

Walter L. Williams, 'Benefits for Nonhomophobic Societies: An Anthropological Perspective', in *Homophobia: How We All Pay the Price*, ed. by Warren J. Blumenfeld (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 258-275.

.....
In a recent publication of the Coalition for Traditional Values, the Reverend Lou Sheldon commits himself to "open warfare with the gay and lesbian community. [This is] a battle with one of the most pernicious evils in our society: homosexuality."¹ What does the Christian Right think is so bad about homosexuality? We are all familiar with the litany: homosexuals are seen as evil because they are said to be a threat to children, the family, religion, and society in general. In sharp contrast to the heterosexual views of some people in Western society, the majority of other cultures that have been studied by anthropologists condone at least some forms of same-sex eroticism as socially acceptable behavior.² Beyond that, quite a number of societies provide honored and respected places for people who are roughly comparable to what we in Western culture would call gay men and lesbians. . . .

.One example is the Navajo people of Arizona and New Mexico, the largest American Indian group in North America. *Nadle*, a Navajo word meaning "one who is transformed," is applied to androgynous male or female individuals who combine elements of both

masculinity and femininity in their personalities. The rare case of a person who is born hermaphroditic, with ambiguous genitalia or with the sexual organs of both the male and the female, is also considered to be a *nadle*, but most *nadle* are individuals whom Western society would characterize as effeminate men or masculine women. While each society of course constructs its own categories of sexuality in different ways, Navajo people traditionally accepted the fact that such androgynous people almost always have inclinations to be sexually active with people of the same biological sex.

Today's Navajos, like other Native Americans, have been significantly affected by Christian attitudes condemning homosexuality, but among those who value their traditions, there still continues a strong respect for *nadle*. We can see traditional Navajo attitudes more clearly by reading the testimony of W.W. Hill, an anthropologist who lived among the Navajos in the 1930s, before they had been so affected by Western values. This anthropologist documented the extremely reverential attitudes toward *nadle*. He wrote that traditional Navajo families who had a child who behaved androgynously

"are considered by themselves and everyone else as very fortunate. The success and wealth of such a family was believed to be assured. Special care was taken in the raising of such children and they were afforded favoritism not shown to other children of the family. As they grew older and assumed the character of nadle,

*this solicitude and respect increased.... This respect verges almost on reverence in many cases."*³

To illustrate these attitudes, Professor Hill quoted what the Navajo people told him about *nadle*:

"They know everything. They can do both the work of a man and a woman. I think when all the nadle are gone, that will be the end of the Navajo. If there were no nadle, the country would change. They are responsible for all the wealth in the country. If there were no more left, the horses, the sheep, and Navajo would all go. They are leaders, just like President Roosevelt.

*A nadle around the hogan will bring good luck and riches. They have charge of all the riches. It does a great deal for the country if you have a nadle around. You must respect a nadle. They are, somehow, sacred and holy."*⁴

On reading such quotations, the insight that immediately springs to mind is how attitudes toward similar phenomenon may differ widely from one culture to another. Presented above are opposing views of homosexually oriented people, condemned by a Christian fundamentalist as "one of the most pernicious evils in society," but seen by the Navajo as something "sacred and holy." Why the difference?

My research in societies that do not discriminate against homosexuals suggests that the main reason for nonprejudicial attitudes is that those societies have figured out specific ways that homosexuality can contribute positively to the good of society as a whole. In other words, acceptance of sexual diversity is due not so much to "toleration" on the part of the heterosexual majority as it is to distinct advantages perceived by the general populace in having a certain proportion of the population homosexually inclined.

In Western culture, where only heterosexuality is valued, it occurs to few people that homosexuality might enrich society. From over a decade of research on this topic, I have come to have a different perspective than most Americans. The knowledge that I have gained has come primarily from fieldwork with native people of North American, Pacific, and Southeast Asian cultures. After three years of documentary research in many libraries, I lived among the American Indians of the Great Plains and the Southwest (1982), the Mayas of Yucatan (1983), and Native Alaskans (1989). I also did field research among the peoples of Hawaii (1984, 1985, 1990), Thailand (1987), and Indonesia (1987-88).⁵ This essay will refer to the results of my fieldwork among these indigenous peoples. Much more ethnographic fieldwork certainly needs to be conducted in these and other societies before we can firm conclusions, but I have formulated some tentative points that I outline below.

