, there to erect a liberated society in which we can demonstrate, to ourselves and the world, the beauty of our own lifestyle. This liberated society will, of necessity, be an exercise in religious freedom. Atheist and believer, alike, will operate in the absence of legislated religion. In our Alpine County government, the machinery of Caesar will cease to meddle in the work of God. Religious freedom will be revitalized, and that "sweet land of liberty" will be fact.¹⁸³

The Mission announced a Religious Freedom Symposium scheduled for January 23, 1971 and promised a "lively, sweeping, and informative discussion."¹⁸⁴

Information on the Alpine project was to be presented and the following questions addressed:

How does religious freedom affect homosexuals? Heterosexuals? Where are the horizons of religious freedom? How do they affect minority life-styles? Does legislated Judeo-Christian morality constitute "establishment of religion?" Could homosexuals, free from the libel of perversion and disease

¹⁸² Saint John, "Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?" *The Advocate*, March 3-16, 1971; Ladd & Kelsey, Architects, Letter to Economics Research Associates; Economic Research Associates, "A Proposal for Research: Development Potentials For A Year-Round Resort In Alpine County, California, box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁸³ Saint John, "Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?," United States Mission, "The Promised Land," box 1, folder 2, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁸⁴ "The Promised Land," Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

create a healthy society? How would the world stand to benefit from Project Alpine? What theological progress would stem from the project?¹⁸⁵

To collect donations on Hollywood Boulevard and MacCadden Place, Robert Humphries converted a Conestoga wagon into a mini covered wagon with the words “Alpine or Bust” on the cover and an open slot on top for donors to make deposits. A photograph appeared in the December 9th edition of *The Advocate* featuring Alan Cohn and Val Dill of the U.S. Mission, plus Michael O’Herrn, chairman of the LA-GLF Alpine finance committee, making the first contributions. According to LA-GLF records, volunteers were sought to make collection containers for placement in gay bars and businesses and to perform guerilla theatre skits at collection drives. The Mission declared that any donations collected would be used “to preach the equality of the homosexual ethic, inspired by God through us, to show the need for a homosexual sanctuary, to measure and strengthen the bonds of brotherhood between gay and straight, and to assert homosexual religious freedom.”¹⁸⁶ Accordingly, any inclinations to the contrary would be regarded as “an attempt to regulate religious activity.”¹⁸⁷

Robert Humphries was questioned by officer Warren Everett Newton while tending the Alpine Donation Wagon with Mike Haggerty, and Donald Dill on Hollywood Boulevard during December of 1970. A permit from the department of social services, which the three did not have, was required by Los Angeles Municipal Code Section 44.16 to solicit for charitable or political causes but not for religious ones. Humphries claimed that the Alpine project was a religious cause and therefore

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ United States Mission, “The Promised Land,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.; “ALPINE OR BUST,” Photo Caption: *The Advocate*, December 9-22, 1970.

exempt from the permit requirement. Both religious and political slogans were posted on the wagon. Newton cited Humphries, Haggerty, and Dill for soliciting without a permit. Misdemeanor fraud charges were filed against Humphries, Dill, and Haggerty based on Newton's report. The Religious Freedom Symposium was reportedly called off due to police harassment. Humphries, Dill, and Haggerty were later found not guilty of misdemeanor fraud charges in Los Angeles municipal court.¹⁸⁸

Organizing continued in the San Francisco Bay Area. Mother Boats reported that committees were being formed to organize farm communes, bee keeping, a melodrama-theater-beer hall project, a crafts pleasure fair, ski resort, free clinic, free school, utilities, communications, housing, and consumers' co-op. Noel Landree, organizer of Contra Costa GLF, owned a house in Alpine at which "a number of Gay people"¹⁸⁹ had taken up residency forming a temporary commune. Jeff Poland and Steve Ginsburg prepared an informational booklet for mail distribution containing well researched information on the climate, geography, economy, government, history, and population of Alpine County.¹⁹⁰

ALF addressed Bank of America's policy of non-lending to homosexuals at a December 8th meeting. Bank of America was the only financial institution operating in Alpine County. ALF drafted a letter to the bank demanding public repudiation of its policy and warned that if the institution failed to cooperate: "we shall organize a boycott of your bank by California's two million homosexuals, and shall commence

¹⁸⁸ "L.A. judge finds alpine fund raiser innocent," *The Advocate*, June 23, 1971.

¹⁸⁹ "Alpine Liberation Front – Northern California Chapter" Sexual Freedom League Records; Don Jackson, "Gay Highland Plan Goin' Down," *Berkeley Barb*, March 26-April 1, 1971.

¹⁹⁰ Boats, "ALPLIB for Washos Too," *Berkeley Barb*, Charles Thorp Papers; "Alpine Liberation Front – Northern California Chapter," Sexual Freedom League Records; Alpine Liberation Front, "Alpine County Information, Statistics, Etc.," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

picketing your World Headquarters in San Francisco to demonstrate our dissatisfaction and to call the attention of the public to your bigotry.”¹⁹¹

Jeff Poland drafted a letter to the Alpine County Clerk explaining his intention to relocate to Alpine County in 1971, seek the Peace and Freedom Party nomination in the 1972 election, and run for office to represent Alpine County in the state legislature. Poland requested a list of Alpine County’s registered voters and stated his intention to begin campaigning in Alpine by mailing leaflets, bulletins, plus ALF literature. Poland assured the clerk that his intentions were not to harass or offend voters but rather present alternative points for consideration as a supplement to media reports. Poland planned to encourage voters to write in with responses and individual views that could be printed in a bulletin or newsletter thus opening two-way communication. Poland asserted that the requested list of registered voters was public record, which one was entitled to for political use.¹⁹²

Representing twelve hundred members, the national directors of the Sexual Freedom League voted in favor of a resolution to support the Alpine project presented by Jeff Poland. SFL concluded that gay people had a right to political representation in accordance with their numbers and that geographical clustering might be the only way to achieve it since non-gay voters were not likely to support a known gay candidate. The resolution described the project as admirable and praised ALF’s decision to open participation to non-gay individuals.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ Boats, “ALPLIB for Washos Too,” Charles Thorp Papers; Don Jackson, “Alpine News Round-up.”

¹⁹² Jefferson Poland, Letter to Alpine County Clerk, December 17, 1970, Sexual Freedom League Records.

¹⁹³ Sexual Freedom League, “ALPINE OR BUST,” Sexual Freedom League Records.

The amount of effort that Bay Area groups and participating LA-GLF members put into the Alpine project reflects genuine dedication, which in-turn indicates that it was indeed an earnest pursuit and not merely a publicity seeking conspiracy. The thoroughness of the *Alpine Report* and the informational booklet published by ALF reflect a considerable investment of time and effort to research and planning, which is indication of sincerity. Likewise, the amount of thought and planning reflected in documents including but not limited to BAGFUN's "Suggested Agenda & Some Ideas," Randy Hurst's "Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles," Alan Bernard's "Statement of Activities," and "Statement to Law Schools" indicate legitimacy. LA-GLF initiated fundraising, collected food supplies, courted support from pro-gay churches, and devoted time to planning an election strategy and legal defense, which further indicates sincerity. Overall, proponents devoted a considerable amount of time and effort to research, planning, and initiating preparations; efforts that likely would not have been exerted without earnest intentions. However, all labors would soon prove to be in vain.¹⁹⁴

Volunteers in the San Francisco Bay Area proceeded with efforts to further develop the project into 1971, unaware that multiple convergent factors had already essentially doomed the project. For example, Bay Area Alpine Liberation, the San Francisco-Berkeley chapter of ALF, held a benefit dance to raise funds for the project on January 9, 1971 at Finnish Brotherhood Hall in Berkeley. Admission was two

¹⁹⁴ Alpine Liberation Front, "Alpine County Information, Statistics, Etc.," "Suggested Agenda & Some Ideas," Charles Thorp Papers; Hurst "Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles," "Alpine Report," "Statement to Law Schools," Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Cherry, "Brother Don Had a Dream," Bernard, "Statement of Activities," Sexual Freedom League Records.

dollars per person and open to the general public. Local rock acts provided live music. Records show that the event yielded a \$234.97 net loss of revenue.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ “Alpine Liberation Front Benefit Rock Dance,” “Profit and Loss Statement,” Don Jackson, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

CHAPTER 4

OPPOSITION AND DISINTIGRATION

Misunderstandings of gay separatism, volatile New Left politics, mission drift, shifts in the gay counterculture, and deception were all undermining factors that contributed to the project's demise. However, publicity inflicted the most damage. In an effort to maintain discretion, early articles and promotional materials outlined the idea without specifying the targeted location. Don Jackson anticipated a backlash if the idea became known to the public and therefore initially preferred a discreet approach. Jackson later explained, "If I'd had my druthers, we'd have moved in quietly, as artists and writers, establishing a colony, and then announced the gay takeover as a *fait accompli* on the day the election returns came in."¹⁹⁶

After the story broke, news sources including the *San Francisco Examiner*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *TIME*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *London Observer*, and *The New York Times* printed sensationally titled articles such as "How the Gays Plan to Capture Alpine County," "Gay Threat," "Gays Outline Plan for Invasion," and "The Great Gay Conspiracy." Sensationalism fed public fears.

