

A Day in the Life of a Gay Rights Activist

THE GAY ACTIVISTS OF YESTERYEAR asked government to leave them alone. Their political program centered on decriminalizing homosexual relations between consenting adults. But today, as tolerance of homosexuality grows, gay activists are increasingly turning to government to impose their agenda on society. Though state power has been used as a bludgeon against gay people since at least the Middle Ages, suddenly today's gay leaders seem to be picking up the club themselves, saying, "Now it's *our* turn." This is a great irony—and a potential cause of trouble for homosexuals and turmoil for America.

THE BIRTH OF THE GAY LIBERATION MOVEMENT in America can be dated to the evening of June 27, 1969, when patrons of the Stonewall Inn, a homosexual bar in Manhattan, resisted a police attempt to close the place down. For three days a neighborhood rebellion effectively kept the police from carrying on the ancient tradition of shaking down gay bars and busting the ones that didn't pay up. In the official complaint, the operators of the Stonewall were cited for not having a liquor license. But even if they had applied, it is doubtful their request would have been granted: the state licensing bureau was notoriously hostile to gay establishments. The first modern gay protesters, then, were rebelling against regulation. Indeed, liberation from government generally was a central idea of gay liberation.

But something happened to divert the gay movement from this original goal. Today, the so-called gay rights movement sees government as the agency, not the enemy, of liberty. From socialized medicine to anti-discrimination legislation to mandatory "tolerance" lessons in the schools, there is no scheme to increase the power of government these alleged freedom fighters do not endorse.

As long as homosexual acts between consenting adults are illegal in some states, I believe organizations dedicated to their repeal have a legitimate place in the constellation of human rights causes. Beyond this strictly limited goal, however, a political movement based on sexual orientation is a grotesque aberration. The fact that the gay rights movement has taken on an increasingly authoritarian style is the inevitable result of basing political allegiances on clan loyalties instead of philosophical principles.

IN A FREE SOCIETY THERE ARE NO GAY RIGHTS, only individual rights. For homosexuals and heterosexuals alike, these rights boil down to a single principle: the right to be let alone. Politically, the gay rights movement must return to its early libertarian roots. This would begin the vital process of depoliticizing homosexuality and defusing a dangerous culture war the gay minority can never win.

Even the state "neutrality" that gay "centrists" like Andrew Sullivan advocate would force government treatment of homosexuality as on a par with heterosexuality, as seen in Sullivan's demands for gay pseudo-"marriage" and open gays in the military. True neutrality, however, would involve not recognition but *indifference*, inattention, inaction. A neutral state would neither penalize nor reward homosexual behavior. It would neither forbid nor would it grant legal status to

homosexual marriage. In a military setting, a neutral state would subject all sexuality to the same rigorous regulation.

Gays must reject the nonsensical idea that they're oppressed by "heterosexism," a vile ideology that subordinates and denigrates homosexuals by insisting on the centrality of heterosexuality in human culture. There is no escaping human biology, however much such a project entrances cloistered academics who imagine that human sexuality is a "social construction" to be altered at will. Homosexuals are and always will be a rarity, a tiny minority necessarily outside of the traditional family. The heterosexual "bias" of social institutions is not something that needs to be imposed on a reluctant society by an oppressive state, but a predilection that comes quite naturally and inevitably. If this is "homophobia," then nature is a bigot. If gays use the power of the state to correct this historic "injustice," they are engaged in an act of belligerence which will rightly be seen as a challenge to the primacy of the traditional family.

Even many gay liberals recognize that the gay rights model has outlived whatever usefulness it may once have had. The idea of gay people, particularly gay men, as a victim group is so contrary to reality it is no longer sustainable. In economic, political, and cultural clout, gays wield influence way out of proportion to their numbers, a fact which has spawned numerous conspiracy theories. From the medieval Knights of Malta to the mysterious "Homintern" of more modern times, the idea of a powerful homosexual cabal is a persistent theme in conspiracy literature, one that mimics the form and style of anti-Semitic lore.

