

The University of Maine

DigitalCommons@UMaine

Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion

Special Collections

4-23-1974

Maine gay symposium stresses two themes: a re-evaluation of the homosexual self-image and 'coming out'

Bill Ferguson

University of Maine

Steve Ward

University of Maine

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice



Part of the [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Repository Citation

Ferguson, Bill and Ward, Steve, "Maine gay symposium stresses two themes: a re-evaluation of the homosexual self-image and 'coming out'" (1974). *Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion*. 526. https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/social_justice/526

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Social Justice: Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

Maine gay symposium stresses two themes: a re-evaluation of the homosexual self-image and 'coming out'

"Homosexuality and gay liberation are symptoms of a sexually healthy society," said activist Morty Manford at the Maine Gay Symposium here Saturday.

Over 300 paying observers attended the well-organized gathering which met with no violent opposition, picketing, or demonstrations as had been feared by some UMO



"We are human entities first before we are men or women," ventured Nathalie Rockhill of the National Gay Task Force. Rockhill was one of two featured speakers at the Maine Gay Symposium. Rockhill was one of two featured speakers at the Maine Gay Symposium.

of the public," Boule said. "We must end prejudice against homosexuals. That is our long-range objective that starts now with our emergence from the closet." Boule then introduced Nathalie Rockhill of the National Gay Task Force who also paid tribute to the Wilde-Stein Club.

"The whole nation is watching the controversy you've created here," she said. "Controversy is what we need to attract attention to our cause. Once there is public attention, then there is the possibility of recognition by the people of the legality and authenticity of gays," she continued.

Rockhill outlined the national gay movement. There are over 1000 organized gay organizations nationwide, she said. Groups are becoming more diversified, with Catholic, Jewish, and many professional organizations forming.

She also announced the passage of a gay rights bill in New York City and named 10 other major cities that have followed suit.

Unification in the open where everyone can see will do more to strengthen our movement than any other single factor. We're everywhere. Our love is good and beautiful. We belong here. Once we overcome the struggle in our own minds, nothing can stop us," she finished to much applause.

Morty Manford of the Gay Activists Alliance in New York City, reinforced the theme of emergence from the closet as being of paramount importance.

"Only as gays stand up to be counted can there be any growth in our organization," Manford asserted.

"We have been prevented from expressing ourselves freely far too long. We must fight this oppression, this discrimination, the social and political inequality that we have known so long," he went on, citing Rep. Louis Jalbert as an antagonist. Jalbert labeled the club "a pack of queers".

Manford commended the university trustees for allowing the symposium to be held and condemned the adverse positions taken by some local ministers.

The gay militant also stated that the gay liberation faction is "a symptom of a sexually healthy society" and that gay militants affirm freedom "here to stay."



Ken Allen, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, having given the official university welcome at the Maine Gay Symposium, chats with Mr. and Mrs. Boule, parents of Steve Boule, chairperson of the Wilde-Stein Club.

Symposium, chats with Mr. and Mrs. Boule, parents of Steve Boule, chairperson of the Wilde-Stein Club.

Story by Bill Ferguson

At an afternoon press conference, a panel of gays expounded on the surfacing of homosexuals to stand their ground and fight.

We must make straight people aware of our existence," said Vito Russo. We have to show them that we are real people, not perverts, or fang-bearing monsters."

The basic tenet of the homosexual philosophy is that they are normal, they feel equal to other people and are thus deserving of equal treatment civilly and morally.

Invisibility is our greatest problem," Russo stressed. "Gays are afraid of public reaction

Photos by Steve Ward

against them and are forced underground as a result."

Russo explained that in the small towns of Maine, people are ignorant of homosexual behavior because gays usually leave rural areas, seeking the anonymity of the city to come out.

Workshops were held in the afternoon on various aspects of homosexuality. Five topics were discussed informally by the several speakers.

Dr. Throckmorton spoke on religious sources and connotations." I was disturbed at the reaction of several local clergymen to the

be judged as persons first, before being expected to fulfill male or female obligations.

"It is a question of humanity," she believes. "We are human entities first, before we are women or men."

Another workshop, "Gay-Straight Relations" was presented by John Lawrence and Sheri Barden of Boston.



"We have been prevented from expressing ourselves freely, far too long," stated Morty Manford of the Gay Activists Alliance, who was one of two featured speakers during the Gay Symposium Saturday.

"The gay-straight relationship is marked by misunderstanding, hostility and mistrust," Lawrence contended.

"Homosexuality is not a term but a label that conjures up images of horrible sexual perversions in the minds of straight people," he went on.

"Actually, gayness is not an act, but a way of living and loving. We need to deal with straight people so that mutual understanding takes place."

Barden explained the necessity of separatism by gays in order to establish their identity within the context of society as a whole.

"However we cannot simply separate ourselves into a commune," she warned. "The key to our acceptance is understanding by other straight people. If we stay among ourselves, we cannot progress. It is only by going out and expounding our views and beliefs, among straights, and exposing ourselves to public scrutiny that we can promote knowledge that will dispell the negative aura that surrounds us."

The futility of psychiatry as a curative process was also discussed.

"The psychiatric system is no more than an extension of the criminal code," one member accused. "Both deal with 'deviants', but the problem arises in the definition of 'normal' which is made by the same system. The psychiatric system, like the economic system, is based on the family unit as a 'normal' situation. We challenge this as a continuance of social norms."

The weekend conference had two major themes: the re-evaluation of homosexual self-image by asserting gayness as a possible positive concept, and armed with this ideal, to emerge from the closet to spread this philosophy to anyone interested. In this way, gays hope to be recognized as sane people, not as warped maladjusted, or perverted.

administrators. A team of four campus policemen guarded the affair which was sponsored by the Wilde-Stein Club, UMO's gay group.

The symposium began Wednesday night with an address by Dr. Howard Brown, founder of the National Gay Task Force. A former New York State Health Services Administrator, Dr. Brown defined Maine as a "crucial area" in the homosexual movement due to the statewide flood of controversy over the Wilde-Stein Club and the symposium.

The symposium reconvened Friday evening with about 300 registering for the activities. A movie, "How Hollywood Has Portrayed the Homosexual" was presented by Vito Russo of the Museum of Modern Art in Boston. A social contact meeting followed the film.

The bulk of the symposium took place Saturday, the program starting with registration at 9:00 a.m., and progressing until 6:00 p.m.

Dr. Burton Throckmorton of the Bangor Theological Seminary delivered an invocation. Dean Kenneth Allen of the College of Arts and Sciences welcomed the group on behalf of the university. Allen defended the university's decision to allow the symposium.

"The role of the university is to educate and enlighten," Allen stated. "There is no more appropriate place for such a meeting than here at the university."

Steve Boule president of the Wilde-Stein Club extended welcome on the club's behalf and stated the objectives of the symposium.

"Our primary goal is to smash the stereotyped image of the homosexual as it exists in the mind



Registration for the symposium began at 9 a.m. Saturday. About 300 people paid the \$5 admission fee, which

covered all activities in the symposium. Registration was handled by John Lawrence, Danny Estes, and John Major.



Various publications and literature were available for purchase at the gay symposium. The material on sale at the

Hilltop Conference Center ranged from newspapers to gay handbooks.