According to Craig Hansen:

Alpine County takeover has really caused a ruckus. Why? GLF has done a lot of crazy things which deserved news before and received the silent treatment

¹⁹⁶ Saint John, "Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?;" "Help Build the Stonewall Nation," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

from the Establishment media. I believe the reason is that we have threatened straight America. We are taking over! We could take all the Gay bars in town, and nothing would be said; but take a county with 300 people and straight America goes outa mind! If GLF wants news it has the tool. Anything which looks like a threat to straight society will get news.¹⁹⁷

Premature publicity provided opponents with ample opportunity to coordinate resistance. News that hundreds of homosexuals were preparing to invade a mountain community, one with “A Great Place to Raise Children”¹⁹⁸ for a motto, created a sense of terror that resonated well beyond Alpine County. During the Los Angeles press conference Kilhefner mentioned that he expected to see similar communities established in other parts of the nation if the project succeeded.¹⁹⁹

Alpine residents and officials panicked. Herbert Bruns, rancher and Chairman of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors, announced on October 18, 1970: “Naturally; we’ll do everything we can to prevent anyone taking over our county.... We have a real nice county here. We don’t know what we’re going to do if they succeed. We’ll try anything.”²⁰⁰ The situation proved unsettling enough to prompt the Alpine Board of Supervisors to consult Governor Ronald Reagan's Assistant Legal Affairs Secretary, Richard Turner, for possible assistance. Herbert Bruns, Chairman of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors, three additional supervisors, plus District Attorney Hillary Cook, met with Turner in Sacramento on October 21, 1970. After a few closed door meetings, the delegation learned that there was nothing the administration could legally do to intervene. Alpine officials were forced to acknowledge that there was no direct legal means to prevent hundreds of

¹⁹⁷ Quoted in Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

¹⁹⁸ Faderman and Timmons, 177.

¹⁹⁹ “Alpine County Hopes for Snow,” clipping from *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 22, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers; “Gay Mecca No. 1.”

²⁰⁰ “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

homosexuals from becoming residents of Alpine County and establishing the foundation for a political takeover.²⁰¹

Alpine administrators, residents, and property owners considered alternatives to counter the pending invasion. Administrators explored the possibility of enacting emergency legislation to dissolve Alpine by merging with a neighboring county. Non-resident property owners pledged to register to vote in Alpine County to help local residents maintain a non-gay voting majority should the invasion commence. Wallace J. Jackson, president of the Bear Valley Resident Association, stated: “Quite frankly we’re not going to sit around idly and watch some erratic attempt to take over the county.”²⁰² Supervisor Herbert Bruns warned: “They will receive a hostile reception when they come... No fruit is very welcome up in our particular county.”²⁰³

The *Alpine Report* forewarned of harassment from the Department of Health, rigid enforcement of federal, state, and county laws, and that any new buildings constructed would be constantly checked to ensure adherence to codes. Even if new structures consistently met building code requirements, utility companies could complicate matters by avoiding grid expansion into newly developed remote areas of the county making it difficult to obtain utilities. The *Alpine Report* further warned of the possibility that highway departments of neighboring counties would aid Alpine by avoiding road maintenance on select routes one to two miles from the County’s borders thus making it less accessible during winter months. Merchants threatened commercial boycotts that would have made it difficult for gay residents to obtain

²⁰¹ “Gay Mecca No. 1;” “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

²⁰² Harriot Manely, “Bear Valley hoping it can outvote Gays” *The Advocate*, December 9-22, 1970; Teal, 319.

²⁰³ “A gay ‘nation’ in the Sierras?”

needed goods and or services. California Highway Patrol Captain. W.T. Kramer assured Sheriff Stuart Merrill that Alpine authorities could depend on mutual aid to strengthen patrols implying a threat of police harassment.²⁰⁴

According to an article in *The Record-Courier*, per rumor, a contingent of Alpine residents were considering the possibility of inviting Joe Conforte, owner of the infamous Mustang Ranch, to establish a brothel in the county and run for mayor as a way to counter a gay invasion. The rationale was that a brothel would both stimulate the local economy and keep the county predominately heterosexual.²⁰⁵

A day-long hearing was held at the Alpine County Courthouse on November 12, 1970, at which Chairman Bruns announced: “Possibly, these people are victims of persecution, and we will help them if we can, but not by allowing them to take over Alpine County. We hope to convince the people in Los Angeles that this is not a good place for them to live.”²⁰⁶ However, *The Advocate* reported that Bruns also compared the project to Hitler’s plans and described the situation as “the most crucial problem any county has faced since perhaps, the Civil War.”²⁰⁷

Three committees formed to prepare for the possible gay immigration. A legislative committee headed by Bruns was established to prepare emergency legislation to dissolve the county. If no means could be found to prevent the takeover, Alpine would merge with El Dorado County to the north. A second committee headed by Sheriff Stuart Merrill was established to maintain law and order. A third

²⁰⁴ “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records; Ed Jackson, “But lot of things are strange in Alpine,” *The Advocate*, November 25-December 8, 1970; “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays,” *The Advocate*, December 9-22, 1970.

²⁰⁵ “Gay Liberation Counter Movements Growing in Alpine County,” *The Record-Courier*, November 5, 1970.

²⁰⁶ “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays.”

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

committee headed by Dr. Ruth Jolly, county health officer, was set up to “see to the Gays’ welfare – if they came.”²⁰⁸ Dr. Jolly offered the following assessment:

“Homosexuality is as old as heterosexuality. That it is undesirable may be argued. But to talk of invading this county is sickness.”²⁰⁹

Assemblyman Eugene Chappie of El Dorado County attended the hearing and advised Alpine County supervisors to “keep your cool” and “remember you are dealing with individuals, regardless of motivation.” Chappie believed existing local ordinances were sufficient to “maintain control” and warned that punitive legislation could ultimately harm the county.²¹⁰

Addressing rumors that LA-GLF was in negotiations to acquire a ranch, Bruns reported that the only property large enough to accommodate a community of five hundred was a tract of land on the East Carson River. According to Bruns, “If they got in there and we had a good storm, they would never get out.”²¹¹ County Clerk Lincoln Covington reported that no new voter registrations, land purchases, or leases had been recorded since the project was announced.²¹²

Sandy Kennedy, a spokesman for Teen Challenge of San Francisco, also spoke at the hearing. Kennedy described homosexuals, whom he claimed to have worked with for five years, as “mean, sadistic, masochists” who “carry knives, and hurt people.” Kennedy urged county supervisors to pray and local residents to “fight these people.”²¹³

²⁰⁸ Teal, 318.

²⁰⁹ “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays.”

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid.

Not all Alpine residents were hostile to the project. The author of the *Alpine Report* questioned residents regarding their thoughts on the project and noted several positive quotes in addition to negative ones. One resident retorted, “They got rights don’t they?”²¹⁴ The owner of Woodsford Store declared, “I hope they come. Hell, 500 more people up here and my business would triple. Of course I will sell to them. I’m open to the public aren’t I?”²¹⁵ Another resident simply inquired, “What’s all the fuss about?” Another rationalized that the immigration was “ok if there’s no violence like in the paper.”²¹⁶ Rob Gibson later reported returning to Los Angeles re-inspired after visiting Alpine County and hearing many positive responses from local residents.²¹⁷ However, the more extreme points of view were the ones that garnered the most publicity.

Following the publicity and hysteria that ensued, “A Soul Brother” wrote to Morris Kight on November 13, 1970, and inquired: “If the GLF was actually serious about founding a homosexual nation in Alpine County, why in hell did it release the story to the news media in October, months before effective legal action would be taken?”²¹⁸ The author noted that the premature publicity offered opponents ample time to coordinate resistance strategies and provided the following insightful assessment of the situation:

If the move has only propaganda value, and could never be practical, then it has great value indeed. If, however, it is practical, and a voting majority could be supported there by outside funds from Gays all over the U.S., or production arms of successful industries controlled by Gays could be relocated there, then the strategy has been handled abominably. The poor slobs in Alpine County

²¹⁴ “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

²¹⁵ Teal, 317.

²¹⁶ “Alpine Report,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

²¹⁷ Saint John, “Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?”

²¹⁸ A Soul Brother, Letter to Morris Kight, November 13, 1970, courtesy of Mary Ann Cherry.

and millions of straights everywhere are convinced that this sinister, powerful, well-organized underground is as threatening as the Mafia or the Communist Party.²¹⁹

Comedian Bob Hope ridiculed the project during a televised monologue, *Bob Hope Special*, broadcasted by NBC on November 16, 1970. During the act, Hope stated: “They [gays] had their own sheriff and he looked real good. He had boots, chaps, buckskin jacket, and pearls. Instead of handcuffs he carried a slave bracelet. They had one demonstration up there, and the cops had to break it up, and instead of mace, they sprayed them with Chanel No. 5.”²²⁰ *The Advocate* reported receiving a number of angry letters calling for a letter writing campaign to NBC plus boycotts of Hope’s movies and Plymouth and Chrysler automobiles - a major sponsor of the program.²²¹

ALF finance committee chairman Alan Bernard warned of the negative effects of publicity in a statement drafted to serve as a project status update. Bernard cautioned:

I personally do not feel that the people of the various news media who are creating an idealistic picture of truck loads of freaks running around naked and smoking grass are doing this project one bit of good.

