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*The Case for a Bigger Tent:
Perspectives from Gay Conservatives in America*

ABSTRACT: *There are conservatives of all different stripes, even rainbow ones. This article is a study of gay conservatism in American history from pre-Stonewall activism to the present. It seeks to uncover what gay conservatives believe, who they are, and how they have interacted with broader political and cultural movements in the United States, particularly where they fit in (and stick out) in the rise of an ideologically monolithic Republican Right over the last half-century. The author demonstrates that gay conservatives are an ideologically diverse group, share some similarities with mainstream conservatives, but do have distinctive beliefs, which shows the need for a reworking of scholarly definitions of conservatism in the United States.*

KEYWORDS: *modern history; U.S.; Civil Rights; conservatism; libertarianism; Republican Party; Right and Left; gay conservatives; Log Cabin Republicans (LCR); LGBTQ+*

Introduction

The term “gay conservatism” elicits a wide range of contorted facial expressions, which demonstrates everything that is wrong in this relatively small field of study. I will spare you the cringe of an obligatory but gratuitous pun about gay conservatives needing to “come out of the scholarly closet” or the like and instead remark that gay conservatives are like blemishes on a favorite white shirt: the more you look for them, the more you find. Despite the oft-muted existence of these figures in the history of American conservatism post-coming out, their existence in substantial numbers and in influential posts of the movement is undeniable. Yet the swept-under-the-rug nature of their existence should in no way obviate the studying of these individuals. If anything, it should increase our interest, for the contorted facial expressions belie an assumption that the existence of gay conservatives is a contradiction at worst and a paradox at best. The intersection of two identities that should be mutually exclusive in the eyes of many has recently gained traction in the study of minority conservatives and, to a lesser extent, gay conservatives, as these unexpected crossings are rich soil for deepening our understanding of the social currents that move in the United States.¹

Despite the limited number of gay conservatives, the scholarly work on this group is far too small in volume and scope even for gay conservatives, as their study reveals a trove of complexities and connections that will gain relevance as society changes at a rapid clip. There has yet to be a comprehensive look at queer

¹ For African American conservatism, see Leah Wright Rigueur, *The Loneliness of the Black Republican: Pragmatic Politics and the Pursuit of Power* (Princeton University Press, 2014). For Latino conservatism, see Geraldo L. Cadava, *The Hispanic Republican: The Shaping of an American Political Identity, from Nixon to Trump* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2020); and Benjamin Francis-Fallon, *The Rise of the Latino Vote: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019). Asian American conservatism lacks a monograph of its own, the closest thing to it being Stanford Ph.D. candidate Vivian Yan-Gonzalez’s dissertation, tentatively titled, “A Spectrum Apart: Conservatism in Asian America, 1920-1990.”

conservatism's relatively expansive history – in fact, there is not a single historical work of monograph length on the subject of gay conservatism at all, and most studies of any length are from the fields of Communications and Political Science, and concern themselves only with taking stills of gay conservatism at certain moments in time rather than reflecting on the historical presence of these individuals in politics and culture.² The historical scholarship that does exist is biased heavily toward accounts of the most easily identifiable of gay conservatives in the Log Cabin Republicans (LCR) organization, famous for being the largest conservative organization of its kind. This article ventures to scratch the surface of the broader field of gay conservatism that not only reflects, but even exceeds, the diversity of opinion found in the larger coalition of the Right, but that also vindicates emerging trends in the selection of theoretical frameworks in the historiography of conservatism in the United States.

The emerging trends to which I refer can be found in studies on minority conservatives and in those concerning race and conservatism in the United States. The rules for hunting the “ducks,” as Barry Goldwater used to call swing voters, have changed since the *Brown* U.S. Supreme Court decision (1954) and the Civil Rights movement, which altered the American social and political climate, a fact that many historians either recognize implicitly or argue for explicitly.³ There is plenty of evidence identifying the melting of “massive resistance” proponents into mainstream “colorblind” conservatism, which makes suspect the motives of those who employ such language. The interest in coded appeals and undercurrents of prejudice and hate is prevalent in academic studies on conservatism in the United States, and rightfully so. Yet many historians still focus almost exclusively on “coded, racial appeals” when looking at politics in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, an approach that, in the words of Joseph Crespiño, “overemphasize[s] continuity in Southern politics” and not just Southern politics but politics in general.⁴ Matthew Lassiter minces no words in declaring that “the ‘Southern Strategy’ explanation of the political transformation of the modern South is wrong,” positing a scholarly “overreliance on race-reductionist narratives to explain complex political transformations,” which “downplays the centrality of class ideology in the outlook of suburban voters and

² The only historian to address gay conservatism directly is Clayton Howard; see Clayton Howard, “Gay and Conservative: An Early History of the Log Cabin Republicans,” in *Beyond the Politics of the Closet: Gay Rights and the American State Since the 1970s*, ed. Jonathan Bell (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 141-164.

³ See Wright Rigueur, *Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 118-120, 156, 159, 160; Geoffrey M. Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin: The Downfall of Moderation and the Destruction of the Republican Party, from Eisenhower to the Tea Party* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 188; Cadava, *Hispanic Republican*, 276; and Francis-Fallon, *Rise of the Latino Vote*, 240; all of which recount the use of middle-class values by Republicans to appeal to minority voters.

⁴ Joseph Crespiño, *In Search of Another Country: Mississippi and the Conservative Counterrevolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 6, 7.

ignores the consistent class divides among white southerners evident throughout the Civil Rights era.”⁵

The point is that an approach favoring class, especially during the emergence of what many consider a New Gilded Age, is entirely more appropriate for inspecting gay conservatism than a more traditional paradigm that has a penchant for being engrossed in pointing to smokescreens and the contrails of racism and bigotry in conservatism so that it misses a (purportedly) burgeoning conservative constituency in areas where conservatives were once thought to have no constituency at all.⁶ Middle-class ideals of normalcy and respectability play a central role in gay conservative thought, as they do indeed in any discussion of queer acceptance in society. Most egregiously, the conventional approach often employs bloc categorizations that assume a Manichaeian human being that contains no internal contradictions—a sort of Platonic form of a human that is nowhere to be found in actuality. It is therefore the goal of this article to utilize a more class-based and political-theoretical approach to get a fuller picture of who gay conservatives are and what they stand for and, in the process, challenge longstanding definitions of conservatism as it is understood on an academic and popular level. Hence, this article argues that there are different strands of thought among gay conservatives and presents for dissection gay conservatives’ politically significant understandings of gay history in the United States.