Benefits to Religion

In Western writings about homosexuality, the emphasis usually been on its "cause," with the implication that it is an "abnormality" that must be prevented. In contrast, American Indians the reaction is usually acceptance, notion that all things are "caused" by the spirits and therefore spiritual purpose. It is left to them only to discover each individual's spiritual purpose.

Traditional American Indians seem more interested in finding a useful social role for those who are different than in trying to force people to change character. One's basic character is a reflection of one's spirit, and to interfere with that is dangerously to disrupt the instructions from the spirit world. Many native North American religions are of a type called "animistic"; they emphasize not one creator god but a multiplicity of spirits in the universe. Everything that exists has a spirit; all things that exist are due equal respect because they are part of the spiritual order of the universe. The world cannot be complete without them,

In this religious view, there is no hierarchy among the beings—the humans, animals, and plants—that populate the earth. Humans are not considered to be any more spiritual or any more important than the other beings. Neither is the spirit of man more important than the spirit of woman. Each spirit may be different, but all are of equal value. However, American Indian religions see an androgynous individual as evidence that that person has been blessed by being bestowed with two spirits. Because both women and men are respected for their equal but

distinct qualities, a person who combines attributes of both is considered as higher, as above the regular person—who only has one spirit.

In contrast to Western sexist views, where a male who acts like a woman is considered to be "lowering himself" to the subordinate female status, in the egalitarian American Indian religions feminine roles are accorded equal respect with men's roles. Therefore, a male who acts like a woman is not "lowering himself"; rather, he is indicating that he has been favored with an extra gift of spirituality. He is respected as a "double person." Such an individual is considered to be not entirely man and not entirely woman but a mixture of both masculine and feminine elements with additional unique characteristics. Such a distinctive personality is respected as a different gender, distinct from either man or woman.

This concept of respect for gender nonconformity is quite foreign to mainstream American society today. Despite the gains made in recent decades by the women's movement, our culture still does not respect the social contributions of anyone other than masculine men. Perhaps the best way to see this is to look at attitudes toward androgynous males. On American schoolyards today the worst insult that can be thrown at a boy is to call him a *sissy*. What does it say about a society's gender values when the worst insult that can be directed toward a man is to say that he is like a woman?

While androgyny among males is seldom defended in mainstream American culture, it can be argued that many men need social permission to express those aspects of their

personalities that in our society are more commonly associated with women. American men in particular are under constant pressure to conform, to maximize their masculine side—to "be tough," not to show emotion. Seldom verbalized are the dangers to society of excessive masculinity, even though the evidence appears daily in newspaper headlines. Violence is preponderantly a characteristic of masculine personalities: physical and sexual violence by men against women, children, and other men is a major social problem. Not only are men's tempers not conducive to cooperation in the workplace, but they also lead to stress-related health problems for hot-headed men themselves.

In contrast, American Indian cultures that are not prejudiced against androgynous persons allow more flexibility among personality types. A major reason for this flexibility is the basic respect that their religions accord human diversity. According to these religions, since everything that exists comes from the spirit world, people who are different have been made that way by the spirits and therefore maintain an especially close connection to the spirit world. Accordingly, androgynous people are often seen as sacred, as spiritually gifted individuals who can minister to the spiritual needs of others. In many tribes, such androgynous men—called *berdache* by the early explorers and by modern anthropologists were often shamans or sacred people who work closely with shamans. Females who were inclined to take the traditional masculine role of hunter and warrior were called *amazons* by the early explorers, after the ancient Greek legend of warrior women.