Overlaid with the victim propaganda of the past 20 years, this image of hidden homosexual power combines to produce a quite unappealing character: a creature of privilege constantly whining about his plight. If the gay political leadership is so concerned about the alleged rise of anti-gay bigotry, perhaps they will take care to project a less bash-able image.

As a specialized contingent of an army dedicated to ramming "multicultural" socialism down the throats of the American people, the gay lobby capitalizes on the worst insecurities of its constituents. Holding up the bogeyman of the "Religious Right" to keep the troops in line, the gay politicians point to Jesse Helms and say, "Without us, you wouldn't have a chance against him."

But in fact no major religious conservative has called for legal measures against homosexuals. The Christian Coalition, the Eagle Forum, and other grassroots conservative activists only involved themselves in supposedly "anti-gay" political activities defensively, in working to overturn gay rights legislation that attacked their most deeply held beliefs.

The leadership of the gay movement is playing with fire. The great tragedy is that they will not be the only ones burned. The volatility of the issues they are raising—which involve religion, family, and the most basic assumptions of what it is to be human—risks a social explosion for which they must be held accountable. The boldness of the attempt to introduce a "gay positive" curriculum into the public schools, the militant victim stance that brooks no questioning, the blunt intolerance once they gain power in urban ghettos like San Francisco—all this, combined with the fact that the gay rights para-

By Justin Raimondo

digm itself represents an intolerable invasion of liberty, is bound to produce a reaction from the majority.

IT'S TIME TO CHALLENGE THE FICTION that the "gay rights" movement speaks for all or even most gay people. It does not. Gay rights legislation violates the principles of authentic liberalism, and homosexuals should speak out against it—to distance themselves from the excesses of a militantly destructive movement, to help avert societal damage, and to right some grave wrongs. Those wrongs are the political assault being waged on the heterosexual family by the theoreticians of the gay rights revolution; the endless ridicule of religion that suffuses the gay press; and the limitless contempt for all tradition and "bourgeois values" that permeates the homosexual subculture.

And the search for a gay "ethnicity" is as much a dead-end as the effort to forge a gay political movement. In no sense is homosexuality comparable to being, say, Armenian. There is no gay culture separate from the culture in general, and in spite of pseudoscientific claims to the contrary, there is no genetically encoded gay race. There is only behavior engaged in by a diverse range of individuals, each acting from his or her own motives and predispositions.

Efforts to sanctify such behavior, or to explain it in such a way that it has no moral content, are counterproductive as well as unconvincing. Attempting to somehow reconcile homosexuality with the customs and religious beliefs of the majority is to concede the one right that people, gay and straight, really *do* have—the right *not* to have to justify one's existence.

The obsession with "coming out," and the essentially feminine self-centeredness such a ritual implies, is surely another aspect of the gay movement that has to go. Do we really need to know the sexual proclivities of our neighbors and coworkers, or even our brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles?

To expect approval or official sanction for so personal a matter as sexuality is a sign of weak character. To unblushingly ask (nay, *demand*) such approval in the form of some act of government is an act of unparalleled bad taste. It is also a confession of such a devastating lack of self-esteem, of inner emptiness, that its public expression is hard to fathom. Self-esteem is not a quality to be sought from others, nor can it be legislated into existence.

The history of the gay movement reveals that ideology and Eros are antipodes. Politics, said Orwell, is "sex gone sour," and sour certainly describes the worldview of gay rights dogmatists. This is evident just by looking at them: Beleaguered on every side by a "heterosexist" society, and usually too homely to get a date, these poor souls have so politicized their sexuality it can hardly be said to exist.

Instead of the preening moralism of gay "visibility," a sensible resolution of the Gay Question would call for a return to the joys of private life, the rediscovery of discretion and even anonymity. The politicization of everyday life—of sex and the core institutions of the culture—is a trend to be fiercely resisted, not just by gay people but by lovers of liberty in every sphere of human endeavor.



Justin Raimondo is a San Francisco writer. His book *Enemy of the State: The Life of Murray N. Rothbard* will be published in June.

When Fairness is Unjust

By Thomas Sowell

An edited excerpt from recent remarks delivered at the American Enterprise Institute by author Thomas Sowell, whose most recent book is The Quest for Cosmic Justice.