The analysis presented here primarily relies on a series of polemical texts, published between 1989 and 2005, when intellectuals from the queer Left and the gay Right engaged in a “war of ideas” for the soul of the LGBTQ+ community. Authors from the gay Right include Marshall Kirk (psychologist and amateur historian) and Hunter Madsen (marketing specialist), Rich Tafel (former national president of the Log Cabin Republicans), Bruce Bawer (gay rights activist and academic), and Andrew Sullivan (Harvard Political Science Ph.D., journalist, and blogger). The queer Left is represented by Richard Goldstein (journalist and editor) and Paul Robinson (Stanford Professor of Humanities Emeritus). To show the continuous historical presence of gay conservatives, this article also uses archival sources from the late 1960s to the mid-2010s, ending around the seminal *Obergefell* (2015) and *Masterpiece Cakeshop* (2018) U.S. Supreme Court decisions.

I. The Different Strands of Gay Conservatism

Gay conservatives are an incredibly amorphous group of people, if they constitute a group at all. A more appropriate description is that they are a category of individuals, and a very broad category at that. First and foremost, members of this category are all *gay* conservatives, not *queer* conservatives—gay conservatives have a visceral reaction to the “queer” label that causes them to eschew the term

⁵ Matthew D. Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 4, 5.

⁶ Cadava, *Hispanic Republican*, xii, conveys the assumption, shared by many, that minority groups and Hispanics in particular “will help to end the Republican Party.”

with vigor.⁷ Though Bruce Bawer holds positions unique to his strand of gay conservatism, his statements on the label “queer” stand for gay conservatives collectively when he says that the term “queer” is “an odd and problematic word, often less indicative of sexual orientation than of ideology” that describes a “socially marginal rebel, defined primarily by his or her sexuality, who is perpetually and intrinsically at odds with the political and cultural establishment.”⁸ The implication of this is that gay conservatives do *not* see their sexual identity as primary to their existence, an opinion that holds true across the different strands and, in conjunction with clinging to traditional values, is what sets gay conservatives apart from the broader Left-leaning queer community.

The categories of gay conservatives have some overlap with categories identified by historians of the twentieth-century conservative movement in the United States. Hence, they inevitably come with the same complex web of relations that make gay conservatives just as much of a loose coalition as the broader conservative movement, beginning with gay conservatism’s strong libertarian bent. Studying libertarianism in the context of gay conservatism brings to the fore the very independent nature of libertarianism and two very distinct features: first, gay libertarians want recognition for gay rights, but simultaneously refuse to support public accommodations legislation; and second, during their early days in the 1970s, libertarians did not see themselves linked to conservatism at all. Thus, gay libertarians have a convoluted, outsider relationship with the rest of the Right, fittingly mirrored by Ayn Rand’s complicated relationship with the Right.⁹ Libertarians and the Libertarian Party are defined by an uncompromising, all-important dedication to freedom, but in a way that holds sacred the rights of the individual and the individual’s agency, as opposed to the goal of deconstruction by the semantically similar *Gay Liberation Front*.¹⁰ Their unilateral commitment to freedom has historically caused some wariness of libertarians by the traditional Right because this commitment has led libertarians to endorse positions that are

⁷ Therefore, this article uses the term “gay” instead of “queer,” for similar reasons that Cadava, *Hispanic Republican*, uses the politically incorrect term “Hispanic” instead of “Latinx,” because—in Cadava’s case—the former is the label preferred by the majority of the respective demographic (*ibid.*, ix) and because the term “Latinx”—or in the case of this article “queer”—“implies a particular political identity” (*ibid.*, x). This is not to say that the subjects of study in this group are all specifically gay; they may also be transgender, lesbian, bisexual, etc., though their demographics will be addressed shortly. “Gay” or “homosexual” will also be used at various points when referring to queer history to avoid anachronism.

⁸ Bruce Bawer, *Beyond Queer: Challenging Gay Left Orthodoxy* (New York: Free Press, 1996), ix.

⁹ Jennifer Burns, *Goddess of the Market: Ayn Rand and the American Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁰ Grant Walsh-Haines, “Issue Framing and Identity Politics in the Log Cabin Republicans” (Ph.D. diss., Northern Arizona University, 2018), 42, which addresses queer theory’s goal to radically transform understandings of sex and gender. Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument About Homosexuality* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 57, describes liberationists’ greatest end as to “be free of all social constructs.”

not in line with those who have held the reins of power in the Right's resurgence, namely, evangelical Christians.¹¹

In the case of gay libertarians, this is evidenced by their unencumbered participation in Libertarian Party affairs since the first days of this organization in the 1970s. The party platforms of the 1970s often addressed the issue of sexual relations directly, offering a stance that promised not to police the bedroom. As early as 1976, Alyn W. Hess, secretary of the local Libertarian Party chapter in Milwaukee and a founder of the Gay People's Union, used his influence in the queer community to draft letters expressing his frustration with mainstream candidates Ford and Carter, acclaiming the works of Rand, and outlining how he had overcome his doubts whether the Libertarian Party "was the best way for gay people and truly liberal people to go."¹² Hess explains why he was casting his vote for Libertarian Party candidate Roger MacBride, citing the party and MacBride's intention "to repeal ALL the victimless crime laws, which of course includes the oppressive anti-gay sex laws. In fact, they [i.e., the Libertarians] have published a pamphlet[t] publicly stating their pro-gay views."¹³

The Hess correspondence reveals little in the way of LGBTQ+ interest in economic thought, save for a section conjecturing that the IRS was targeting homosexuals and a few lines about abolishing the Federal Reserve, but it does reveal a strong affinity for privileging *social* freedoms over economic concerns. This explains why someone like Hess, who was expressing concerns over the environment and "the flagrant discrimination [which had been] perpetrated against talented women, blacks, Chinese and gay people," and later in life appeared to associate himself with liberal, Democratic Party politics, would be attracted to libertarianism at some point in his life.¹⁴ Judging by his notes from the Wisconsin State Libertarian Convention in April 1977 (on what "marginal utility

¹¹ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*, documents in great detail the fall of moderate Republicans, while Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religions, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011), describes the rise of the religious Right, especially in southern California.