Nonprejudiced Native American societies recognized that the berdache and the amazon were almost always homosexual, but an androgynous personality, not sexual behavior, was the defining characteristic. Many tribes had special career roles for berdache and amazons. Many Indian tribes, believing that sickness can be cured by the intervention of the spirits, will turn to the spiritually powerful as healers. While conducting my fieldwork on a Lakota reservation in South Dakota, I often observed people who were ill calling on *winkte* (the word in the Lakota language meaning "half man/half woman") to perform healing ceremonies for them. *Winktes* spend much of their time helping others, visiting the ill and infirm, comforting those in distress, and drawing on their spiritual connections to help people get well.

With a spiritual justification provided by the culture, berdache and amazons are not seen as a threat to religion. Instead, they are often considered sacred. Sexuality—indeed bodily pleasure—is seen not as sinful but as a gift from the spirit world. Both the spirit and the flesh are sacred. The homosexual inclinations of such berdache and amazons are accepted as a reflection of their spiritual nature. The American Indian example shows that it is not enough for a religion to "tolerate" sexual diversity; it must also provide a specific religious explanation for such diversity.

Some worldviews see reality as pairs of opposites: everything is viewed as good versus evil, black versus white, the spiritual versus the physical. The latter derides the needs and desires of the physical body as "temptations of the flesh," in contrast to the devotions of the spirit. The American Indian religions take a different view, seeing both

the body and the spirit as good, as reflections of each Other. As a consequence, sexual behavior—the epitome of the physical body—may be seen as something positively good, as something spiritual in and of itself, at the same time as it is physical.

The conceptualization by Native American societies of the berdache and the amazons as sacred has its practical applications. Those male berdache whom I have met and read about are uniformly gentle, peaceful people who would simply not fill the traditional Indian man's role of hunter and warrior effectively. By recognizing that they are special and encouraging them to become religious leaders and healers, Indian cultures give such people a means by which to contribute constructively to society. Rather than wasting time and energy trying to suppress their true nature or assuming an unsuitable role, they are encouraged to see their uniqueness as a special spiritual gift and to maximize their capabilities to help others. A Crow elder told me, “We don't waste people, the way white society does. Every person has their gift, every person has their contributions to make.”⁶

Benefits to the Family

This emphasis on the social usefulness of the person who is different can be seen especially clearly in the contributions of such people to their families. Because most pre-Columbian Native Americans lived in extended families, with wide networks of kin who depended on one other, it was not necessary for everyone to have children.

In contrast to a society with only nuclear families (father-mother-children), where all must reproduce to have someone take care of them in old age, an extended family offers some adults the opportunity not to reproduce. Childless people have nephews and nieces care for them. It is actually economically advantageous to the extended family for one or two adults not to reproduce because then there is a higher ratio of food-producing adults to food-consuming children. Also, by assuming gender roles that mix both the masculine and the feminine, the berdache and the amazon can do both women's and men's work. Not being burdened with their own childcare responsibilities, they can care for others' children or for their aged parents and grandparents.

The same pattern occurs in Polynesian culture, where an androgynous role similar to that of the berdache exists. Called *mahu* in Hawaii and Tahiti and *fa'afafine* among Samoans, such alternatively gendered people were traditionally those who took care of elderly relatives while their heterosexual siblings were busy raising their own children. With this kind of gender flexibility, and with their families holding high expectations for them (since they are spiritual people), berdache and amazons are often renowned for being hard workers, productive, and intelligent.

Since they are not stigmatized or alienated, berdache and amazons are free to make positive contributions to family life. Today, they often allow adolescent nieces and nephews to move in with them when the parents' home gets overcrowded and also

help finance schooling. A Navajo woman whose cousin is a respected *nadle* healer told me,

They are seen as very compassionate people, who care for their family a lot and help people. That's why they are healers. *Nadles* are also seen as being great children, real Pied Pipers. Children love *nadles*, so parents are pleased if a *nadle* takes an interest in their child. One that I know is now a principal of a school on the reservation.... *Nadles* are not seen as an abstract group, like "gay people," but as a specific person, like "my relative so-and-so." People who help their family a lot are considered valuable members of the community.⁷

It is thus in the context of individual family relations that much of the high status of the berdache and amazon must be evaluated. When such people play a positive and valued role in their societies, and when no outside interference disrupts the normal workings of those societies, unprejudiced family love can exert itself.