Whenever I hear about “fairness” in education, I think back to my own education half a century ago in Harlem. I think particularly of one teacher, Miss Simon.

Miss Simon was from what I would call the General Patton School of Education. She was not my favorite teacher at the time, and I’d be very surprised if I were her favorite student. Miss Simon required us to write every misspelled word 50 times. Not in class, but at home, along with all the other homework that we had from her and all the other teachers with similar attitudes. So if you misspelled four or five words, you had quite an evening ahead of you. There would be no “Lone Ranger” that night.

Many years later, on the streets of San Francisco, I ran into a Harlem neighbor and we caught up on old times. It turned out he had become a psychiatrist and owned a home and property in California’s Napa Valley. He is currently retired, living overseas with servants.

One of the things he mentioned was that over the years his secretaries have commented that he seldom misspells a word. And I said, “You know, my secretaries make that same comment. But if they knew Miss Simon, it would be no mystery.”

Suppose, however, that instead of Miss Simon we’d had teachers with the enlightened views of today. Our teachers would have said, “It’s not right to force these kids to be able to spell all these words. Their parents don’t have the kind of education that parents in other neighborhoods have. They don’t have books and magazines in their homes. These are tougher words for them than they are for other people.”

I wonder what would have happened to my neighbor and me in that case. Perhaps we

would have ended up on welfare or in prison. People perfectly capable of achievement would have been turned into clients, supplicants, mascots—symbols of other people’s goodness.

I thought about that some years ago as I looked at the math textbooks my nieces in Harlem were using. What they were being taught in the eleventh grade I was taught in the ninth grade. But probably the teachers felt very good about themselves for being so “fair.”

OUR CHOICE IS BETWEEN
REQUIRING THEM TO DO
SOMETHING HARD NOW, OR
HAVING MAKE-BELIEVE EQUALITY
AND LETTING THEM GO OUT INTO
THE WORLD DOOMED TO FAIL.

In education today there’s a widespread notion of “fairness” in some cosmic sense—not in the sense of treating everyone the same, but in the sense of trying to redress pre-existing inequalities.

There’s no awareness of the cost of this notion of fairness—not only to the educational system but to the very people we’re trying to help. It’s an empirical question whether what we’re giving disadvantaged people by treating them this way outweighs what we’re taking away from them in terms of their own accomplishment. But it’s an empirical question that is almost never asked. Because to do-gooders, the results are less important than feeling noble about offering “help.”

For instance, the College Board is now trying to fudge the results of SAT tests—to “race-norm” the scores—on the grounds that blacks and others have a tough time if they are held to

same standard as other people. It so happens that a hundred years ago in this very city of Washington, standardized tests were given in the academic high schools. There were four high schools at that time, three white and one black. The black high school came in ahead of two of the three white high schools on the standardized tests, and they did not race-norm the scores. That was 100 years ago. Today, no one is so utopian as to hope for any such thing.

When you tell people things like this, they say, “Oh, those were middle-class kids.” You will be quite unpopular if you ask a follow-up question, “What speck of evidence do you have showing that’s true?” It so happens I have more than a speck that it’s false. A survey was done of the occupations of those kids’ parents: They included 52 laborers and just one physician.

Still people say, “Oh, but that’s where doctors and lawyers sent their kids.” As one of the former principals told me, “If this school was for the doctors and lawyers, how come we had 1,400 black kids here at one time?” In fact, the data have been available publicly for a quarter of a century: There were far more kids whose mothers were maids than whose fathers were physicians.

And so it’s very hard to convince me that black kids can’t do what they’ve already done. The same thing applies with Hispanics. I went to school with Hispanic kids who spoke English every day of the week. Hispanic kids today can learn to speak English.

Is it fair? No, it’s not fair. It would be much fairer if they were born into a family where everyone already spoke English. But we have no control over that. That kind of fairness has never been an option. Our only choice is between making them do something that’s a little harder right now, or having make-believe equality and letting them go out into the world foredoomed to fail.



Thomas Sowell

Bruce Reedy Photography