¹² Alyn W. Hess, "A Personal Message from Alyn Hess," Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections.

¹³ Alyn W. Hess, "A Personal Message from Alyn Hess," and "Cover Letter to Gay Pride," Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections.

¹⁴ Alyn W. Hess, "Questions I Wanted to Ask MacBride," Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections; and Eldon Murray, "Milwaukee Activist Alyn Hess Dies of AIDS Complications," *The Wisconsin Light*, April 19, 1989, 1, [online](#), accessed June 16, 2022. See also Sue Burke, "Milwaukee Gays Become Politically Active in 1970's," *The Wisconsin Light*, February 8, 1989, 9, [online](#), accessed June 16, 2022. Hess also voices his displeasure with MacBride's showing in Milwaukee in "CRITIQUE of Roger MacBride in Milwaukee," Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections, criticizing MacBride's failure to meet with the local Libertarian chapter. There may be a correlation with social libertarians leaving for the Democratic Party when neoliberal economics reached its zenith and it became more difficult to separate social and economic libertarianism.

theory” and “Austrian economics” portended for the country), Hess was still relatively new to the neoliberal economics that would become the most recognizable feature of libertarianism in the later twentieth century.¹⁵

The pamphlet referenced by Hess in his draft of a letter to acquaintances in the queer community is most likely Ralph Raico’s “Gay Rights; A Libertarian Approach,” written in 1975 and published in 1976. Like Hess’s correspondence, it has little to say about the economic side of the libertarian message, but instead offers a defense of sexual rights and a pitch for the Libertarian Party, criticizing the “oddly selective” freedoms espoused by the Right and picking apart the “timid” efforts toward equality by liberals, though Raico does reserve some praise for Democrats such as Sargent Shriver for their stance on the issue of gay rights, further muddling the libertarians’ place on the political spectrum in their early years.¹⁶ Indeed, the newsletter of the Libertarians for Gay and Lesbian Concerns shows a concerted effort by gay libertarians *not* to be associated with the Right,¹⁷ expressing a more staunchly libertarian viewpoint than Hess’s. However, Raico’s text indicates that the Libertarian Party, while supporting rights for gays, also opposes “infringements on the rights of homophobic persons,” choosing instead to direct the reader’s attention to “the mortal enemy of homosexuals [which is] the state.”¹⁸ This view, while not pragmatic and highly idealistic, is in keeping with the singularly focused ideology of libertarianism in its purest sense, showing Raico’s unwavering commitment to individual rights above all else.

Clearly, less ideological libertarians like Hess saw more appeal in the message for gay rights than in the more nuanced, yet more ideological view expressed by Raico, but this was to be expected given Raico’s higher position in the national Libertarian Party. Raico, along with fellow gay libertarian Justin Raimondo, were regular contributors to the *Libertarian Review*, demonstrating their staunch libertarian identity and acceptance in the party by their articles on government overreach in criminalizing marijuana, the libertarian movement in Italy, and libertarian political philosophy.¹⁹ These early libertarians were more concerned

¹⁵ Alyn W. Hess, “Libertarian State Convention,” Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections.

¹⁶ Ralph Raico, “Gay Rights: A Libertarian Approach,” January 1, 1975, [online](#), accessed June 16, 2022, according to which “[t]his essay originally appeared in a 1976 presidential campaign pamphlet published by the Libertarian Party.”

¹⁷ George Meyer, “Gay Libertarians Hit Anti-Discrimination Laws,” *Libertarians for Gay and Lesbian Concerns Newsletter*, no. 1 (September/October 1983): 1, Alternative Press Collection, University of Connecticut Archives and Special Collections. Alyn Hess also devotes time to differentiating libertarians from Ronald Reagan: “A Personal Message from Alyn Hess,” and “Libertarian State Convention,” Papers of Alyn W. Hess, Box 1, University of Virginia Library Special Collections.

¹⁸ Raico, “Gay Rights.” This is followed, in true libertarian fashion by a proposition to abolish the FBI and CIA to end the pamphlet.

¹⁹ *The Libertarian Review*, 7, no. 4 (May 1978): 11-13, 25, 28.

with social libertarianism than the neoliberal economics and business ties for which today's libertarians are famous, perhaps because economic freedoms are more compatible with the conservative coalition than social freedoms. The rise of the Chicago school of economics with the likes of Milton Friedman and James Buchanan has strengthened libertarianism's economic theory and increased its appeal to the mainstream but has not deterred continuing gay libertarian participation and acceptance in libertarian circles, and the party's stance remains relatively unchanged from what Raico had expressed in the mid-1970s.²⁰ For instance, shortly after *Obergefell*, an article published in *Reason* magazine, a libertarian publication, expressed that, "[a]s a gay libertarian, I support the right of a baker to decline to produce a wedding cake for a same-sex couple, but don't expect me to buy so much as a cookie at their shop," referencing the then pending *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case in which the courts were asked to rule on a Christian baker who had refused to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple.²¹

Another strand of gay conservatives, here dubbed institutional conservatives, are those whose beliefs are closer to that of the mainline Republican Party and who choose, and have always chosen, to operate within its boundaries. Because of their organizational structure and institutional history, this group has received the most scholarly attention of any of the strands discussed here, which is why the most information is available about them. Demographic studies on these institutional conservatives have been attempted, revealing them to be of the same stock as the stereotypical Right-wing voter: white, mostly male, middle-aged, religious, and middle-class or higher.²² They are represented most conspicuously by the Log Cabin Republicans, the largest national organization for LGBTQ+ conservatives.

²⁰ Nancy MacLean, *Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right's Stealth Plan for America* (New York: Viking, 2017); Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012). Maclean mostly tracks the story of Buchanan and his ties with the Kochs, while Jones is more concerned with the theoretical lineage of neoliberal economics from Hayek down to Friedman and Buchanan.

²¹ Scott Shackford, "A Libertarian-Gay Divorce?" *Reason* 47, no. 6 (November 2015): 38-44, here 44.