In most Western cultures, such people are often considered misfits, an embarrassment to the family. They often leave the family in shame or are thrown out by homophobic relatives, the family thereby losing the benefit of their productive labor. In contrast, traditional Native American families will often make such people central to the family. Since other relatives do not feel threatened by them, family disunity and conflict are avoided. The male berdache is not pressured to suppress his feminine behavior, nor is the female amazon

pressured to suppress her masculine inclinations. Neither are they expected to deny their same-sex erotic feelings. Berdache and amazons thereby avoid the tendency of those considered deviant in Western culture to harbor a low self-esteem and to engage in self-destructive behavior. Because they are valued by their families, few become alcoholic or suicidal, even in tribes where such problems are common.

Male berdache are often highly productive at women's work. Unlike biological females, who must take time away from farming or foraging when they are menstruating, pregnant, or nursing children. The berdache is always available to gather or prepare food. Anthropologists have often commented on the way in which berdache willingly take on the hardest work. Many berdache are also renowned for the high quality of their craftwork, whether pottery, beadwork, weaving, or tanning. In many tribes, berdache are known as the best cooks in the community and are often called on to prepare feasts for ceremonies and funerals. Women in particular seem to appreciate the help provided by berdache. An elderly Papago woman for example, spoke fondly of a berdache she had known in her youth (referring to him as *she*): "The man-woman was very pleasant, always laughing and talking, and a good worker: She was so strong! She did not get tired grinding corn. I found the man-woman very convenient."⁸

The female amazon is often appreciated for her prowess at hunting and fighting. In the Crow tribe of the Great Plains, one of the most famous warriors of the nineteenth century was an amazon called "Woman Chief." Edward Denig, a white frontier trader who lived with the

Crows for over twelve years, wrote that Woman Chief "was equal if not superior to any of the men in hunting, both on horseback and foot." After single-handedly warding off an attack by an enemy tribe, she developed a reputation as a brave fighter. She easily attracted male warriors to follow her in battle, where she always distinguished herself by her bravery. According to Denig, the Crows believed that she had "a charmed life which, with her daring feats, elevated her to a point of honor and respect not often reached by male warriors." Crow singers composed special songs to commemorate her gallantry, and she eventually became the third highest ranked chief in the entire tribe. Her status was so high, in fact, that she easily attracted women to marry her. By 1850, she had four wives, which also gave her additional status in the tribe. Denig concluded his biography of Woman Chief by saying in amazement, "Strange country this, where [berdache] males assume the dress and perform the duties of females, while women turn [like] men and mate with their own sex!"⁹

Whether attaining status as a warrior, a hunter, a healer, or an artist or simply by being hard working and generous, most amazons and berdache share an urge for success and prestige. They might not be good at doing the kinds of things that are typically expected of their sex, but instead of feeling deviant, they merely redirect their efforts into other kinds of prestigious activities.

Moreover, berdache and amazons can gain notable material prosperity by selling their craftwork. Since they are considered sacred, their work is highly valued for its magical power as well as for its beauty.

The economic opportunities open to berdache and amazons are especially evident among the Navajo. Whereas average men and women are restricted to certain economic activities, *nadle* know no such constraints. Goods produced by them are much in demand. Also, because they are believed to be lucky, they usually act as the head of the family and make decisions about family property. They supervise the family's farming, sheepherding, and selling or trading. With such opportunities, talented *nadle* are valued and respected for their contributions to the family's prosperity.

More than economic success is involved in such people's striving for excellence, however. Atypical children soon recognize their difference from other people. Psychological theory suggests that, if a family does not love and support such children, they will quickly internalize a negative self-image. Severe damage can result from feelings of deviance or inferiority. The way out of such self-hatred is either to deny any meaningful difference or to appreciate uniqueness. Difference is transformed—from *deviant* to *exceptional*—becoming a basis for respect rather than stigma. American Indian cultures deal with such atypical children by offering them Prestige and rewards beyond what is available to the average person.