I firmly believe that the entire project will go down the drain if we approach Alpine County with bus loads of young people who are totally uninterested in working and turn them lose like a lot of cattle to turn on and drop out. We will never create a self supporting economy by sweeping the Welfare cases off the streets of our cities and dropping them in Markleeville. We will only create a new ghetto where one did not exist... If local heads continue to threaten this small county with every considerable perversion and continue to offer only BREAD LINES and MORAL DECAY, no one with any money will invest one dime in this project and Alpine County will go down as one of the biggest jokes in recent history. With a project like this you will only get one chance at the available market. Smoke some grass or do whatever you want, but do not

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Sasha Gregory-Lewis, “Here’s what Bob Hope said...” *The Advocate*, January 6-19, 1971.

²²¹ Ibid.

tell the whole world in print about it first so that they can arm themselves against you and defeat you before you get started.²²²

When temperatures dropped below average in the high Sierras during December of 1970, opponents were quick to capitalize on weather-related concerns. Chris Gansberg, chief of the volunteer fire department in Alpine County cautioned: “An invasion of 500 people in January could create a land-office business for the undertaker.”²²³ Sheriff Merrill informed the press: “There’s deep white snow on the ground and the icicles are two feet long — Alpine County is a virtual fairyland, but not the kind they want.”²²⁴ Merrill erroneously concluded that “the Gays have been defeated and repelled.”²²⁵ Following Merrill’s statements, both UPI and AP began reporting headlines such as “Victory over homosexuals” and “Gay Front Delaying Invasion,”²²⁶ resulting in confusion within the press that undermined the project’s credibility. Further confusing matters and undermining credibility, Merrill reported that housing alone would require millions of dollars²²⁷ and claimed, “They have no organization in Los Angeles but a few leaders making a few bucks off a few suckers.”²²⁸

Homophile supporters insisted that the ultimate intention of the plan to construct a resort in Alpine County was to create employment opportunities for new residents in the job poor area. A small contingent of Gay Liberationists, on the other hand, claimed that the resort was really intended to serve as a brothel for wealthy

²²² Bernard, “Statement of Activities,” Sexual Freedom League Records.

²²³ “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays.”

²²⁴ Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays.”

²²⁸ Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

homosexuals and further inflamed the situation with related allegations in the underground press.²²⁹

On February 4, 1971, radio station KPRI of San Diego revealed that an effort led by “Pat Love” and endorsed by San Diego GLF was underway to purchase a small town east of San Diego, later revealed to be the former resort town of Bankhead Springs. Organizers planned to raise funds by establishing a corporation and selling shares conferring a ninety-nine year lease on a quarter acre of land. In reference to the problems the Alpine project faced, Love explained: “We all wanted Alpine County, but this will be our own town where there will be no harassment from the straights.”²³⁰ Love’s comment indicates that supporters were moving away from the project and embracing alternatives, which in turn generated additional publicity and contributed to further doubt. Bankhead was not a continuation of the Alpine project but rather a separate endeavor inspired by it. In addition to targeting an alternative location, the new organizers differed ideologically from the leaders of the Alpine project. Love spoke of demonstrating, “that we can build a city and live like everyone else. This will make it impossible for the world to do anything but accept us.”²³¹ This is a sharp contrast to the countercultural enclave the original Alpine organizers had envisioned.²³²

Responding to reader inquiries and requests for updates on the status of the project, *The Advocate* ran an article that included reprints of letters from Ron Gibson, Don Jackson, and Morris Kight in its March 3, 1971, edition. Ron Gibson opened by

²²⁹ Smedley, “Off the Snow Pigs,” *Gay Sunshine*, January 1971, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

²³⁰ Speedy III, “Nation’s first gay town may be in San Diego County, not Alpine,” *The Advocate*, March 3-16, 1971.

²³¹ Speedy, “Nation’s first gay town may be in San Diego County, not Alpine.”

²³² *Ibid.*

declaring his intention to “expose a lie being pushed on the gay community.” According to Gibson, the project began primarily as discussions of “the pros and cons of leaving the subculture we have created for ourselves in the big cities” and proceeded as such for several months. Gibson reported walking into the LA-GLF center one Tuesday morning and unexpectedly finding a press conference in session. Gibson suspected that “an elite group of our [LA-GLF] members” deliberately leaked the story for publicity. “Lies began to pour forth” in the aftermath according to Gibson who reported LA-GLF did not have doctors, nurses, engineers, draftsmen or five hundred people ready to move as was claimed. After receiving an influx of enthusiastic inquiries from people who were prepared to uproot their lives and move to Alpine County, Gibson claimed that LA-GLF members began to argue over the ethics of the deception and that the group effectively split over the issue. Gibson observed that, “it was decided that for those who thought the project to be valid, they would now have the monumental task of making it come off” and that no one from the “elite group” participated in project meetings. Gibson also accused “upper and middle class Gays” of attempting to capitalize on the project by purchasing land to “make a quick killing through real estate.”²³³

Countering Gibson, Morris Kight asserted that the project was genuine and remained a work in progress. However, Kight contradicted himself by claiming that two problems had essentially broken the spirit of the group. One was the alleged enactment of building codes by the Alpine County administration that would effectively double new building costs within its borders. The more significant problem, according to Kight, was the unanticipated large number of “push-outs” the

²³³ Saint John, “Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?”

project attracted. Kight described push-outs as “people pushed out of jobs, housing, and the chance for dignity in their lives... into alcohol, hard drugs, and total personal defeat.” Kight rationalized:

How could a handful of homosexuals feed, clothe, and house such a group? It would break the spirit of the hardest working and most dedicated of us. And such an influx would surely destroy the delicate ecology of Alpine County; one of the strongest reasons for going there is to enjoy its primitive beauty.²³⁴

Don Jackson acknowledged that the project had been jeopardized by a number of problems stemming from premature publicity and reported that Bay Area groups had adopted a “controlled news” strategy to avoid additional ones. Jackson summarized:

Property owners have entered into a “sales freeze” agreement. There are threats of vigilantes, threats to enforce new building code regulations to preclude renting, purchasing, or erecting housing. They threaten to bring in large numbers of straight voters who will claim residence as “caretakers” on land belonging to absentee owners.²³⁵

Don Jackson also claimed that participants were disturbed by threats from the Klu Klux Klan and religious extremists who threatened “to move in and kill people.”²³⁶ Regardless, ongoing enthusiasm and continued requests for information indicate that sufficient numbers of participants could have been maintained had deception, which undermined the project’s credibility within the gay community, not been part of the engineered publicity seeking strategy. Despite the assorted controversies, problems, and setbacks, Jackson remained optimistic that “the determination of gay people for self-government and liberty”²³⁷ would ensure

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

²³⁷ Saint John, “Alpine Project: sham, dream, or going concern?”

success, but was nonetheless forced to admit that Alpine might no longer be the right location.²³⁸

The HI! collective contributed to doubts by reporting in March 1971, the same month that *The Advocate* printed Gibson, Jackson, and Kight's letters, that the project had been dropped. HI! invited supporters to participate in a plan to establish gay majorities in the 19th and 20th districts of Manhattan in order to create a "gay power district."²³⁹

When questioned about the project during a 1986 interview, Don Jackson attributed the project's failure to publicity. Jackson maintained that the project had sufficient support to inject a numeric voting majority into Alpine County but that the project "gradually fell apart" because the ensuing hype made it "appear unreal." Jackson confirmed that Morris Kight was responsible for much of the publicity but passively defended him by expressing doubt that Kight had deliberately solicited media attention. According to Jackson, a reporter obtained a copy of an informational flyer distributed at a Gay-In at Griffith Park in Los Angeles. The flyer included a description of the project and provided contact information for LA-GLF, thus Kight was simply the first to receive questions from media representatives and provided updates accordingly.²⁴⁰

Don Jackson was most likely unaware of the extent of Morris Kight's betrayal at the time of the 1986 interview. According to a brief 1975 *Los Angeles Times* article by Bart Everett, Don Kilhefner and Morris Kight both admitted that the project was

²³⁸ Ibid.; Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

²³⁹ "About the Organization," *Homosexuals Intransigent!* Second Anniversary Special Issue, April-May 1971, accessed June 27, 2013: <http://mrgaypride.tripod.com/AnniversaryIssue.html#program>.

²⁴⁰ Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

mostly guerilla theater intended to draw attention of the mainstream to Gay Liberation. Jackson had distanced himself from Gay Liberation by 1975 and had no high profile involvement with the movement for several years. Therefore, Jackson was most likely not aware of Kight and Kilhefner's admission. Kight did not elaborate on the full extent of his deception until several years after Jackson's 1986 interview.²⁴¹

Much of the gay criticism of the project during its active years came from activists who had limited understandings of the concept of gay separatism. Influenced by the New Left and the Civil Rights movement, Gay Liberationists were sensitive to problems of poverty and segregation. Many equated gay separatism to Native American reservations and urban ghettos inhabited by ethnic minorities; charging that the project would produce an isolated and exploitative gay ghetto. *TIME* followed the same conceptualization when reporting on the project by partially describing it as a plan to establish a "national refuge for persecuted homosexuals."²⁴² Critics claimed that the project would produce an isolated and exploitative gay ghetto. According to a reprint from the New York street paper *Gay Flames*, "Even if we seize the county, we cannot outlaw private property or keep out the Tavern Guild or the money of organized crime."²⁴³

Moira Rachel Kenney suggested in *Mapping Gay L.A.: The Intersection of Place and Politics* that it is erroneous to assume that gay ghettos inevitably feature the characteristics of squalor typically associated with ghetto life. As Kenney conveyed, gay enclaves existed more as places to escape to rather than from and were

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² "Gay Mecca No. 1."