²² Kenneth W. Cimino, *Gay Conservatives: Group Consciousness and Assimilation* (New York: Harrington Park Press, 2007). Cimino estimates that, out of 118 who answered his survey, 92% of Republican queers are white (*ibid.*, 95, 97); they are much more likely to be married, namely, 35.6% compared to 22.1% for the broader LGBTQ+ population (*ibid.*, 99); and they are more likely to be religious, namely, 84% compared to 75% for liberal queers (*ibid.*, 101). The oft-cited study by Mary F. Rogers and Phillip B. Lott, "Backlash, the Matrix of Domination, and Log Cabin Republicans," *The Sociological Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (1997): 497-512, which assembles a few different demographic sources from surveys to LCR ("Log Cabin Republican") meeting minutes, also conjectures that Log Cabin Republicans are overwhelmingly white, male, and upper-middle class. However, Michael S. Chouinard, "He Leans to the Right: The Personal and Political Identities of Gay Republicans" (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2015), interviewed several persons (only one of whom was a member of the LCR) and found that, though they were mostly white, they came "from a diverse array of political backgrounds, social classes, geographic locations, and generations" (*ibid.*, 90). See also Courtney Sanders Muse, "Elephant in the Room: Organizational

A solid percentage of these institutional conservatives seems to be associated with the conservative movement that swept the United States during the second half of the twentieth century, opposed for example, to feminism, abortion, and some Civil Rights legislation²³—a position shared, most famously, by the late Marvin Liebman, a close associate of William F. Buckley Jr. Interestingly enough, Liebman did not consider himself part of the far-Right, disparaging these groups as having “little in common with the conservative philosophy that is primarily based on the sanctity and power of the individual over the state,” despite the fact that he supported Barry Goldwater.²⁴ To give a better understanding of where Liebman stood, he was opposed to both the radical John Birch Society and former governor of New York Nelson Rockefeller, a moderate.²⁵ This is probably the furthest to the right on the political spectrum that one will find gay conservatives, for many seek to disassociate themselves with the conservative movement of the twentieth century and instead find themselves among the moderates who were purged out of positions of power in the Republican Party between 1970 and 2000.²⁶

These moderates are characterized by their support for a “two-party strategy” for the LGBTQ+ community, similar to that practiced by racial minority groups in the Republican Party. This strategy claims to foster competition for votes between parties to keep them accountable for the interests of minority groups.²⁷ To former Log Cabin Republicans president Rich Tafel, the pursuit of this strategy stems from a feeling of being “taken for granted by Democrats.” In his autobiography, Tafel repeatedly points out that the Democrats’ pre-election promises for reform were consistently pushed aside once an election was over.²⁸ However, the use of this strategy can also stem from feeling a responsibility to work for gay rights from within Republican ranks. In this sense, the two-party strategy is exemplified in the following statement by gay Republican representative Steve Gunderson:

I was far more interested in working for gay rights from within the system than I was in making myself a Republican poster boy for the gay community [...]. It seemed to me that the gay

Framing and Personal and Collective Identity Conflict Resolution among Log Cabin Republicans” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 2008), 147.

²³ Howard, “Gay and Conservative,” 159-161.

²⁴ Marvin Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative: An Autobiography* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1992), 12.

²⁵ Liebman, *Coming Out Conservative*, 165.

²⁶ Kabaservice, *Rule and Ruin*. Kabaservice offers a detailed account of the long fall of moderates from power after the Eisenhower administration.

²⁷ Wright Rigueur, *Loneliness of the Black Republican*, 12-13.

²⁸ Richard Tafel, *Party Crasher: A Gay Republican Challenges Politics as Usual* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 22-23, 73, 79-81; *ibid.*, 99: “As long as Democratic leaders can point to evil Republicans outside the gates, gays are less likely to make any demands of their protectors;” Howard, “Gay and Conservative,” 148-150, 155.

community was far better served by me, a member who was sensitive to gay issues, even if I felt obliged to remain quiet about my sexual orientation to preserve my electability.²⁹

Moderate and more staunch gay conservatives who make their home in the Republican Party have also been identified as “overwhelmingly libertarian” by Rich Tafel, though Michael Chouinard’s assessment that the gay conservative often “identifies as a fiscal conservative, but is socially more liberal,” might be a better fit than the single-minded devotion of libertarians to individual freedoms.³⁰ This should be unsurprising, given that many gay Republicans view the religious Right and their traditional values as mortal enemies, seeing their alternative in libertarian or moderate conservatism as “a less constrictive form of Republicanism” and “a more open-minded view, particularly on social issues.”³¹

The social issues that preoccupy gay conservatives center primarily around the extension of institutional protections to the LGBTQ+ community while, like the libertarians, upholding a standard of “no special rights.”³² The Log Cabin Republicans gained national acclaim for their support of gay marriage, filing an *amicus* brief in *Obergefell* and bringing a lawsuit against “don’t ask, don’t tell” policies in the U.S. military. Fighting to prevent discriminatory laws in various legislation packages brings fierce, often personal conflict with the religious Right.³³ Log Cabin Republicans and other mainstream gay conservatives combat this in two major ways: first, by putting the onus on the religious Right: “by declaring the radical Right as the source of party divisiveness, the LCR can then emphasize its more inclusive and moderate platforms;” and second, by arguing that “the Religious Right rejects multiple positions on controversial issues that are historically conservative,” hence claiming the conservative legacy not of the late twentieth century but of the nineteenth century.³⁴ Even so, marriage equality and equal treatment in the military are issues primarily advocated for *by the gay Right*,

²⁹ Steve Gunderson and Robert Morris, *House and Home* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 133.

³⁰ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 49; Chouinard, “He Leans to the Right,” 89.

³¹ See David Brooks Alexander, “Redefining What It Means to Be a Republican: A Rhetorical Analysis of Same-Sex Marriage” (M.A. thesis, Clemson University, 2007), 19, for the LCRs’ fight against the Family Research Council; Chouinard, “He Leans to the Right,” 94.

³² Raico, “Gay Rights.”

