



Witness to Revolution: The Advocate Reports on Gay and Lesbian Politics, 1967 - 1999

Chris Bull

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The Awakening: Pre- and Post-Stonewall Riots (1967-1975)

By the early 1970s the political establishment was beginning to take notice of the fledgling movement. In the August 16, 1972, issue, Rob Cole reported on the attempt by a spokesman for Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern to distance the liberal senator from one of the first unequivocally pro-gay statements from a national candidate. "I hope for the day when we do not need to specify that 'Liberty and Justice for All' includes blacks, Chicanos, American Indians, women, homosexuals, or any other group," McGovern said. "ALL means ALL."

Despite such progress, gay life sometimes resembled a war zone. In the August 1, 1973, edition, the newspaper reported that an arson fire at the Up Stairs, a popular New Orleans gay bar, had killed 32 men. A photo depicted the charred body of a man frozen in place trying to escape the fire through a window. (The arson remains unsolved.) The same issue carried a photo of the Rev. Ray Broshears, a Metropolitan Community Church minister in San Francisco, brandishing a shotgun after announcing the formation of the "Lavender Patrol" to combat "teenage attacks on homosexuals."

The newspaper was not without reports of victories, some of them historic. The January 16, 1974, edition reported, in "Sick No More," that the American Psychiatric Association's board of trustees had voted 13-0 to remove homosexuality from its list of mental illnesses. Psychiatrists had studied the lives of gays and lesbians and found no evidence of pathology. The decision had far-reaching ramifications, effectively placing the scientific establishment on the side of gays and lesbians. Critics, however, noted that the change came only after years of lobbying from gay activists, and they refused to countenance the science underlying the vote.

As the feminist saying went, the personal was political. Four years earlier, the July 21, 1970, issue had carried a report on a medical-journal article by gay rights foe Charles Socarides asserting that homosexuality is a mental illness. Socarides, the article said, believed that homosexuality "derive[s] from a 'faulty sexual identity' caused by a 'pathological family const

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