²⁴³ "From Gay Flames," folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

therefore distinct in comparison to other ghettos.²⁴⁴ Alpine supporters similarly conceptualized the project not only as a place to escape, but also as an opportunity to create something new. Defending the project in October 1970, Don Jackson explained: “A ghetto is a place where a group of people are forced to live, but belongs to somebody else. Straight policemen patrol, harass and brutalize us, straight landlords exploit us with exorbitant rents, straight shopkeepers gouge us, straight ‘rat packs’ beat and rob us at will because the pigs won’t protect us.”²⁴⁵ Don Jackson, “Gay cities and counties will offer an escape from the ghetto. They will belong to us.”²⁴⁶

Ultimately, the Alpine project was a manifestation of cultural nationalism and a movement toward greater self-determination. Organizers did note opportunities that a gay majority in Alpine would create within the system, such as direct representation in the California legislature, which partially fed claims that the project was reformist in nature. However, systemic benefits were of secondary importance to initial organizers who were more concerned with distancing themselves from the governing majority and creating an alternative gay counterculture.²⁴⁷

In addition to publicity and misperceptions of gay separatism, volatile New Left politics further undermined the project. The first set of leftist critics to voice opposition were “movement people” who accused project supporters of being “‘counter-revolutionaries,’ ‘escapists,’ ‘reformists,’ and ‘anti-heterosexual.’” Don

²⁴⁴ Kenney, 39-41.

²⁴⁵ Don Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

²⁴⁶ Ibid; Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

²⁴⁷ Don Jackson, “Mountain Women,” *Berkeley Barb*, January 8, 1971; “A Gay Nation in the Sierras?,” Jefferson Poland, Letter to Alpine County Clerk, December 17, 1970, Sexual Freedom League Records.

Jackson countered by lashing out at the accusers in an article printed in the *Berkeley*

Barb:

Radicals and “hippies” are oppressed because of the way they dress, the way they live and the things they do. Pampered and spoiled brats from middle class homes, they have no idea what real oppression is. Oh, they like to play a game – living on rice, wearing rags and begging, but they know they can end their oppression anytime they choose by writing a letter home to mama or shutting up, getting a haircut and a job. They have done nothing to end the brutal persecutions of Gay people.²⁴⁸

Jackson claimed that “straights” could not understand the gay experience which he described as “one of total condemnation by society; relatives, churches and schools, getting fired from jobs, thrown out by parents, kicked out of schools, kicked out of your house, economic deprivation, getting robbed and beaten, blackmailed by pigs, condemned to hell and generally suppressed.”²⁴⁹ Jackson expressed:

Worst of all, we live in constant fear of being among [sic] the three or four thousand who are selected each year by the monstrous lottery called “morals law enforcement,” to fall into the hideous clutches of the concentration camp doctors of Vacaville and Atascadero who use us for their medical experiments, force us to take apin-causing drugs, turn us into vegetables with lobotomies, castrate us and destroy our personalities with electric shocks.

All this is done to us, not because we do anything to harm anyone, but because of the way we are. Considering what heterosexuals have done to us, cn [sic] anyone wonder why we want to get away from them?²⁵⁰

Jackson was less harsh in his criticism of Gay Liberation but did draw attention to the movement’s lack of achievement: “The Gay Liberation Front has been around for 18 months. Although I am still a staunch advocate of Gay Liberation, I am disappointed that the status of homosexuals has not improved.”²⁵¹

²⁴⁸ Don Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

On November 2, 1970, Berkeley GLF voted to withdraw its support of the project. Approximately two-thirds of the sixty people in attendance voted in favor of the measure. Meeting chairman Ed Luckin reported not being able to find out what arrangements had been made for housing and described LA-GLF's decision to begin relocations in January as "ridiculous."²⁵² Gary Alinder offered an alternate perspective of the meeting, claiming that the group neither specifically condemned nor endorsed the project. Nonetheless, Berkeley GLF went on record as officially not supporting the project and condemned it as sexist, racist, and impractical. Interestingly, at a Berkeley GLF meeting exactly one week prior, Mother Boats asserted that Alpine belonged to the reported 298 Washoe who resided in the county. Berkeley GLF claimed embarrassment over the omission of Washoe from planning and blamed the mistake on a "faulty intelligence report based on typically racist establishment records."²⁵³

Evidence contradicts allegations of racism. Mother Boats advocated establishment of a Washoe-gay coalition through intertribal groups in Los Angeles and San Francisco to share political power.²⁵⁴ LA-GLF suggested that "no one apply to any public agency in Alpine County for anything"²⁵⁵ because "many Original Americans live there, and their needs should be first."²⁵⁶ ALF and other Bay Area

²⁵² Harriot Manely, "San Francisco GLF affirms Alpine support," *The Advocate*, December 9-22, 1970.

²⁵³ "Gay Radical Says Alpine Indian Turf;" Ellen Shumsky, "Berkeley GLF Opts Out" *The Advocate*, November 25-December 8, 1970

²⁵⁴ "Gay Radical Says Alpine Indian Turf."

²⁵⁵ Hurst, "Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles," Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

Gay Liberation groups expressed solidarity with the Native American occupation of Alcatraz Island.²⁵⁷

On December 8, 1970, ALF passed a resolution introduced by Psychedelic Venus Church proposing that at least one-half of the Alpine County Board of Supervisors and School Board be comprised of “Third World people”²⁵⁸ based on the rationale that “deliberate ‘over-representation’”²⁵⁹ would help achieve racial equality. John Moore of Berkeley-GLF amended the resolution to limit the reserved seats to gay third world candidates. The amendment, which passed by a margin of thirteen to one, was based on a formula adopted at the national Gay Liberation convention in Minnesota to insure “Third World and female gay delegates” outnumbered white male delegates at the People’s Revolutionary Constitutional Convention.²⁶⁰

Jeff Poland suggested five actions of possible mutual benefit or interest to both Washoe and gays that included: 1) Subsidizing Washoe basketry and marketing the product through gay shops in cities; 2) Reviving pine-nut harvesting, “since health food people and hippies dig pine nuts,”²⁶¹ and marketing the pine-nuts in city and college town health food stores; 3) Adding Washoe language to the local school curriculum; 4) Legalizing peyote; 5) Establishing a junior college with Native American studies as one of the leading departments. Poland also recommended thirteen books and included several pages of notes and information on Washoe history and culture in the ALF informational booklet.²⁶²

²⁵⁷ “Gay Radical Says Alpine Indian Turf.”

²⁵⁸ Boats, “ALPLIB for Washos Too,” Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁵⁹ “Third World People to Be Half of Alpine Boards,” folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Alpine Liberation Front, “Alpine County Information, Statistics, Etc.,” Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁶² Ibid.

Defending the project against Berkeley GLF, the chief source of the initial allegations of racism, Don Jackson claimed that the group, which had only three non-white members, based its conclusion on his suggestion that the Native American tradition of gift giving as a display of good will be honored. Jackson countered by explaining: “Berkeley GLF holds a white racist attitude in presuming its white cultural mores to be superior to Indian values by arbitrarily saying that the Indian good will gift tradition is ‘exploitive’ or ‘buying people.’”²⁶³

Don Jackson did at one point refer to the Washoe as a “primitive tribe that still live separate from white people retaining much of their own ancient and folkways”²⁶⁴ in a letter to LA-GLF and suggesting that a committee be set up to study the tribe’s ethnology, customs, mores, traditions, and attitudes toward homosexuality. It is unclear precisely what Jackson meant by “primitive” but the letter reveals intrigue and a primary interest in establishing a direct rapport with the Washoe. Jackson also referred to the impoverished conditions of the Washoe and mentioned that “any small trinket”²⁶⁵ as a gift would likely please them. While this may reflect insensitivity, it does not necessarily imply racism. Jackson was most likely being politically cautious by making an effort to not appear overly demanding while simultaneously demonstrating a mindfulness of GLF’s limited financial resources.

A spokesman for the Washoe attended the county hearing held November 12, 1970 and reported that the tribe wanted no part in the project. This indicates Washoe

²⁶³ Don Jackson, “We Shall Overcome” *Gay Sunshine*, January 1971, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁶⁴ Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

residents of Alpine County may not have been cooperative with efforts to engage them.²⁶⁶

The Washoe perceived racism as somewhat of a problem in Alpine County. Most of the Washoe residents of Alpine resided approximately seven miles north-northwest of Markleeville in Woodfords; a village described as a “rural slum”²⁶⁷ by Jerry Belcher in a *San Francisco Examiner* article. The majority of the non-Washoe residents lived in Markleeville. The county, therefore, may not have been legally segregated but it was geographically. No Washoe had ever held local office in the county’s history. Ironically, activists who opposed the project, and therefore effectively supported the existing status quo, were in a sense upholding an established form of oppression.²⁶⁸

Don Jackson attributed Berkeley GLF’s opposition to New Left politics:

Berkeley is noted for being the hub of the most extreme elements of every movement. The doctrinaire Marxist Berkeleyites are not typical of Gay Liberation... The self-hate of the old homosexuals is caused by their acceptance of their innate evilness that is instilled and conditioned into them by Judeo-Christian doctrines. Since Marxism preaches the same self-hating doctrines, it militates against Gay Liberation. Marxism is counter-revolutionary.²⁶⁹

Charles Thorp agreed with Jackson’s assessment that Berkeley GLF’s withdrawal was politically motivated. Thorp noted similarities in rhetoric expressed by the opposition at Berkeley and SF-GLF meetings. Also, according to Thorp:

Morris Kight, who is an older generation person, came in and said that it was going to be actually working within the system. And a lot of people think

²⁶⁶ “Committees Formed in Alpine County to Deal with Gays.”