³³ In a 1994 debate over the Elementary and Secondary Education Act on the House floor, Rep. Bob Dornan (R-CA) of the more conservative, religious Right outed gay conservative and deputy whip for the Republican Party Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-WI): Gunderson and Morris, *House and Home*, 1-13; Chris Bull, “The Out House: Congressional Debate over an Education Bill Gets Personal and Nasty,” *The Advocate*, May 3, 1994.

³⁴ Muse, “Elephant in the Room,” 28; Megan R. Loden, “The Rhetorical Elephant in the Room: How Three Political Action Committees are Strategically [Re]Defining the U.S. Republican Party,” (M.A. thesis, California State University, Long Beach, 2010), 78-79, relates the origins of the “log cabin” term, associating it with the “log cabin” president, Abraham Lincoln; David Lampo, *A Fundamental Freedom: Why Republicans, Conservatives, and Libertarians Should Support Gay Rights* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 195, also paints the religious Right as the enemy.

not the queer Left, because of what these two groups signify.³⁵ It is no coincidence that of all the queer or LGBTQ+ organizations in the United States, many of whom are more influential than the Log Cabin Republicans, the LCR were the ones who brought a suit against discrimination in the U.S. military. The political values of the Right and the Left are reflected in the issues they choose to pursue.

There is one more major category of gay conservatives that needs to be addressed here — one that is perhaps the most interesting of them all, because their credibility as conservatives is debatable. The reason these individuals stay under the penumbra of the conservative label is because the concept of conservatism in the United States has far too long been far too attached to a strictly political meaning. As Geraldo Cadava has put it in *The Hispanic Republican*, “there are differences between being conservative and being a Republican,” an epiphany that is a non-negotiable prerequisite for the study of gay conservatism because of the labyrinth of considerations that go into navigating an identity that has, for various reasons, slipped through the cracks of mundane social boxes.³⁶ The individuals of the group in question here are defined by their centrist or liberal identity; their queer sexuality or non-binary gender identity; and their status and belief system that marks them as “sexual conservatives” to the LGBTQ+ community.

The greatest difficulty in defining this group is that, when asked on a survey if they are conservative or Republican, they will check the box that says “no.” Hence, the demographic studies listed above that concern more mainline gay conservatives do not apply here, nor can we be sure how many of these conservatives there are. Whatever their numbers or sociological traits may be, many of their arguments echo those described for libertarian and mainstream conservatives, the first and most important of which is their penchant for assimilationism. The assimilationist approach is widely recognized as an approach to politics of the LGBTQ+ community that chooses to seek inclusion in society rather than trying to change society and deconstruct its norms. These conservatives are very focused on maintaining an image of what Nyan Shah calls “respectable domesticity:” living in accordance with expected social norms.³⁷ One need look no further than the aptly titled, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society*, by Bruce Bawer to see what it is that these gay conservatives seek. Bawer and others of this stripe find the “everything I do is gay” attitude repugnant and argue that LGBTQ+ publications and media present a “narrow, sex-obsessed

³⁵ According to Paul Robinson, *Queer Wars: The New Gay Right and Its Critics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 81, “many gay radicals [...] agree that the ban is unjust, but they hate the idea of gays being corrupted by the military’s ugly male chauvinism and its fondness for foreign adventure;” Robinson also addresses this *ibid.*, 7. Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 63-64, makes the same observation concerning the political divide over support for these issues.

³⁶ Cadava, *Hispanic Republican*, xix; Loden, “Rhetorical Elephant,” 4-5, also addresses this difference.

³⁷ Nayan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco’s Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

image of gay life” with “little resemblance to [...] the lives of the vast majority of gay Americans.”³⁸ This image, Bawer continues, is “defined by a small but highly visible minority of the gay population” whom Kirk and Madsen in *After the Ball* identify as the gay leadership, the perpetrators of writing the “Fairy Tale of Gay Life.”³⁹ Mainline conservatives and sexual conservatives agree on this observation; according to Tafel,

[t]he gay establishment have tried to convince gay people that there is a “gay” way to act, dress, eat, converse, walk, socialize, shop, a gay place to live, and even a gay way to vote. Gays in fact share only two fundamental qualities—a sexual attraction to and love of people of the same sex, and an awareness of the societal rejection that results.⁴⁰

To this idea of a uniquely gay subculture, Bawer responds that “there is no one ‘gay lifestyle’ any more than there is a single monolithic heterosexual lifestyle,” though the myth of this has resulted in a retreat to a “gay ghetto,” because, as Kirk and Madsen put it, this elite “would rather live in a ghetto of gay orthodoxy” than live in a pluralistic society.⁴¹ Indeed, a hallmark of gay conservatives of any stripe is their insistence that “most gays live in the mainstream” and “have appropriately moderate political views,” in contrast with “the leadership and intellectuals [who] remain stuck in their revolutionary infantilism.”⁴²

The sexual conservatives have many prescriptive remarks about the behavior of the LGBTQ+ community in conjunction with their assimilationist approach. In a long diatribe, Kirk and Madsen enumerate the issues that have arisen as a result of the “gay press” condoning all behaviors, however questionable, that are done in the name of sexual freedom or the freedom of the LGBTQ+ community. They accuse this small but vocal elite minority of pushing an unsustainable, glorified, “fast-lane” lifestyle; of encouraging misbehavior in gay bars that has built a hierarchy of youth and beauty and a purely physical approach to romance among LGBTQ+ individuals; and, most scathingly, of enabling “a pathological degree of self-absorption” creating a generation filled with a type of man who “places his own desire to continue to have orgasms ahead of his partner’s desire to continue to live.”⁴³ While some, like Bawer, and certainly mainline conservatives like Tafel, would advocate for the type of relationships that are ubiquitous among heterosexual couples in the institution of marriage, this is not always the case

³⁸ Bruce Bawer, *A Place at the Table: The Gay Individual in American Society* (New York: Poseidon Press, 1993), 19, 153; Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989), 351, reluctantly accept Bawer’s point with regard to sex-obsession.

³⁹ Bawer, *Place at the Table*, 19; Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 362.

⁴⁰ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 29.

⁴¹ Bawer, *Place at the Table*, 33; Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 352.

⁴² Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 17; Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 12.

