

OUR CRUISING REPORTER IN THE GAY GHETTO

by steve gavin

QUESTIONS:

- (1) How would you classify yourself: bisexual, gay, straight or other?
- (2) What are your views on sexism?
[NONE of those interviewed could really define sexism, so the reporter supplied the following definition: Sexism is the doctrine which associates certain traits or functions to a particular sex.]
- (3) What do you think of the Gay Liberation movement?

EDWARD PARKER

- 1 bisexual, 30 years old, male
2. There are natural roles that men and women can and do assume. Women's Liberation is a culmination of their boredom.
3. Gay Liberation is coming too late in the century. It should have started around 1900 or 1492. It is progress in the interest of those who want to pursue their own sexual persuasion. We are born with the right to do as we damn well please sexually. We shouldn't have to have a group like the Gay Liberation Front to re-establish our God-given right. Unfortunately, we have to have this group and I think it's good that we do as long as it's necessary.

BILLY SOMETIMES

1. other, 30 years old, male
2. Each person has to choose the role that will satisfy him the most. America is a sexist society, although other countries are more sexist. In general, women aren't oppressed; they don't have to do a God damn thing they don't want to do.
3. Gay Liberation is fine. They are attracting a lot of attention. A lot of the things they are doing in the street are tawdry. If they want to achieve their ends, they should be careful not to stage a lot of tawdry scenes in the street.

BOBBY ROBERTS

1. gay, 20 years old, male
2. Everyone has their own natural role. People are shaped by their surroundings and what others expect them to be. Many people believe that being homosexual means they should display feminine traits. Other people over-compensate for what they think is their lack of masculinity.
3. I'm for liberation for everyone, not just for any specific group. Everything should naturally be free. Gay people oppress themselves more than other people oppress them. If gay people didn't want to oppress themselves, they wouldn't permit the opinions of others to affect them.

STANLEY LAUREL

1. (straight, 27 years old, male.
2. I think it is fine that people are becoming aware of the plight of women. I don't think there should be any presupposed roles in a relationship: Roles were learned. People who practice role playing are not living out their ego.
3. I don't know too much about Gay Liberation. I don't disagree with what is going on in that direction. I don't know the freedom that they desire except that it is a freedom, and for that reason, it's important.

GARY NEWMAN

1. straight, 20 years old, male
2. It is wrong to think that each sex should have specific functions or purposes. A majority of the people in our society are sexist.
3. Gay Liberation is a good idea. Gay People are an oppressed people. I don't think that homosexuals should make physical advances toward people that are straight. It's perfectly O.K. to have relationships with each other. I think that the paranoia of straight people in this society is more or less caused by a fear of being homosexual themselves.

GEORGE NEILSON

1. straight, 16 years old, male
2. A girl who does the same work as a man should get the same wages. Differences in capabilities between sexes is due to training, but women are physically weaker than men. Basically, women can do what they want, although there is some discrimination against them.
3. Being gay is up to the individual. Gay people try to be effeminate; it is their right to be what they want. They should not be put down for being gay. They should have equal job opportunity and be free to display their affections openly.

RON DANIELS

1. straight, 25 years old, male
2. Women dominate my life more than other men. There are functions that are feminine. My woman should do my cooking unless I got achateau briande that I want to cook in wine sauce. I don't think sexism is oppressive to women. I think they need to feel fulfilled. Women want to be responsible for creating your environment. I'm against job discrimination for women.
3. Gay people should be able to do what they want to without getting busted. They shouldn't be embarrassed. I don't think they get as much harassment as peace marchers though.

DAVID HOYT

1. straight, 21 years old, male
2. I'm for Women's Liberation as long as it's not a halfway thing. It has to be on a much larger scale rather than on a self-centered basis.
3. Homosexuals are fine as long as they don't try to bring you over to their thing. It's a matter of getting rid of personal hangups that you might have on the subject so that you can be completely objective about the subject.

JOHN SELBY

1. gay, 22 years old, male
2. Sexism is too confusing. There's no room for imagination. I think Women's Liberation is hypocritical. I think they're fighting for something they don't need. I don't feel that women are oppressed.
3. I'm glad that Gay people are fighting for what they believe in. I think there's a lot of discrimination against Gay people, especially in other parts of the country. It's more tolerated in New York and California. I don't know very much about the Gay Liberation movement.