²⁶⁷ Jerry Belcher, clipping from *S. F. Sunday Examiner & Chronicle*, August 30, 1970, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.; Don Collins, “I wouldn’t know one from a bale of hay,” *The Advocate*, November 25-December 8, 1970.

²⁶⁹ Manely, “San Francisco GLF affirms Alpine support.”

that's counter-revolutionary and is undermining the Gay Liberation movement.²⁷⁰

Accusations of sexism followed allegations of racism. The primary source material examined does not explicitly indicate what factors triggered the accusations. Colin R. Johnson noted in "Homosexuals from Haystacks," the basis of the accusations was not particularly important to media more intrigued by exemplification of how self-defeating "doctrinaire radicals"²⁷¹ had become. It is worth noting that, though the project was initiated by gay men, a number of women did actively participate.

Accusations of sexism most likely stemmed from growing gender based discourse between gay and lesbian groups that project organizers were unable to distance themselves from enough to avoid guilt by association. Despite commonalities in respective plights, gay men and lesbian women confronted different social and economic realities and thus experienced distinct problems. Differing political priorities nurtured conflicts between the two populations. For example, lesbians tended to have fewer career opportunities in comparison to gay men and were more likely to encounter legal problems pertaining to custody of children. Gay men, on the other hand, were far more likely to be victims of violent crime and police harassment. Lesbian activists complained that their gay male counterparts frequently ignored social and political issues of concern to women and as a whole, tended to be just as sexist as non-gay men. According to Karla Jay, "Some men were very feminist and they were very good, but a lot of the guys were insensitive. They called us girls. They told us our job was to make cookies. I mean they couldn't have been

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Johnson, "Homosexuals from Haystacks," 48.

more revolting if they tried.”²⁷² From a male perspective, author Perry Brass summarized a belief asserted by a contingent of female GLF members that “all men oppress all women”²⁷³ as sexist in its own right. Author John Lauritsen observed that blindly accusing gay men of sexism was highly effective as a disruptive tactic.²⁷⁴

Sexual expression was another source of contention. When describing growing animosity between male and female GLF members in New York City, historian Terrance Kissack noted the existence of “a Manichean world view in which some sex was male identified - and therefore bad - while other sex was woman-identified and therefore good.”²⁷⁵ This polarizing dualism, like previously mentioned divisions, was not a unique feature of New York City. Rather the conflict was manifested nationwide and expanded as the 1970s progressed. Female attempts to censor or regulate sexual behavior were resented by the men of Gay Liberation for whom sexuality served as a source of social, recreational, emotional, and spiritual fulfillment.²⁷⁶

During October of 1970, Del Martin, co-founder of Daughters of Bilitis, resigned from *Vector* in protest over SIR’s refusal to support women’s rights or

²⁷² *After Stonewall*, directed by John Scagliotti (1999; First Run Feature, 2005) DVD.

²⁷³ Perry Brass, interview, July 20-21, 2013, *OUTSpoken*, accessed April 7, 2014:

<http://www.OUTSpoken-lgbtq.org/#!interviews/ch5u>.

²⁷⁴ John Lauritsen, “Dangerous Trends in Feminism,” *Pagan Press* (website) accessed May 4, 2014: <http://paganpressbooks.com/jpl/DTF.HTM>; John Preston, “Goodbye To Sally Gerhart,” in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, ed. Marc Blasius, and Shane Phelan (New York: Routledge, 1997) 511-521; Charlie Shively, “Cock Sucking as an Act of Revolution” *Fag Rag*, Summer 1972; Kenney, 43; Artie Bressan, April 8, 1979 episode of *The Gay Life*, Randy Alfred Subject Files and Sound Recordings, 1991-24, accessed May 5, 2014: <http://www.glbthistory.org/gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=17>; W. Dorr Legg, interview by Jim Kepner, November 30, 1976 episode of *IMRU*.

²⁷⁵ Terence Kissack, “Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York’s Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971,” *Radical History Review*, Spring 1995 (62), 120.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*; Lauritsen, “Dangerous Trends in Feminism;” John Preston, “Goodbye To Sally Gerhart,” 511-521; Artie Bressan, April 8, 1979 episode of *The Gay Life*; Charlie Shively, “Cock Sucking as an Act of Revolution,” *Fag Rag*, Summer 1972.

discuss oppression of women in meetings. Martin cited major moral and philosophical differences as the basis of her resignation in a *Vector* article and letter to the editor of *The Advocate*. Don Jackson responded to Martin's letter and acknowledged grievances but cautioned: "Gay women may be making a serious tactical error by aligning themselves with the women's liberation movement."²⁷⁷ Martin's resignation and subsequent articles helped empower the lesbian community, particularly in the Bay Area, to pursue a sociopolitical course separate from gay men during a time when the Alpine project was beginning to receive widespread publicity.²⁷⁸

Mission drift further weakened the project. As the project expanded, new recruits brought varied values, ideas, priorities, visions, and expectations to the project that created or expanded ideological divides amongst supporters. Tension grew between gay separatists and moderates who joined the project and promoted a more conservative middle class sensibility. In contrast to creating the new society gay separatists had envisioned, Don Kilhefner told reporters at the Los Angeles press conference: "We are simply following the advice of President Nixon and Spiro Agnew to work within the electoral process."²⁷⁹ Similarly, Morris Kight attended a San Francisco GLF meeting and explained the project as "mostly working within the system."²⁸⁰ Radical members of San Francisco GLF consequently perceived that the project had been subverted. Alan Bernard defended himself against accusations of only being interested in the gay middle-class by explaining in a statement that his

²⁷⁷ Thompson, *Long Road to Freedom*, 59.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*; Ormsbee, 220-221; Stein, 91-98.

²⁷⁹ "Gay Mecca No. 1."

²⁸⁰ Manely, "San Francisco GLF affirms Alpine support."

objective was to create an economic structure capable of supporting people who wished to settle in Alpine County. Don Jackson advised Morris Kight to personally provide some interviews to the press to “give dignity to the project”²⁸¹ and suggested rotating the types of individuals providing interviews, because the “younger longhairs are best for relating to the younger Gay Lib types.”²⁸²

Opening the project to non-gays also brought criticism from gay supporters. Craig Schoonmaker of HI! asserted that there was no guarantee that non-gay participants would consistently vote in the best interests of gays. Alpine residents and LA-GLF members alike feared that a large influx population would ruin the county’s ecology. According to Don Jackson, “liberated straights”²⁸³ who joined the project were intrigued by fields of wild marijuana that purportedly grew in nearby Calaveras County and were disappointed to learn that state police could make arrests anywhere in California for narcotics violations. If some proponents were motivated primarily by a misperception that anti-narcotics laws could go unenforced, logic indicates that they would have lost interest or become disenchanted after learning otherwise. Overall, too many ambitious objectives operating simultaneously diverted resources away from the original goal.²⁸⁴

Shifts in the gay counterculture eroded the project’s base of support. As previously noted, the project was originally a manifestation of cultural nationalism and a short lived drive toward greater self-determination initiated by radical gay men.

²⁸¹ Don Jackson, Letter to Morris Kight, undated, provided courtesy of Mary Ann Cherry.

²⁸² Ibid.; Manely, “San Francisco GLF affirms Alpine support,” Bernard, “Statement of Activities,” Sexual Freedom League Records.

²⁸³ Don Jackson, “Alpine for All Swingers,” Charles Thorp Papers.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.: Craig Schoonmaker, “Separatists Forming Alliance,” *Gay Sunshine*, January 1971, folder 19, Charles Thorp Papers; Hurst, “Memo for: Gay Liberation Front of Los Angeles,” Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

Thus, despite perceptions that the project was reformist in nature, it was a radical endeavor. As the 1970s progressed and reform strategies gained favor, radicalism and militancy became less popular in the gay subculture. As radicalism began to fade, so did the project's radical base of support.

A moderate dissenting faction broke away from GLF and formed the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) in December of 1969. The distinctions between GAA and GLF epitomize the differences between two differing political philosophies of Gay Liberation. A prevailing belief among GLF was that "the system" could not be reformed and therefore had to be destroyed. By comparison, GAA focused on bringing about reform within the existing social and political structure. By 1972 most GLF cells had disbanded or ceased operations. However, GAA remained active through the 1970s thus reflecting a shift away from radicalism and toward liberal reform.²⁸⁵

Talk of violence and association with militant groups through 1970 drove some more moderate inclined individuals away from GLF. "Fire queens"²⁸⁶ threatened armed resistance in response to increased crack-downs and police brutality in Los Angeles. Stew Albert advised gay people to carry firearms as a deterrent to police violence and harassment while campaigning for sheriff of Alameda County, California.²⁸⁷ Seattle GLF members spoke of bombing stores who refused service to homosexuals.²⁸⁸ Members of the Black Panthers visited GLF meetings in Venice,

²⁸⁵ Kissack, 116-117; Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Rutledge, 2012), 100-111.

²⁸⁶ Don Jackson, "L.A. Gay Riots Predicted," Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

²⁸⁷ Don Jackson, "Guns for Gays," Don Jackson correspondence and submissions to Gay Power.

