

# Excerpts From "A Gay Manifesto"

## Background

Carl Wittman (profiled in the March 4 issue of *The Front Page*) was an activist in the new left and in the San Francisco counterculture of the 1960s. In the months before the Stonewall Riots in New York City, there was much planning and organizing going on in the gay community on the West Coast. Wittman worked on "A Gay Manifesto" in the summer months of 1969; and it was published in December in the *San Francisco Free Press*. His political analysis of sexuality, culture and repression became nationally known and widely read, one of the most influential documents of those early years of gay liberation.

Shortly after making its original appearance in the *Free Press*, "A Gay Manifesto" turned up in pamphlet form from a number of different sources; published by "Gay Flames" in New York, for example, and by the Marxist "Red Butterfly" cell in San Francisco (with additional commentary). For a time, you could obtain a copy by writing to "The Council on Religion and the Homosexual." It was also anthologized in the important *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, edited by Karla Jay and Allen Young.

Dennis Altman, in his book *Homosexual Oppression and Liberation* (1971), refers to the manifesto as "one of the most important statements of the gay movement." *The Gay Militants*, written by Don Teal and also published in 1971, similarly credits Wittman with a very influential document.

In 1972, *Out of the Closets: The Sociology of Homosexual Liberation* by Laud Humphreys, cites Wittman, as does *The Homosexual Dialectic*, edited by Joseph A. McCaffrey. "Wittman's persuasive article," McCaffrey writes, "has been referred to by some as the bible of the Gay Liberation Movement. The author carefully solidifies his argument that the homosexual is a viciously persecuted individual. In effect, this piece constitutes an elementary 'bill of rights' for homosexuals — both male and female."

More recently, "A Gay Manifesto" has been discussed in: *Pink Triangles: Radical Perspectives on Gay Liberation* (1980); *The Politics of Homosexuality* by Toby Marotta (1981); Michael Bronski's *Culture Clash: The Making of a Gay Sensibility* (1984); and in the June 21, 1986 issue of *Gay Community News*.

Although close friends say that Wittman changed his mind about a number of things included in "A Gay Manifesto," the essay is still a lively and relevant piece of analysis. Bits and pieces of it have not aged well; certain phrases betray the period in which it was written. Still, it is an important work; especially so for gay men and lesbians in the state that Wittman eventually called home.

(Originally published as "Refugees from Amerika: A Gay Manifesto" in the *San Francisco Free Press*, December 22-January 7, 1970.)

San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled small towns where to be ourselves would endanger our jobs and any hope of a decent life; we have fled from blackmailing cops, from families who disowned or "tolerated" us; we have been drummed out

## BY CARL WITTMAN



of the armed services, thrown out of schools, fired from jobs, beaten by punks and policemen.

And we have formed a ghetto, out of self-protection. It is a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us. We have pretended everything is OK, because we haven't been able to see how to change it... we've been afraid.

In the past year there has been an awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy. How it began we don't know; maybe we were inspired by black people and their freedom movement; we learned how to stop pretending from the hip revolution. Amerika in all its ugliness has surfaced with the war and our national leaders. And we are revolted by the quality of our ghetto life.

Where once there was frustration, alienation, and cynicism, there are new characteristics among us. We are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. And as we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high, with the initial flourish of a movement.

We want to make ourselves clear: our first job is to free ourselves; that means clearing our heads of the garbage that's been poured into them. This article is an attempt at raising a number of issues, and presenting some ideas to replace the old ones. It is primarily for ourselves, a starting point of discussion. If straight people of good will find it useful in understanding what liberation is about, so much the better.



It should also be clear that these are the views of one person, and are determined not only by my homosexuality, but my being white, male, middle-class. It is my individual consciousness. Our group consciousness will evolve as we get ourselves together...we are only at the beginning.

## On Orientation

1. *What homosexuality is:* Nature leaves unidentified the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object is imposed socially. Humans originally made homosexuality taboo because they needed every bit of energy to produce and raise children: survival of species was a priority. With overpopulation and technological change, that taboo continued only to exploit us and enslave us.

As kids we refused to capitulate to demands that we ignore our feelings toward each other. Somewhere we found the strength to resist being indoctrinated, and we should count that among our assets. We have to realize that our loving each other is a good thing, not an unfortunate thing, and that we have a lot to teach straights about sex, love, strength, and resistance.

Homosexuality is *not* a lot of things. It is not a makeshift in the absence of the opposite sex; it is not hatred or rejection of the opposite sex; it is not genetic; it is not the result of broken home... *Homosexuality is the capacity to love someone of the same sex.*

2. *Bisexuality:* Bisexuality is good; it is the capacity to love people of either sex. The reason so few of us are bisexual is because society made such a big stink about homosexuality that we got forced into seeing ourselves as either straight or non-straight.

We continue to call ourselves homosexual, not bisexual, even if we do make it with the opposite sex also, because saying "Oh, I'm Bi" is a copout for a gay. We get told its OK to sleep with guys as long as we sleep with women too, and that's still putting homosexuality down.

## On Women

1. *Lesbianism:* It's been a male-dominated society for too long, and that has warped both men and women. So gay women are going to see things differently from gay men; they are going to feel put down as women, too. Their liberation is tied up with both gay liberation and women's liberation.

This paper speaks from the gay male viewpoint. And although some of the ideas in it may be equally relevant to gay women, it would be arrogant to presume this to be a manifesto for lesbians.

2. *Male Chauvinism:* All men are infected with male chauvinism — we were brought up that way. It means we assume that women play subordinate roles and are less human than ourselves.

Male chauvinism, however, is not central to us. We can junk it much more easily than straight men can. For we understand oppression. We have largely opted out of a system which oppresses women daily — our egos are not built on putting women down and having them build us up. Also, living in a mostly male world, we have become used to playing different roles, doing our own shit-work. And finally, we have a common enemy: the big male chauvinists are also the big anti-gays.

But we need to purge male chauvinism, both in behavior and in thought among us. Chick

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