Masculine females and effeminate males in Western culture are often equally productive and successful, but they are so in the face of overwhelming odds. They may eventually come to appreciate their difference, but such self-acceptance comes more easily when one is considered "special" rather than "deviant." Few Western families show such youths more than grudging tolerance.

If American families would adopt an appreciative attitude when faced with difference, much conflict and strife could be avoided when a family member turns out to be gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Such children could be nurtured and supported, and such nonprejudiced treatment would ultimately rebound to the family's great benefit.

Benefits for Children

From the Native American and Polynesian viewpoints, then, homosexuality and gender nonconformity do not threaten the family. An unusual phenomenon is instead incorporated into the kinship system in a productive and nondisruptive manner. Similarly, berdache and amazons are not seen as a threat to children. In fact, because they often have the reputation for intelligence, they are encouraged in some tribes to become teachers. In my fieldwork on Indian reservations and in the Yucatan, Alaska, Hawaii, and Thailand, I met a number of gender nonconformists who are highly respected teachers. Many of the venerated teachers of the sacred traditional 'hula ceremony among native Hawaiians are *mahus*.

Native American amazons also have the opportunity to become fathers. Among the Mohave, for example, the last person to have sex with the mother before she gives birth is considered to be the true father of the child. This allows an amazon to choose a male to impregnate her wife yet still claim paternity. The child is thus socially

recognized as having an amazon father, who is thus able to fulfill all social roles that any other father would do.

Berdache have the opportunity to become parents through adoption. In fact, since they have a reputation for intelligence and generosity, they are often the first choice to become adoptive parents when there is a homeless child. For example, a Lakota berdache with whom I lived while conducting my 1982 fieldwork had adopted and raised four boys and three girls in his lifetime. The youngest boy was still living with him at the time, a typical teenager who was doing well in school. The household consisted of the berdache, his adopted son, the berdache's widowed mother number of nephews and nieces, and an elderly aunt.

Such an extended family contrasts sharply with contemporary American society, where gays, lesbians, and bisexuals are alienated from their families, have trouble becoming adoptive or foster parents, and are often denied custody of their own children.

Whereas American Indian communities can remedy the tragedy of a homeless child quickly and easily, foster and adoptive families are not so easy to come by in mainstream American society. As a result, the costs that Americans pay are high—in terms of both tax dollars and crimes committed by homeless youths.

Of course, the main reason for preventing gays and lesbians from becoming adoptive or foster parents—or even Big Brothers or Big Sisters—is the often expressed fear that the youths will be sexually molested. Since recent statistics show that well over 90 percent of child molesters

are heterosexual men and their victims young girls, sexual orientation by itself is not a valid criterion on which to base adoption decisions. If it were, heterosexual men would not be allowed to adopt. The fact that homophobic leaders continue to oppose gay and lesbian adoptions when they know the statistics suggests that this issue is merely a rhetorical ploy. The real issue emerges most clearly in custody cases. Children are taken away from lesbian mothers or gay fathers, not because of molestation, but because they will provide "bad role models."

To consider an adult lesbian, gay man, or bisexual a bad role model is simple heterosexism. Children growing up in America today, no matter who their parents are, will see plenty of heterosexual role models—on television, at school, among neighbors and the parents of friends. Why not have a few gay and lesbian role models as an alternative? The answer is simple: American culture will regards it as a tragedy if a youth turns out to be lesbian, gay, or bisexual.