WILLIAM STEIN

1. bisexual, 30 years old, male
2. I think people are entitled to their rights as man and woman, and one should not be subservient to the other. Women are born with instincts to bear children and to be mothers. Man is born with natural instincts to provide food and shelter for himself and others. There are very few other things which are naturally associated with a person's sex. Their behaviour as sexual creatures is mostly determined by their environment. Women are discriminated against because of their sex. There is a constant battle between the sexes for domination.
3. Homosexuality is basically a pathological condition. People should be free to live as they choose. A person's sexuality is basically determined in early childhood.

DAVID NICHOLS

1. other, 24 years old, male
2. Physically, there is a sexual difference between sexes and people should look like their sex. It turns me off to see a chick walking like an athlete. Other than appearance, sex roles are absurd.
3. Gay people are really getting fucked up by the Establishment — maybe by everybody, unconsciously. All Liberation movements should come together. It sort of makes me feel jolly when I think of Gay Liberation. It's hard to visualize Gay people having a liberation movement. It's a nice thing to happen.

19 LETTER FROM CUBA by earl galvin

Third day at sea. So much has been happening that it's hard to sit down and write. When we arrived in St. John, we found besides the three GLF males from New York City there was only one GLF male from Chicago. No women. The GLF people from San Francisco all dropped out because of police repression there. However, there are now 2 more gay males and one gay woman in on gay caucus. There are also a few straight men who are wearing G.L.F. buttons and we generally have strong support from almost all of the women and a great number of men. There are many people who are going to come out on this trip.

The Cubans are freaked. Yesterday, two G.L.F. people had a talk with a Young Communist (member of Cuban Youth Organization). One of them will write about that. Elaine is also going to write.

At 6:00 in the evening we hear the news broadcast from Havana in Spanish and English. The women's strike in the U.S. has been given wide publicity in Cuba. We also heard about the explosion in Madison Square. At the end of the newscast, a Cuban orchestra played a song which they dedicated to us on the boat. It's really far out.

September 7: Haven't written for some time due to a real lack of time. There is so much to do. today is the first day of our second week of work—its hard work but its the main thing that holds us together. People are beginning to listen to each other again. The tensions of last week were incredible, and they were with us 24 hours a day. It's a good thing we're way out in the middle of nowhere because it looked for a bit as though we were on the verge of a 6-way war. Blacks vs. Puerto Ricans and Chicanos vs. Whites, Men vs. women, etc.. Because we have the support of almost all of the white people (weak though it may be for many), G.L.F. became a sort of "white" issue. There are 3rd world gay people



on the Brigade, but they are mostly very closeted and tend to be the most vocal in opposition to the "bullshit movements"—i.e. Women's Lib and Gay Lib. This week things have cooled off on all sides. The Cubans have said that all they recognize in this situation is one total brigade. Any group of people may meet as they wish, but only in the work cadres can decisions affecting the brigade be made. I'm glad of that.

It's so difficult to write everything down—it's so completely different here. When we arrived in Havana the docks were crowded with people dancing and singing. All of us on the boat were doing the same. We took buses from Havana across Havana Province to board another boat to take us to the Isle of Pines. In all, the little towns along the way were signs saying "Welcome Venceremos Brigade." People in the streets everywhere to greet us. Last weekend we visited two towns on the island. We are left free to go wherever we please during these visits, unescorted, and to talk with anyone. People ask us into their houses everywhere. The cultural differences here in the countryside are very great but aside from feeling sexually repressed (and I think all Cubans are sexually repressed due to a cultural lag), I am getting a real sense of freedom. We are going to write an article collectively this week and send it with Cuban diplomatic materials to the U.N. They will forward it to you from the U.N. It will probably get there before this letter which must go by way of Spain. The stamps on the envelope, like everything else here, were free. Money is just about useless on the Isle of Pines. You must go on the next brigade. To really see and experience socialism will blow your mind. We are going to spend 1 week with the Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians as well as Tupamaros, Brazilians, Bolivians, etc. Too much!!

1/01 1, #7, Page 19

ONE MAN'S GAY LIBERATION

by DENNIS ALTMAN

My first contact with Gay Liberation came in San Francisco in August. I discovered their phone number in the back of the *Berkley Barb* called and was invited to dinner to the gay commune that serves as the centre for the local GLF.

That commune is a huge deserted warehouse in one of the flat frame-house areas of San Francisco (a city where the richer you are, the higher you live). About twenty or so people lived in the house, both men and women, and, despite its name, both gay and straight. The cooking is communal, improved by the fact that California has perhaps the best surplus fruit in the world. It took some time to find the man with whom I had spoken on the phone — so fluctuating was the population that not everyone knew each other's name — but he finally surfaced from a long, dope-induced sleep and decided to take me round to meet the San Francisco GLF President. Who was watching television with his flat-mates, a remarkably conventional-looking man, for all the world like a bank clerk, except that he was stark naked.