⁴³ Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 293, 303, 307, 296, 299. The last quotation above is a reference to the AIDS epidemic that swept through the LGBTQ+ community in the later twentieth century.

among the sexual conservatives. Though Kirk and Madsen advocate for changing behaviors in their community, they “challenge [...] those straight Americans who, arrogating themselves the right to define the word ‘family,’ have declared unfit and invalid any social unit other than that comprising one heterosexual father, one heterosexual mother, and 2.3 protoheterosexual children.”⁴⁴

While gay libertarians take a hands-off approach to gender roles and gay mainstream conservatives rarely address them at all, sexual conservatives spend a great deal of time stressing the importance of masculinity, especially in traditional gender roles.⁴⁵ In the type of polemical texts mentioned above, both Robinson and Goldstein associate gay conservatism with brash macho, which Goldstein reads as a part of the “crisis of masculinity” being experienced in the United States, a wave of insecurity “rising among men as their prestige wanes.”⁴⁶ From Goldstein’s perspective, “[m]asculism is what holds the conservative movement together. It makes brothers of fundamentalists and libertarians despite their deep differences,” and he may well be correct. On the religious Right, this crisis has simultaneously seen the rise of titles like *Raising Men, Not Boys*, which lament “the moral confusion that surrounds any discussion of gender these days,” attempting to consciously inculcate traditional gender roles in children in the face of the liberationist challenge.⁴⁷ Kirk and Madsen go to great lengths to preserve these roles, arguing that “men and women really are physiologically and psychologically different, in ways bearing cogently on their differing approaches to affairs of the heart and body,” suggesting that this is a reason for the brevity of same-sex relationships; and Sullivan adds to this, remarking that “the lesbian experience is somewhat different from the homosexual male experience” because “it is far more rooted in moral and political choice than in ineradicable emotional or sexual orientation,” and that “women can be less defensive about emotions and sexuality than boys and men.”⁴⁸

II. *The Gay Conservative Version of Gay History*

One thing that all the strands of gay conservatives agree upon is a particular version of gay history—one that is fundamental in understanding what gay conservatism is. But first, it is imperative to understand why their version of history is unique by apposing it to the widely existing narrative of our times. The

⁴⁴ Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 371.

⁴⁵ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 3.

⁴⁶ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 94; Richard Goldstein, *The Attack Queers: Liberal Society and the Gay Right* (London Verso, 2002), 66.

⁴⁷ Goldstein, *Attack Queers*, 75; Mike Fabarez, *Raising Men, Not Boys: Shepherding Your Sons to Be Men of God* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2017), 10 (Fabarez, of the New Calvinist tradition, is head pastor of Compass Bible Church in Aliso Viejo, California); Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 2, observes that “gay conservatives seek to rescue homosexuality from its association with gender deviance—with effeminate men and mannish women.”

⁴⁸ Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 318-319; Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 16-17.

generally accepted narrative among most academics and especially intellectuals on the queer Left is the insistence that “the gay movement began on the Left” and was “aligned closely with liberal ideologies and broad-based efforts to achieve social equality.”⁴⁹ Grant Walsh-Haines suggests that the Mattachine Society, a forerunner to the gay liberation movement, had “Marxist roots” and a broader anti-discrimination platform from the very start.⁵⁰ In this widely accepted version of events, the spark of the Gay Liberation Front and the movement for LGBTQ+ rights began with the Stonewall riots in 1969, when a police raid on a gay bar marked the beginning of Pride parades and the ascension of queer theory.⁵¹ The assumption is then that the movement remained in solidarity until the formation of the Log Cabin Republicans in response to the Briggs Initiative (Prop. 6) in California in 1978, which sought to prevent any LGBTQ+ individuals from holding a K-12 teaching post in the state.⁵²

Conservatism among LGBTQ+ individuals, it has been posited, reached its zenith in the 1990s when, as Goldstein maintains, “right-wing rump movements arose in every minority community, [and] a group of gay writers emerged to join” them.⁵³ At this time, claims Goldstein, sexual conservatives appeared regularly on mainstream media outlets and had a “media blackout” on “queer Leftists,” and that this “alliance between the gay Right and liberal society [was] part of a broader backlash against the liberation movements of the past thirty years.”⁵⁴ Writing only a few years after Goldstein, Robinson muses that “gay conservatism should be thought of as a luxury [...] because gays are now so firmly established in the American mainstream, they no longer need to maintain the united front of earlier times,”⁵⁵ recapitulating the trend in LGBTQ+ history as it is widely narrated. In short, the movement for gay rights began on the Left and remained in solidarity until, in the last few decades of the twentieth century, gay conservatives “seceded” from this unified community and brought forth a heretical philosophy.⁵⁶

While the narrative of the Left and of some academics sees a liberationist movement being usurped in the 1990s, the Right sees the parallel existence of a

⁴⁹ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 1; Walsh-Haines, “Issue Framing and Identity Politics,” 1. Robinson is less sure that the queer left is expected to support other causes of social justice, but the majority of academics and others of the queer intelligentsia do see a connection between the different constituencies that make up the Left; see Angela D. Dillard, *Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner Now? Multicultural Conservatism in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 141.

⁵⁰ Walsh-Haines, “Issue Framing and Identity Politics,” 2; Goldstein, *Attack Queers*, 22, agrees.

⁵¹ Walsh-Haines, “Issue Framing and Identity Politics,” 41-42.

⁵² Walsh-Haines, “Issue Framing and Identity Politics,” 5-7.

⁵³ Goldstein, *Attack Queers*, x.

⁵⁴ Goldstein, *Attack Queers*, x, 10.

⁵⁵ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 5.

⁵⁶ Goldstein, *Attack Queers*, xi: gay conservatism is “a highly articulate attempt to secede from” the LGBTQ+ community.