Nonheterosexist cultures, by contrast, emphasize an individual freedom to decide his or her own fate. Paradoxically, those cultures often see sexual variance or gender nonconformity not as matters of choice but as inborn or as determined by the spirit world. Ironically, while the professed American ideal is "freedom of choice," in reality every child is subjected to extreme social pressures to conform. Despite the omnipresent American rhetoric of freedom, mainstream American culture continues to deny lesbian gay, and bisexual youths the freedom to

choose their own life styles. Ever since Freud, however, research has made it abundantly clear that many psychological problems arise when childhood sexual desires are repressed, In fact, a greater incidence and severity of mental illness has been documented among more repressive cultures.¹⁰

Benefits for Friendship

In America today, many men are prevented from expressing their feelings or developing close friendships with other men by the fear that others will think them homosexual. Men can be coworkers, sports buddies, even social companions, but nothing more personal. Consequently, many American men are left with only one legitimate, socially sanctioned intimate relationship in their lives—that with their wives. Is it therefore surprising that most men equate intimacy with sex or that, starved for intimacy, many elect to keep a mistress? To expect marriage to meet all a person's needs—to expect a spouse or significant other to be sexual playmate, economic partner, and best friend—places too heavy a burden on what today is an infirm institution.

During my fieldwork in Indonesia, by contrast, I was struck by the intensity of friendships between men (friendships that reminded me of the intense "blood brother" relationships between Native American men), In Indonesia, the highly structured mixed-sex marriage and kinship system is balanced and strengthened by unstructured same-sex friendship networks. The one

complements the other, and both provide men with the support that they need to get through their lives.

Once gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals have transcended the fear of being thought homosexual, they open themselves to whole new possibilities for more satisfying same-sex friendships. In homophobic societies, heterosexual men are free to develop sex friendships and nurture their same-sex friends. Because no stigma is attached to same-sex friendship, no pressure exists to choose between an exclusively homosexual or heterosexual orientation. In contemporary America, by contrast, where men are socialized to equate intimacy with a sexual relationship, some may feel forced to abandon an exclusively heterosexual identity for an exclusively homosexual one. Homophobia creates two distinct classes of men, self-identified "heterosexuals" and self-identified "homosexuals." More flexible notions of same-sex friendship in nonhomophobic societies mean less of a need to compartmentalize people on the basis of sexual behavior and less social consternation should the relationship between same-sex friends become erotic.

Benefits for Society at Large .

A culture that does not try to suppress the same-sex desires of its people can focus instead on the contributions that can be made by those who are different. We have already seen that American Indian berdache and amazons are honored for their spirituality, their artistic skills, and their hard work, all of which benefit the entire community. They are also often called on to mediate disputes between

men and women. Married couples in particular turn to them since, as "half men/half women," they can see things from the perspective of both sexes. Their roles as go-betweens is integral to the smooth functioning of Native American communities.

Although there is not as much information on the social roles of amazons, the historical documents suggest that berdache performed their go-between function in traditional Indian cultures for males and females on joyous occasions as well. A number of tribes were noted to have employed berdache to facilitate budding romances between young women and men, a role that reached its highest development among the Cheyenne tribe of the Great Plains. One Cheyenne informant reported that berdaehs "were very popular and special favorites of young people, whether married or not, for they were noted matchmakers. They were fine love talkers.... When a young man wanted to send gifts for a young woman, one of these halfmen-halfwomen was sent to the girl's relatives to do the talking in making the marriage."¹¹ Because of their spiritual connection, berdache were believed to possess the most potent love medicines. A Cheyenne bachelor who gained the assistance of a berdache was believed to be fortunate indeed since the berdache could often persuade the young woman and her family to accept the gift-laden horses that a man offered when he made a marriage proposal.

Whereas American Indian societies recognize and incorporate sexual diversity, others simply ignore it. When I was in Southeast Asia in 1987 and 1988, I learned that it was commonly known in both Thailand and Indonesia that some major government figures were homosexual.

Although those men did not publicly broadcast their homosexuality, neither did they make any attempt to hide their same-sex lovers from public view. Such tolerance benefits both the individuals, who are allowed to live their lives as they choose, and the nation, which utilized their leadership skills.