²⁸⁸ Gary L. Atkins, *Gay Seattle* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2003), 126.

California and spoke of armed revolution. In August of 1970, Black Panther Party founder Huey P. Newton openly endorsed Gay Liberation.²⁸⁹ On August 21, 1970, Charles Thorp delivered the keynote speech at the National Gay Liberation Front Student Conference in San Francisco that was widely interpreted as pro-violence. Don Jackson summarized in a letter to Stan Williams, that papers controlled by “Weathermen and Maoists”²⁹⁰ had exhibited friendliness toward the project.²⁹¹

The proliferation of lesbian separatism that followed the lesbian-gay schism further eroded the project’s base of support. Competing and conflicting interests exacerbated existing conflicts between lesbian and gay populations to the point that Gay Liberation fractured along gender lines during the early 1970s. Though lesbian and gay activists periodically cooperated with one another to varying degrees on shared objectives, the two groups operated largely independent of one another in distinct gender based ideological spheres through the remaining years of Gay Liberation.²⁹²

Jill Johnston argued for Lesbian separatism in a series of essays written for the *Village Voice* from 1969-1972 that were collectively published as *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* in 1973. Johnston argued that women should make a total break both from men and male-dominated institutions. When interviewed several years later for the *Gay and Lesbian Review*, Johnston explained:

²⁸⁹ Karla Jay, interview, 2014.

²⁹⁰ Don Jackson, Letter to Stan Williams, undated, Gay Liberation Front, Los Angeles Records.

²⁹¹ Ibid.; Teal, 302-304; Charles P. Thorp, “Keynote Speech for the National Student Gay Liberation Front Conference,” as “I.D., Leadership and Violence,” in *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, ed. Karla Jay and Allen Young (U.S.A.: Douglas, 1972) 352-363; “No Support for Thorpe ‘violence’ Speech Kight Says,” *The Advocate*, September, 16, 1970.

²⁹² Kenney, 117-138; Thompson, *Long Road to Freedom*, 59; Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 79-85.

In a revolutionary time, separatism is inevitable. An oppressed group of people first must gather together to define themselves and seek mutual support. A “vision of a world of women living independently of men” was not a realistic, indeterminately future one. It was rather a stage in the process. Black separatism had the same profile... Separatism was hardly carried out just by Lesbians, all perceptions to the contrary. Merging was going on, and lines blurred. But at heart, the women’s liberation movement was one of reform, not revolution. Clamoring to get a better deal under patriarchy isn’t a bad way to define it.²⁹³

D.E. Mungello noted that Carl Wittman and Stevens McClave made an effort to include women in the commune the two founded near Wolf Creek, but that “women's separatism was very much in the air”²⁹⁴ indicating lesbian separatists’ preference for organizing separately. Due to inequalities linked to institutionalized sexism, lesbian-separatists generally had less to gain from larger society than their male counterparts and consequently less to lose by withdrawing from it. As a result, lesbian separatism quickly dwarfed gay separatism by comparison. Overall, rather than investing energy and effort in ventures perceived to be dominated by gay men, lesbian-separatists instead devoted their resources to supporting female centered projects exclusive of male influence.²⁹⁵

Deterioration of the broader 1960s counterculture left the project structurally unsupported. Michael Marinacci noted when describing the decline of the PVC through the 1970s, “the Summer of Love was by now a distant memory, and the Berkeley street culture that had nurtured the Church was more and more the domain

²⁹³ Jill Johnston, “Was Lesbian Separatism Inevitable?,” *The Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide*, March-April 2006, accessed March 6, 2013: <http://www.glreview.com/issues/13.2/13.2-johnston.php>.

²⁹⁴ Mungello, 20.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.; Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 79-86; Ellen Shumsky, interview, July 17, 2014, *OUTSpoken*, accessed October 20, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/c1gwY>; Paola Bacchetta, interview, January 13, 2014, *OUTSpoken*, accessed October 20, 2014: <http://www.outspoken-lgbtq.org/#!/interviews/ch5u>; Johnston, “Was Lesbian Separatism Inevitable?”

of runaways, criminals and crazies.”²⁹⁶ Similarly, the overlapping environment in which the Alpine project found support and gained momentum faded. Essentially, the project lost the practical and ideological support needed to inspire and sustain ongoing momentum.

Deliberate deception was also a factor in the project’s undoing. Reverend Mikhail Itkin of Evangelical Catholic Communion wrote to Morris Kight in December 1970, asking him “out of the spirit of warmest friendship,”²⁹⁷ to clarify his reason for supporting the Alpine County project. Itkin claimed that the two had once agreed that cultural nationalism was counter-revolutionary. Kight’s enthusiastic support of an idea that he had initially opposed apparently made Itkin suspicious.²⁹⁸

Jim Kepner blamed Morris Kight, the apparent mastermind behind the deception, of almost singlehandedly sabotaging the project. Kight misled people into believing that deposits on real estate had been returned, effectively freezing GLF out of the county. While answering questions from a reporter on December 16, 1970, Kight claimed that Alpine County property owners had enacted a sale embargo against homosexuals. Kight mentioned the possibility of pursuing legal action under the Civil Rights Act of 1964 on the basis of sex discrimination and assured that, if victorious, the migration would commence in the spring. Kight claimed years later that he made up the story about real estate agents returning deposits on property and refusing to deal with GLF.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Marinacci, “Sex Drugs and Hindu Gods: The story of the Psychedelic Venus Church.”

²⁹⁷ Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

²⁹⁸ Ibid; Ormsbee, 158.

²⁹⁹ Shumsky, “Alpine project off? Only till snow melts;” Johnson, “Homosexuals from Haystacks,” 52; Cherry, “Who Was Morris Kight?”

As months passed and the project stalled, suspicion grew and the deception became increasingly apparent. According to Del Whan of LA-GLF, people “were quitting their jobs, putting their homes on the market,”³⁰⁰ and were obviously upset once realization set in that they had apparently been deceived and misled. What was not apparent was that the deception was committed by a very small number of conspirators. Publicity distorted the extent of the deception beyond what its actual proportions were. The actions of a few effectively cast doubts on the entire project and damaged the credibility of all involved.

Overall, publicity, deceptive elements, volatile New Left politics, mission drift, widespread misunderstandings of gay separatism, and rapid shifts in the gay counterculture brought the project to a halt. When Don Jackson concluded that controversy stemming from publicity had led to diminished interest in the project in Los Angeles, he apparently had yet to realize the full extent of the damage. The effect was nationwide. In October 1971, one year after the project attracted widespread attention, *The Advocate* quoted Alpine County Sheriff Stuart Merrill’s brief yet accurate assessment of the situation: “I think they’ve given up.”³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Quoted in Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

³⁰¹ Harriot Manley, “Alpine County idle dream,” *The Advocate*, October 1971; Don Jackson, interview, 1986.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: AUSTERITY VERSUS AUTHENTICITY

Most Gay Liberationists perceived the project as a misguided effort at reform or a hoax perpetuated by LA-GLF to attract mainstream media coverage of the movement. Contemporary historical interpretations hold similar notions. However, the actions of proponents and the overall historical context indicate otherwise. For the separatists who conceived of the project and proponents that devoted considerable time and effort to it, Alpine County was an opportunity to develop an independent gay counterculture and achieve greater self-determination.

Perceptions of the project as primarily reformist or a conspired hoax are attributable to misconceptions of gay separatism, both as a political strategy and feature of LGBT history. This in turn is attributable to the lack of historical scholarship devoted to the topic, which is largely a result of the way LGBT historiography evolved.

One reason that gay separatism is underexplored as a topic of LGBT history is because, when enacted by gay men, the strategy simply is not conceptualized as separatism. In the LGBT context, separatism came to be associated specifically with lesbian, but not gay politics. Lesbian separatism overshadowed gay separatism following the lesbian-gay split during the 1970s. Additionally, lesbian-feminist

perspective associated gay men with patriarchy and perceived efforts to create distinct gay spaces as an exertion of “male privilege” rather than an act of self-preservation.³⁰² As Emily Hobson noted, “separatist Lesbians generally described their efforts as a return to anti-capitalist matriarchy. Alpine positioned Gay Liberation as forward progress, achieving an implicitly white and butch masculinity through pioneer hardship and overtaking land.”³⁰³

The second reason gay separatism has not been adequately explored as a historical topic pertains to methodology. LGBT historiography, for the most part, consists of a conglomeration of works each singularly focused on a specific city or narrowly defined geographic region. John D’Emilio theorized in the seminal work *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970*, that the evolution of gay and lesbian identities and subcultures are heavily linked to the rise of urban capitalism. This set a precedent for historical methodology that largely accounts for subsequent LGBT historiography consisting mostly of assorted single metro focused works. This type of analysis is problematic when applied to events that transcend narrow geographic parameters. Non-urban LGBT history is not accounted for in related historiography. Events that extend beyond a single metro or geographic region are analyzed in limited context and/or complexity as a result. Gay separatism was mostly a non-urban phenomenon that spanned beyond localized geographies. Consequently, as a feature of LGBT history, gay separatism has “fallen through the cracks.” The Alpine project is contrary

³⁰² Kenney, 111-150; Herring 79-85.