“decidedly unpolitical” movement since the mid-twentieth century, a difference perhaps best summarized from a gay conservative’s perspective by Bruce Bawer:⁵⁷

The moderate gay-rights movement is, quite simply, about gay rights. By contrast, gay-Left leaders apparently view those rights as only one plank of a comprehensive socialist platform that all gays are inherently obliged to support.⁵⁸

This narrative pushed by gay conservatives begins at the very roots of the movement for LGBTQ+ rights. Bawer, in keeping with the conservative attempt to detach gay liberation from its place as the true heir of the LGBTQ+ movement, opines that, before there was gay pride and gay liberation, there were “a few small groups of men in business suits and women in dresses [who] staged sober, orderly marches at which they carried signs that announced their homosexuality and that respectfully demanded an end to anti-homosexual prejudice.”⁵⁹ The heavily gendered image presented by Bawer is no coincidence, as it is part of his agenda to reinforce gender norms from within LGBTQ+ ranks. Rich Tafel joins Bawer in recognizing earlier activism, pointing to libertarian Dorr Legg’s 1958 writings in *ONE* magazine, claiming Legg made “one of the earliest moral arguments that closeted behavior is immoral and ultimately unhealthy,” though a critique of this reference might be that these references do not reveal the kind of organized fronts which emerged in the post-Stonewall years.⁶⁰

The response to this critique is that gay liberation’s champions were usurping an already-extant gay establishment.⁶¹ Take the following example:

[Donna Minkowitz of *The Advocate* is] using the cause of gay rights to advance her own program, which would seem to have little to do with furthering understanding and acceptance of homosexuality as it really exists in America and everything to do with promoting radical-Left political ideas.⁶²

However, claims like this are not new. As early as the 1960s, Foster Gunnison Jr., founder of a gay libertarian organization, the Institute for Social Ethics in New York, shared concerns with his group about the new Gay Liberation Front, which he saw as more interested in promoting Leftist political ideologies than supporting the purely gay-rights agenda of his organization and others.⁶³

Furthermore, in a fascinating turn of events, there have recently been some rumblings in academic circles that investigate pre-Stonewall LGBTQ+ activism and that date serious activism’s beginnings on behalf of this community earlier in

⁵⁷ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 32.

⁵⁸ Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 17.

⁵⁹ Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 9.

⁶⁰ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 50-51.

⁶¹ Bawer, *Place at the Table*, 168.

⁶² Bawer, *Place at the Table*, 177-179; this sentiment is echoed in Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 8.

⁶³ “Special Report to the Institute of Social Ethics,” November 10, 1969, Institute for Social Ethics Archive, Foster Gunnison, Jr. Papers, University of Connecticut Archives and Special Collections.

the twentieth century. As Armstrong and Cage posit, “timing mattered [...]. Stonewall activists were the first to claim to be the first” activists in a “construction” of Stonewall as the “spark” of the movement; the “Stonewall story,” they claim, “is thus better viewed as an *achievement* of gay liberation rather than as a literal account of its origins.”⁶⁴ It would be highly ironic if the heavily politicized version of history that gay conservatives present eventually became better aligned with scholarly understandings of LGBTQ+ history than that of the queer Left, but only time will tell.

Nevertheless, undermining Stonewall as the beginning of LGBTQ+ history continues as a concerted effort. The Log Cabin Republicans have chosen to take the Black Cat Tavern protests in 1967 Los Angeles as the beginning of this movement.⁶⁵ In lockstep, Tafel’s version of Stonewall is that “the bar was in violation of many health codes;” that “Hepatitis spread quickly through the patrons of the bar;” that the bar was a Mafia front without a liquor license; and that “it isn’t clear whether this particular raid was a result of police not being paid off or another in a cycle of police raids to make Mayor John Lindsay look good in the upcoming election.”⁶⁶ Tafel concludes this fact-finding mission of ulterior motives by stating that “what really happened at Stonewall is less important than the mythology liberationist writers were able to create.”⁶⁷ Tafel’s statement indicates precisely why gay conservatives work so hard to build an alternative vision of gay history in the United States. By discrediting the events at Stonewall, they hope to delegitimize gay liberation’s founding; and by asserting that “queer ideology is essentially a legacy of the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York,” Bawer hopes to isolate Stonewall’s legacy as merely one strand of LGBTQ+ thought that emerged in the twentieth century.⁶⁸

In tandem with this telling of LGBTQ+ activism’s early history, gay conservatives then accuse the LGBTQ+ elite of being stuck in its “revolutionary infantilism.”⁶⁹ Kirk and Madsen revile LGBTQ+ leadership as “psychologically frozen in a bygone era,” too focused on issues of the past, with Bawer calling for a “move beyond the Stonewall sensibility.”⁷⁰ Mixed with this is criticism of liberationist philosophy as purely deconstructionist—having no “broader, deeper

⁶⁴ Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, “Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth,” *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (2006): 724-751, here 725 (emphasis/italics original).

⁶⁵ Log Cabin Republicans of Orange County, “The History of Log Cabin Republicans of Orange County,” *Facebook*, March 2, 2021, [online](#), accessed June 16, 2022.

⁶⁶ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 39.

⁶⁷ Tafel, *Party Crasher*, 39.

⁶⁸ Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, ix-x.

⁶⁹ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 12.

⁷⁰ Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 349; Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 6.

argument about the ends of society as a whole.”⁷¹ On top of this, while queer liberals see gay conservatism as rising in the 1990s, gay conservatives in turn insist that the 1990s saw the strengthening of a “gay political fascism” from the queer intelligentsia, who “reject all criticism of the community itself [...], using exactly the same tactics of oppression employed by our straight oppressors.”⁷² This is the most salient and most common complaint across the gay Right, who despise “those instruments of power which require no broader conversation” supposedly used by the queer elite, especially the “focus on outing, on speech codes, on punitive measures against opponents on campuses, and on the enforcement of new forms of language, by censorship and intimidation.”⁷³ Using the language of conservatives outside the gay conservative realm, Bawer offers the example of Stephen H. Miller, former chair of the media committee at the New York chapter of the Gay and Lesbian Alliance against Defamation; in this anecdote, Bawer claims Miller was hounded by Left-leaning members of the organization as part of an agenda he titles, “Gay White Males: [Political Correctness’s] Unseen Target.”⁷⁴ According to Bawer, this was a powerful trend, for “in the early ‘90’s [sic], old-guard gay activists began to be supplanted by younger PC types,” among whom the culprits counted “militant lesbian feminists.”⁷⁵

In typical fashion, both the Right and the Left see the other’s power rising at the same time, indicating either false impressions crafted by fear or political strategy, or possibly a rise in partisanship in the LGBTQ+ community. Bawer adds to these problems by questioning queer studies as an emerging academic discipline. While not opposed to the idea of queer studies itself and the promise, he says, it holds for younger gays who have not grown up in supportive environments, Bawer offers these thoughts on the field: “In practice, it is less a traditional field of objective inquiry than a collective attempt to use the methods of contemporary cultural theory to advance the gay subculture’s view of homosexuality.”⁷⁶ Bawer also complains that “anything a gay scholar has ever done or thought is relevant in a work of Gay Studies scholarship precisely because he is gay: if it happened to him it is by definition a Gay Idea, a Gay Experience, a piece of Gay Testimony to be entered into the Gay Book of Life.”⁷⁷

⁷¹ Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 90.