In my research, I have found that those societies with accepted homosexual roles ironically do not emphasize the sexual activities of homosexuals. Everyone knows their sexual preferences, but those preferences are considered matters for private, not public, concern. Homosexuality is therefore not politicized. In America, however, the homophobic Right has made such an issue of what it considers to be deviant sexuality that it has stimulated the development of a politically active gay community.

The suppression of sexual diversity *inevitably* results in social turmoil. Families and communities are divided by the issue. Suicides are occasioned by the discovery, or the fear of discovery, of secret sex lives. When the individuals whose secrets are uncovered are public figures, the ensuing media scandal can bring a community to the point of hysteria—witness Boise, Idaho, in the 1950s and schoolteacher firings in countless communities.

The persecution of gays, lesbians, and bisexuals also endangers the freedom of other groups—indeed, any group. For persecution rarely confines itself to one group. For example, Adolf Hitler tried to rid Germany of Jews, but also extended his campaign to include homosexuals. The Ayatollah Khomeini similarly exterminated infidels and

beheaded homosexuals. The point here is that no one is safe until all groups are safe.

By continuing to discriminate against lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals, the United States is losing the respect of many in the world community—the Dutch and other progressive governments

have already made formal diplomatic protests against discriminatory U.S. policies. Sodomy laws remain on the books and are enforced in many states, homosexuals are excluded from the military, sexual minorities are denied equal protection under the law—all this in a nation devoted to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."

The situation today is similar to that in the early 1960s, when progressive governments in Europe, Asia, and especially the newly independent African nations voiced their support for African-American civil rights protestors. Such diplomatic action helped pressure the Kennedy administration to take action against racial segregation. For how could America champion its ideals of freedom and expect to maintain its position as the leader of the "free" world when people of color were treated so unequally?

Acceptance of people's right to be different is the certain hallmark of democracy and freedom. This is why the New Right's attempt to suppress homosexuality is so dangerous for the larger society. The dominant message propounded by the New Right in the 1980s has been that everyone should be the same. That desire for sameness has a strong attraction for people living in a diverse and

changing society. Instead, we should be thankful that we are not all the same. If we were, society would lose the creativity and vitality that comes from difference. Faced with the new global competitiveness of the 1990s, we as Americans are hardly in a position not to promote independent thinking and creativity. Mindless conformity is an economic and emotional and intellectual dead end.

An appreciation of diversity, not just a tolerance of minorities, is what will promote future American progress. As the American Indian example illustrates so well, far from being a threat to religion, to the family, to children, and to society in general, homosexuality can benefit both men and women as well as bring freedom to all.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Project 10 Newsletter (March 1989), 1.
2. Clellan Ford and Frank Beach, *Patterns of Sexual Behavior* (New York: Harper, 1951).
3. W. W. Hill, "The Status of the Hermaphrodite and Transvestite in Navaho Culture," *American Anthropologist* 37 (1935): 274.
4. Ibid.
5. The results of my 1979—84 fieldwork are reported in Walter L. Williams, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture* (Boston: Beacon, 1986). Part of my Indonesian research is contained in Walter L Williams, *Javanese Lives: Women and Men in Modern Indonesian Society* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991). My research among Polynesians and Native Alaskans has not yet been written up. I express my gratitude to the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars, for a Fulbright research grant to Indonesia (with a side trip to Thailand and Malaysia), to the University of Southern California faculty research fund for trips to conduct research in Hawaii, and to the Institute for the Study of Women and Men for a travel grant to go to Alaska. My main work there was among Aleuts and Yupik Eskimos.

6. Quoted in Williams, *Spirit and Flesh*, 57.
7. *Ibid.*, 54.
8. *Ibid.*, 58—59.
9. *Ibid.*, 245—46.
10. George Devereux, *Mohave Ethnopsychiatry* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1969), viii—ix, xii—xiii, and "Institutionalized Homosexuality of the Mohave Indians," *Human Biology* 9 (1937): 498—499, 518. For examples of other sexually free societies, see Williams, *Spirit and Flesh*, chap. 12.
11. Quoted in Williams, *Spirit and Flesh*, 70—71.

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11