³⁰³ Hobson, 124-125.

to the conventional urban and region-centric focus because a non-urban goal was pursued by groups of dispersed individuals.³⁰⁴

Assimilationist politics constitutes the third and most complex reason that gay separatism has been marginalized as a topic in LGBT history. By the late 1970s, a shift in values and political priorities was underway in the gay subculture. During a 1979 broadcasted radio interview, activist Arthur Evans criticized a growing trend toward “commercialization and conformity,” which he termed “clone capitalism,” that was emerging in the gay ghettos of San Francisco. Evans expressed concern that the movement he and others had worked to create a decade earlier was “in danger of being swallowed up” by this emerging movement toward assimilation that was being led by a privileged few motivated by desire for financial gain. These individuals who, according to Evans, had come to dominate gay media, culture, and gathering spaces, constituted a powerful fraction of the gay subculture that threatened to destroy “the beauty and magic of being gay” and settle for a “pale imitation of heterosexual capitalism.”³⁰⁵

Sociologist Martin P. Levine’s research on gay masculinity conducted during the 1970s and early 1980s coincidentally corroborates Evans’s perception of a trend toward commercialization, conformity, and assimilation. Levine’s research is also evidence that the phenomenon was not confined to San Francisco. Nor was the trend

³⁰⁴ Kenney 74-151; John D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States 1940-1970* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 23-40; Tina Fetner, “How the Religious Right Shaped Lesbian and Gay Activism,” *Social Movements, Protest, and Contention*, V. 31, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 10-13; Scott Lauria Morgensen, *Spaces between Us : Queer Settler Colonialism and Indigenous Decolonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 132.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

exclusive to gay men. For example, Urban Development Research Director, Moira Rachel Kenney, quoted the following lesbian perspective in *Mapping Gay L.A.*:

I think the whole picture has changed. The women in our group have it all together. They're happy with what they are doing. They all have good jobs. They're career women who choose to be career women. They have nice homes. They have the money to take the kinds of vacations they want to. They don't wish for anything to be different. Our group is happy.³⁰⁶

Members of the elite minority Arthur Evans criticized encouraged the transition from radical to liberal activism. One prominent example, David Goodstein, purchased *The Advocate* in 1974 and set forth to neutralize Gay Liberation radicals, who he regarded as obstructionists. While simultaneously promoting a middle-class sensibility through *The Advocate*, Goodstein blacklisted former contributors and content. Goodstein claimed that his actions were motivated by business decisions rather than politics and asserted that *The Advocate* was not intended to represent or appeal to the entire gay population. Nonetheless, Goodstein publicly took a political stand by describing gay radicals as “extremely noisy,” “extremely vocal,” “kind of everywhere,” possibly “mentally ill,” and “unemployable, unkempt, and narcissistic to the point megalomania.”³⁰⁷ As *The Advocate* grew into a national publication, it replaced much of the local gay press that had provided the main forum for communicating radical analysis and perspective.³⁰⁸

Additionally, many Gay Liberation activists were or had been active in parallel New Left social movements and held countercultural ideals. As the influence

³⁰⁶ Ibid.; Kenney, 121, 218; Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho*, ed. Michael S. Kimmel (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 7-123.

³⁰⁷ “The Advocate, Advocating What?” *Fruit Punch*, KPFA, Nov. 23, 1976, accessed April 27, 2014: <http://www.glbthistory.org/gaybackmachine/GaybackMachine.php?pid=361>.

³⁰⁸ Ibid; Terence Kissack, “Freaking Fag Revolutionaries: New York's Gay Liberation Front, 1969–1971,” *Radical History Review*. Spring 1995 (62); Martin Duberman, “Acceptance at What Price? The Gay Movement Reconsidered,” delivered at Kessler Award Ceremony, 2012, accessed April 27, 2014: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9zc45ehnfo>.

of New Left radicalism faded, Gay Liberation transitioned to the more moderate gay rights movement; less inspired by the idea of revolution and more committed to seeking inclusion within the system. Separatism, along with other forms of radicalism, became less popular as assimilation strategies gained momentum.³⁰⁹

As liberal activism succeeded radicalism, social constructionism replaced essentialism as the prevailing theoretical approach to gay history. Though radical in their willingness to broach the subject matter, early scholars of gay history followed conventional methodology by working from an essentialist perspective. Essentialists operate from the premise that forms of homosexual identity has existed in some form throughout history and therefore, whether celebrated, condemned, or regarded with indifference, exist universally.³¹⁰

Focusing on the variation of sexual identities over time and across cultures, social constructionism holds that fundamental differences between homosexuals and non-homosexuals are ultimately non-existent and therefore the creation of society and culture. In contrast to essentialism, social constructionism maintains that Western society created homosexual identity in response to nineteenth century medical discourse. Historian Rictor Norton noted in a critique of social constructionism that first generation social constructionists “were members of Socialist groups committed to the use of Marxist theory to oppose gay oppression.”³¹¹ According to Norton, the theoretical framework social constructionism is based on was intended to foster social

³⁰⁹ Duberman, "Acceptance at What Price? The Gay Movement Reconsidered."

³¹⁰ Rictor Norton, "F*ck Foucault: How Eighteenth-Century Homosexual History Validates the Essentialist Model," *Gay History & Literature: Essays by Rictor Norton*, 1-65, accessed April 28, 2014: <http://rictornorton.co.uk/fuckfouc.pdf>; Ormsbee, 257-261; Timmons, 251; Duberman, "Reclaiming the Gay Past;"

³¹¹ Norton, 4.

change, not create an accurate historical model. Social constructionists operated from a premise that de-construction of sexual identity undermined belief in innate differences and thus eliminated the basis of anti-gay prejudice. By replacing the essentialist paradigm with a “we’re just like you” construct, social constructionism thus served as an instrument for assimilation. Portraying themselves as sophisticated theorists and essentialists as naive traditionalists, social constructionists locked gay history into a hermetically sealed sub-discipline and tend to only cite one another as authorities.³¹²

Clone capitalism, social constructionism, and the shift from radical to liberal politics, perpetuated one another and created a political environment in which assimilation preferable to a greater majority of the gay population in the United States. Capitalists who relied on the gay market for profit depended on non-radical middle class gays as a consumer base. Social constructionist scholars depended on the goodwill of publishers and an increasingly moderate LGBT majority to support their ideas. Proponents of assimilationist relied on the gay media to promote political ideology and social constructionist scholars to validate it. Radical gay politics, including separatism, presented an undermining contradiction for proponents of assimilation. Historian John D’Emilio noted that, “since work on gay or lesbian topics is commonly treated as a de facto statement of identity, the task of producing gay

³¹² Duberman, "Acceptance at What Price? The Gay Movement Reconsidered;" Norton, 1-65; Ormsbee, 257-261; Timmons, 251; Duberman, "Reclaiming the Gay Past;" Estelle Freedman and John D’Emilio, "Problems Encountered in Writing the History of Sexuality: Sources, Theory and Interpretation," *The Journal of Sex Research*, V. 27, No. 4, November 1990, 481-495; Jay Michaelson in "Correspondence," *Gay & Lesbian Review Worldwide*, July-August. 2013, V. 20, Issue 4, accessed April 29, 2014: <http://ezproxy.lib.umb.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/1419385177?accountid=28932>.

history involves more than simple matters of research and writing.”³¹³ With identity politics as an influential and potentially confounding factor, it can be more difficult for researchers to separate from, confront, or challenge popular LGBT historical narratives. Additionally, over the years, scholars of LGBT history were pressured by publishers to tailor written works for popular as well as academic audiences in order to maximize marketing potential. Under such circumstances, unpopular concepts such as separatism are more subject to indirect censorship. All points considered, it is not surprising that less popular concepts, if included at all, tended to be minimized in works that later become part of LGBT historiography.³¹⁴

As LGBT history developed as a sub-discipline, gay separatism was obscured by gender politics. Urban geography based methodology was adopted as the standard approach to the subject matter, which yielded a historiography with blind-spots that distorted perspectives on multiregional non-urban events including gay separatism. The assimilationist goals of an increasingly conservative LGBT majority popularized a down-playing of differences and political distancing the radicalism of Gay Liberation, which further over shadowed gay separatism. The trajectory toward assimilation continued into the gay rights movement and through to the present. Combined with one another, difficulty recognizing gay separatism, regional-centric

³¹³ D’Emilio, “Not a Simple Matter: Gay History and Gay Historians.”

³¹⁴ Ibid.; Ormsbee 258-259; D’Emilio, “Do We Need Another Hero?” (Closing Keynote Address, Radically Gay: The Life & Visionary Legacy of Harry Hay, The Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies, New York, NY, September 27-30, 2012), accessed February 12, 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgfkTomApk>; Howard H. Chiang, “On the Historiographical Politics of Queer Sexuality: Thinking across the Post-Colonial and LGBTQ Subjects of History,” *Ex Historia*, V.1, 2009, 14-15, accessed February 20, 2013: <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/collegeofhumanities/history/exhistoria/volume1/HowardHChiangessay.pdf>; George Chauncey, “The Queer History and Politics of Lesbian and Gay Studies” in *Queer Frontiers: Millennial Geographies, Genders, and Generations* ed. al. Joseph A. Boone (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 298-315.

and metro-centric historical methodology, and assimilationist politics yielded a historiography from which separatism has largely been omitted. Therefore, the topic remains largely misunderstood.