⁷² Kirk and Madsen, *After the Ball*, 348, 350.

⁷³ Sullivan, *Virtually Normal*, 93; Gunderson and Morris, *House and Home*, 131-134, express similar feelings in recounting personal experiences with such tactics by ACT UP (“AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power”) during Gunderson’s time in office.

⁷⁴ Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 24-26.

⁷⁵ Bawer, *Beyond Queer*, 25. “PC” stands for “political correctness.”

⁷⁶ Bawer, *Place at the Table*, 209-210.

⁷⁷ Bawer, *A Place at the Table*, 212.

Conclusion: On the Silent Majority and Definitions of Conservatism

An article published in the wake of the 2020 election by a transgender conservative woman and a gay neoconservative who voted for Joe Biden comments on the increase in LGBTQ+ support for Donald Trump between 2016 and 2020, stating that “a sizeable number of LGBTQ voters apparently feel safe and liberated enough to vote much like the rest of the country, which is something to applaud.”⁷⁸ It confirms a conjecture made by Clayton Howard in his piece on the Log Cabin Republicans that, “if the GOP sheds its most homophobic policies, a significant share of gay and lesbian voters would avidly support Republican candidates.”⁷⁹ Yet there has been no explosion of LGBTQ+ participation in Republican politics – no sudden, monumental shift in the political landscape of the United States. Rather, Richard Nixon’s silent majority has struck again, for while most LGBTQ+ individuals are most likely not closet Republicans, as some gay conservatives might have us believe, they might not be “natural Democrats” either.⁸⁰

It would seem imprudent to suggest that a majority of LGBTQ+ individuals will begin to vote Republican, as the Trump administration’s actions toward transgender individuals in the military suggest a continuing affinity between the Republican Party and limitations on LGBTQ+ rights. But in a post-*Obergefell* age some LGBTQ+ individuals may feel they have more options, especially as younger Republicans see LGBTQ+ identity as less salient of an issue.⁸¹ Should these hypotheses prove correct, other identities held by LGBTQ+ individuals, previously dominated by concerns over sexual rights, may surface in their voting patterns—for, as Paul Robinson opines, “now that homosexuality is widely tolerated, gays no longer have to be concerned about voting their sexual interests and can vote their pocketbooks instead.”⁸² Voting by “pocketbook,” however, is a shallow one-liner for what is occurring as this phenomenon progresses. The appeal of middle-class fiscal and cultural values as voting criteria may well rise among LGBTQ+ ranks, ensconcing them with the culturally more centrist, more conservative some might say, silent majority that is playing the greatest two-party strategy of all time. It would confirm the assessments of Matthew Lassiter and Joseph Crespino addressed in the introduction, that there is a need for a spatial

⁷⁸ Giselle Donnelly and James Kirchick, “The Increase in LGBTQ Support for Trump Has a Silver Lining,” *The Washington Post*, November 30, 2020.

⁷⁹ Howard, “Gay and Conservative,” 163.

⁸⁰ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 1.

⁸¹ Chouinard, “He Leans to the Right,” 41, references a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center: Jocelyn Kiley, “61% of Young Republicans Favor Same-Sex Marriage,” *Pew Research Center*, March 20, 2014, [online](#), accessed June 16, 2022; Kerry Eleveld “Unlocking the Conservative Closet,” *The Advocate*, no. 1043 (November 2010): 26-29, contributes to this idea of young Republicans from an anecdotal perspective.

⁸² Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 5.

and class-based turn to historiographical lenses of conservatism, especially as it pertains to approaching topics of gender and sexuality.

The study of gay conservatism also reveals a need to follow the trend of intellectual history identified by Kim Phillips-Fein in her 2011 article on the state of conservatism, burningly so when it comes to defining this phenomenon.⁸³ Recency bias dominates academic and popular ideas of conservatism, which has narrowed the definition to reflect only the twentieth-century movement by the far-Right in the United States, failing to account for intra-movement strife which resulted in “Burkean conservatives” fading from the GOP’s inner circles and melting into the center, and perhaps even the Democratic Party, after the role reversal of the parties in the 1960s and 1970s.⁸⁴ This is especially true after examining writings by Bruce Bawer, Justin Raimondo, Ralph Raico, and Andrew Sullivan, who represent gay conservatives whose “sexual opinions are decidedly to the left of the conservative mainstream.”⁸⁵

Returning to Geraldo Cadava’s point that conservatives and Republicans are not always one and the same, it would be more beneficial to return to a definition of conservatism that accounts for the *entire* conservative legacy, from its early modern foundations in the works of Edmund Burke, Alexis de Tocqueville, Alexander Herzen, and Jacob Burckhardt, to the contributions of recent moderates like Nelson Rockefeller, George Romney, and Edward Brooke. This would allow historians to adopt a definition of conservatism that is not incontrovertibly tied to a relative position on the political spectrum and a false narrative of historical “progress,” but rather give substance to core beliefs that a conservative holds. Finally, gay conservatism’s characteristics reinforce the necessity of building a definition for conservatism which recognizes that, while categories are useful for identifying and processing stereotypes, individuals often have *tendencies* toward categories, not steadfast allegiances—a definition of conservatism which sees clearly that humans can and do walk comfortably in paradox and contradiction.

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⁸³ Kim Phillips-Fein, “Conservatism: A State of the Field,” *The Journal of American History* 98, no. 3 (2011): 723-743, here 730.

⁸⁴ Jennifer Burns, “Liberalism and the Conservative Imagination,” in *Liberalism for a New Century*, ed. Neil Jumonville and Kevin Mattson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 58-74, here 62, 70-71.

⁸⁵ Robinson, *Queer Wars*, 65.