A few days later, I attended a National Student Gay Liberation conference in the offices of SIR, down there amidst the winos and prostitutes south of Market St. The conference was called and dominated by Charles P. Thorp, who had founded Gay Lib at San Francisco State, not without opposition from an already uptight administration, and was attended by representatives from about twenty campuses, mainly on the West Coast but including Nebraska, Virginia and Texas. Only a couple of delegations included women.

I had spent considerable time in the States before, much of it with gay people (in fact, gay men). My strongest first impression of Gay Liberation was that these were different to the gay men I had encountered before, without any of the mannerisms or appearance that we traditionally associate with gay people. Indeed, in many ways they seemed far closer to their straight counterparts in the radical movement than to non-radical gays, and much of the discussion at the conference related to the American crisis rather than to the specifics of gay oppression.

Gay people have traditionally been plagued by a sense of guilt and self-hatred that has been responsible for many of the aspects we have presented to the straight world. Perhaps the worst part of our oppression is that we have come to accept the straight view of ourselves, and even some of the older homophile groups tended to be apologetic and self-effacing in demanding equal rights, rather as if they were not certain whether the psychiatrists might not be right after all, and we really are pathologically disturbed. "Blatant is beautiful," stated Charles, thus expressing the demand for acceptance for what we are, rather than for our ability to successfully imitate what the straight world would like to have us be.

As a conference measured by conventional criteria, it achieved very little; no motions were passed or position papers issued. As a personal experience for me, and I imagine for most of those who participated, it was rewarding largely because of the new image we were forging. I understood then how blacks had felt when the first demands for 'Black Power' surfaced, and why the liberal arguments about expediency and political sense seemed so largely irrelevant. To be gay, and to be proud of that, is both a non-negotiable demand and a necessary pre-requisite for any political movement.

I was in California when Huey Newton made his statement on Gay and Women's Liberation, and the metaphor of the faggot as nigger tended to dominate our consciousness at the meeting. This was also the time of the picket line at Macy's, protesting entrapment in the men's room, and I joined that line one day, moving in a small circle amidst the elegant downtown shoppers who seemed bewildered rather than hostile. Indeed, perhaps the most hostile were the well-groomed and obviously homosexual men who came by, averting their heads lest they be recognized; "Why don't you get back to your closets" I could hear them hissing.

From San Francisco, I came to New York via Los Angeles and New Orleans, almost compulsively following the gay circuit immortalized by John Rechy. If San Francisco had been for me the first introduction to gay liberation, New Orleans was a reminder of the realities of gay life as most of us have experienced it; the French Quarter, where the straight tourists come to have all their stereotypes reinforced by drag shows, the bars, with their uptight and vaguely hostile ambiance, the hustlers on the street was far more like gay life as I have known it, both here and in Australia, than was the conference experience in San Francisco.

But my last night in New Orleans I spent with Peter, who came from Savannah, Georgia and hustled, who was lonely and vulnerable, and we went together around the bars, drinking and playing the juke boxes, enjoying the transitory warmth of each other's company. Which I remember when I hear brothers put down hustlers...

I have now been in New York six weeks, but this is a New York different to the city I had known on previous visits. Then gay life for me meant bars and bath houses, neither of which I much enjoyed, and while I was lucky and met some gay men whom I could love, by and large, I kept my gay life apart from my straight, concealing what is central to myself from people whom I now know would have accepted me more easily had I been open. Needless to say, it was a gay life that almost totally excluded gay women, and one of the tragedies of the traditional gay life is the extent to which it built and perpetuated barriers between gay women and men.

In six weeks I have been only once to a gay bar, and that was with someone I loved for a time, and to dance. Much of my time has been spent in the gay movement — at meetings, at rapsessions, at dances, on the streets. I still see my straight friends, but I am open with them about my homosexuality, and when I feel oppressed by them — as when I am asked to dinner by myself while straights are asked to "bring someone" — I tell them. The gay community in New York has become for me just that; I walk through the Village and I see people whom I know, even if only by sight, and I feel I belong. Moreover, my contacts with gay people are far richer and more diverse than ever before, for they are no longer restricted by sex as the sole motivating force; I know women and transvestites and I find myself struggling to understand them and their experience in a way I never could before.