One overwhelmingly common mistake activists and researchers make is equating gay separatism with self-imposed exile or ghettoization and therefore acceptance of the status of second class. Contrarily, rather than surrendering it, separatists were exerting political will. For the radicals who initiated the Alpine County project, gay separatism was ultimately about self-determination, not reform. Don Jackson truly believed that separatism was a quicker strategy for ending gay oppression.³¹⁵ Charles Thorp described the project as “a major step toward psychic preservation” and specifically denied that it had anything to do with reform.³¹⁶

Cultural nationalism and self-determination were features of Gay Liberation.

Illuminating the spirit of 1969-1970, Karla Jay explained:

We felt that we were on the cusp of a revolution... And we felt that we had to be active participants in this new world that we felt was about to come... We had to take part in bringing this world about... There were people who thought we should have a cultural revolution. And those people set about trying to have dances, music, and to create our own culture. A kind of liberating alternate culture that could never be taken away from us... The cultural revolution of dances, music, literature, a newspaper that came out of the GLF called *ComeOut!*, all of these things were important cultural steps.³¹⁷

Beginning in the late 1960s and continuing into 1970s, a small number of men settled in the Wolf Creek area of southwest Oregon; establishing communes, forming a rural community, and building an alternative gay subculture in the region. Wolf Creek was the site of the “Fagots and Class Struggle” conference in 1976 and location

³¹⁵ Don Jackson, “Gays Say They Ain’t Guil-tay!”

³¹⁶ Manely, “San Francisco GLF affirms Alpine support.”

³¹⁷ Jay, interview, 2014.

of the first permanent Radical Faerie³¹⁸ sanctuary established in 1987. GLF members organized living collectives in urban areas that served as work stations for activists as well as sites for cultivating a gay identity and culture. Similarly, gay separatists established a number of rural communes through the 1970s including Lavender Hill near West Danby, New York; Short Mountain near Liberty, Tennessee; the Elwah Land Project on the Olympia peninsula of Washington; Mulberry House of Fayetteville, Arkansas; Running Water in North Carolina; Hop Brook Commune in Massachusetts; plus an unnamed farming commune in Grinnell, Iowa. Gay communes encouraged experimentation with alternative lifestyles and means of self-expression as a way of cultivating a separate gay culture. Contributors to *RFD* - a magazine established in 1974 for non-urban gay men who co-founder Donald L. Engstrom described as the “separatist fag community”³¹⁹ - encouraged readers to develop a unique gay consciousness. Urban community organizers rejected rural settlement in favor of a more popular strategy of transforming existing gay ghettos into centers of social, political, and economic power.³²⁰

³¹⁸ Harry Hay specifically rejected the term “movement” in reference to the Radical Faeries based on the notion of “faerie consciousness” constituting a way of life rather than a means to an end. Radical Faeries more or less constitute a transnational spiritual tribe that tends to prioritize alternative culture over assimilation into mainstream society. Generally shared commonalities include egalitarianism, neo-pagan spirituality, pursuit of self-actualization, creative self-expression, comradery, non-rigid conformity to conventional gender roles.

³¹⁹ Herring, 67.

Gay ghettos, rural communes, and urban living collectives, served as laboratories for experimenting with alternative lifestyles and cultivating a distinct cultural identity, thus perpetuating gay and lesbian perceptions of themselves as a distinct peoples. While on the surface rural separatism and urban community organizing appear diametrically opposed to one another, both share cultural nationalism and motivation for self-determination as a common foundation. Gay Liberationists continuously migrated between urban and rural environments on the west coast during the 1960s and 1970s and brought their ideas with them when doing so.³²¹

High profile proponents of the project or of gay separatism practiced principals of cultural nationalism and self-determination years after the project halted. Don Jackson, Carl Wittman, and Steve Ginsburg's actions during later years demonstrate continuation of a trend toward gay cultural nationalism and self-determination. Their actions also retrospectively indicate earnestness toward the project.

Don Jackson re-emerged from his self-described period of repression and founded St. Priapus Church in 1981 and the Gay Rescue Mission in 1983. St. Priapus

³²⁰ Ibid.; "Acknowledgements," *Morning Due: A Journal of Men Against Sexism*, November-December 1976, 79, accessed March 25, 2015: <http://itwascuriosity.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/conference-report-faggots-and-class-struggle.pdf>; Timmons, 248-276; Thompson, "This Gay Tribe;" Stewart Scofield, "History of RFD," *RFD*, Spring 1983; Webb, "Difficulty at the Beginning: A Wolf Creek Journal," *RFD*, Spring 1977; Streitmatter, 248; Mungello, 20; John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, Introduction to *My Desire for History: Essays in Gay, Community, and Labor History* ed. John D'Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6-7; Kenoble, "Somewhere In The Right Direction: Testimony of My Experience in a Gay Male Living Collective;" Auerbacher, interview, 2014; Serinus, interview, 2014; Latronico, interview, 2014; Teal, 160-162; Charles Shively, "Wittman, Carl," in *Encyclopedia of Gay Histories and Cultures*, ed. George Haggerty (New York: Routledge, 2012), 958-959; Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 85-87, 226-227.

³²¹ Streitmatter, 248; Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street*, 85-87, 226-227; Max Kirkeberg, April 5, 1981 episode of *The Gay Life*.

Church combined phallic worship and ancient Dionysian traditions with Christianity and was affirming of male sexuality. Religious services included group sex acts. The Gay Rescue Mission was designed specifically to aid homeless gay men with emergency shelter, food, showers, counseling, and employment referrals. Jackson's work through the Gay Rescue Mission and St. Priapus Church demonstrates a continued commitment to gay cultural nationalism. St. Priapus Church's celebration of maleness and homomascularity was spiritually affirming to Gay men. The Gay Rescue Mission is an example of gay men using their own resources to solve problems within their own community.³²²

Carl Wittman practiced the ideals he expressed in *A Gay Manifesto*. In 1969 Wittman and Stevens McClave acquired land and established a gay commune near the unincorporated mining town of Golden, in the Wolf Creek area of southwest Oregon. Wittman divided his time between Golden and San Francisco for two years before taking up full time residency at the commune in 1971. Wittman helped strengthen the gay community in Wolf Creek through the 1970s. Harry Hay and Carl Wittman corresponded with one another through *RFD*. Wittman eventually assumed responsibility for the publication in the late 1970s and moved its base of operations to Wolf Creek. Hay and Wittman met in Wolf Creek in 1975, and befriended one another. Wittman endorsed Hay's theory of "faerie consciousness." Faerie consciousness, as summarized by Wittman, is "the notion of foundling, growing up a foreigner in family and culture, and returning to the larger whole."³²³ Having

³²² Don Jackson, interview, 1986; Saint Priapus Church 1900-2012, ONE Subject File collection, Coll2012-001, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California.

³²³ Thompson, "This Gay Tribe," 266.

embraced Hay's ideas, Wittman contributed to the founding of the separatist inclined Radical Faeries in 1979.³²⁴

Steve Ginsburg, like Don Jackson and Carl Wittman, continued to demonstrate commitment to the ideas on which the project was based. Ginsburg resigned from the Pride Week planning committee in 1974 while angry over a display ad that featured a swastika, which the *Bay Area Reporter* printed for the Nationalist Socialist Party. Ginsburg explained that his decision to resign was partially based on differences with the "gay capitalist power structure which in San Francisco gives us Booze, God, and the Empress, 125 bars, but no community center."³²⁵ A few years afterwards, Ginsburg moved to El Dorado County, immediately north of Alpine, and built a house in Mount Aukum.³²⁶

By the time the Alpine County project began to collapse, it had effectively been subverted and re-envisioned as a reform endeavor. During a time span of less than two years, the strategy shifted from revolutionary rhetoric and aspirations of seeking diplomatic recognition as a government in exile to communicating about projecting a more dignified image to court investment capitalists. Nonetheless, whether revolting against systematic oppression or subverting the system itself and

³²⁴ Timmons, 248-276; Thompson, "This Gay Tribe," 264-266; Shively, "Wittman, Carl;" Mungello, 20; D'Emilio and Freedman, Introduction to *My Desire for History*, 6-7; Mab Segrest, *Memoirs of a Race Traitor* (Boston: South End Press, 1994) 42-43, 52-60; Webb, "Difficulty at the Beginning;" Scofield, "History of RFD;" Streitmatter, 248; Liz Highleyman, "Who as Carl Wittman?," *Seattle Gay News*, May 5, 2006, accessed May 25, 2013: http://www.sgn.org/sgnnews34_18/page30.cfm.

³²⁵ Steve Ginsburg, "Let's get facts correct," clipping from *The Advocate*, April 24, 1974, box 47, folder 16, Jim Kepner Papers, Coll2011-002, ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, Los Angeles, California.

³²⁶ Ibid.; "Death Threat Taken to Police," clipping from *The Advocate*, April 10, 1974, box 47, folder 16, Jim Kepner Papers; "Steve Ginsburg," *Bay Area Reporter*, April 3, 2008, accessed October 20, 2014: <http://www.ebar.com/obituaries/index.php?sec=ob&article=364>.

reforming it to suit gay interests, active pursuit of self-determination was the main motivating factor.

Short lived and ultimately unsuccessful, the project nonetheless captured media attention throughout the United States and helped make Gay Liberation part of public consciousness. In the words of Howard Fox, “We told them that we are doing what Ronald Reagan and Richard Nixon and Spiro Agnew have told us to do—that if you are unhappy with the system, use your votes to bring about change. And we were doing this by peaceful means. This was the American way. It was wonderful.”³²⁷

³²⁷ Quoted in Cherry, “Brother Don Had a Dream.”

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