Although I have only been here a short time, I feel very much part of the new gay consciousness; I have grown enormously in the past six weeks, and I have, I hope, learnt much. If I am critical of some aspects of the gay movement, it is criticism that comes from within, and with the hope of improving ourselves in the future.

I regret the lack of contact that seems to exist between GAA and GLF. I say this with no knowledge of the history of this split, but with some knowledge of both groups and with friends who align with each. To me the two are complementary, not rivals. (Although I am conscious that it is far easier to write this for a man than a woman; it is impossible to ignore the extent to which GAA is male-dominated, and I do not see any easy solution to this) Each fulfills different functions; it would I think be silly to deny that GAA has a certain political efficacy, just as I would hope they can recognize the extent to which GLF and the various groups it has spawned — Radicalesbians, Gay Youth, Third World Gay Revolution, STAR, and Gay Night — has provided a means whereby gay people can redefine themselves and come to terms with the extent to which we have internalized the shit straight society has thrown at us. I value the sensibility that GLF has taught me toward racism, sexism, etc., but I would wish we could combine this with some of the sense of political efficacy of GAA.

These reflections are sparked off by the incidents at NYU. I feel particularly close to this issue, because I teach at a university, and the issue concerned me both as a gay person and as someone concerned immediately with the need to redefine the role and function of the academic life. I had no hesitation in fully supporting the original claims against the University; I too am oppressed

and degraded when the University declares its intention to examine the validity of my life style (but not, as a letter to a student paper pointed out, that of the U.S. military who are freely allowed on campus.) I am more ambivalent about some of the latter demands that were made, particularly those that involve the concept of 'community control.' I am committed to student/teacher control, and I have some reservations about how far this should be limited by the demands of the community. God knows, our universities have suffered enough by accepting outside standards — I would restore academic autonomy rather than merely shifting the groups to whom the university is held to be responsible.

More importantly in the case of NYU, we threw away a great issue mainly, I believe, because we failed to appreciate fully the nature of a university. I was upset by the way in which so many in the community seemed to ignore the University GSL, instead of regarding them as the logical and natural leaders in such a situation. I admire and respect the street transvestites, but I would have preferred to have followed NYU gay students, just as I would expect to follow the lead of STAR in an issue that related directly to them.

To many in the Movement this will seem an elitist position, one that ignores the community's rights vis-a-vis NYU. I am less certain of these than most (nor am I at all sure, as was claimed by some of the rhetoric, that the University has 'taken over' our community. I suspect NYU long preceded the gay community in the Village.) But there are pragmatic considerations as well. The University not only oppresses us, it also over-ruled a legitimate student body decision and, putting it at its most charitable, was inconsistent in what it told its own people. Here was a perfect issue to forge a student/gay coalition, and reach large numbers of students with some understanding of our position at the same time. There are various ways in which this might have been done, and I do not want to start prescribing for the past, which is always easy and invariably futile. I do regret that we did not seek to do this, that we did not open up the opportunities for dialogue that were there. Few groups are both as oppressed by sexism and as open to liberation as that of the college students, and in the long run, this could have been far more significant than winning the sub-basement.

Our evaluation of any political movement will be highly colored by what it means to us personally. To me Gay Liberation has been most significant because it has helped me confront and accept my homosexuality, and whether objectively there is declining oppression or not, I am grateful to Gay Lib. for that. Not that I had not seen myself as 'liberated' before; over the past year I had indeed come to a position where I no longer lived in a closet (or perhaps, more honestly, where I kept the closet door slightly ajar) and I guess I thought of myself, with all the smugness this suggests as pretty well-adjusted. How far I have to go in really liberating myself myself my experience in Gay Liberation has made clear. But this experience in has made me glad to be a homosexual, for the experience has given me insight into the human potential I had previously lacked.

Ultimately, I feel I may come to love both men and women, and I am hesitant in saying this only because I feel that protestations of bi-sexuality are too often a cop-out. (Think, for instance, of Gore Vidal.) "Sex is love," chalked up the little boy I saw in Washington Square Park last Saturday. Unlike *Playboy*, and much of Hollywood I don't think this is so, and if Gay Liberation has taught me anything, it has taught me to love more easily, and perhaps to move to a position where I could love people for what they are rather than for their genitals. Gay Liberation may have achieved its full potential when it is no longer needed, for we see each other either as men and women, gay and straight, but purely as people with infinite possibilities. It is the fate of the Negro, James Baldwin once wrote, to carry the burden of both white and black Americans. It may be the fate of homosexuals to liberate both gays and straight.