Part II

Changes in the Berdache Tradition Since the Coming of the Europeans

7 *The Abominable Sin: The Spanish Campaign against "Sodomy," and Its Results in Modern Latin America*

Soon after Christopher Columbus recognized that his voyage across the Atlantic Ocean had not taken him to Asia, Europeans realized that he had discovered a previously unknown continent. To them it was, in a very real sense, a "New World." The peoples they found there were as unfamiliar as beings from another planet, and their history had not prepared them for such extensive dealings with peoples of other cultures. In contrast to Middle Eastern civilizations, which had been at the center of commercial and intellectual interaction from three continents, Europeans after the fall of the Roman Empire had been relatively isolated from outside contact. Accordingly, Europeans held their own cultural values, and were little used to accepting differing viewpoints.

Such intolerance of cultural variation extended to sexuality, and at least since the thirteenth century European thought condemned same-sex relations as a major sin. Despite a tradition of homoeroticism going back to the ancient Greeks, when the Roman Empire adopted Christianity as its state religion it also adopted the antisexual heritage of the Hebrews. Weakened as it was by the otherworldly concerns of Christianity, and divided by sectarian divisions and persecutions within this new state religion, the late Roman Empire began condemning sexual practices that had previously been well accepted.

During the early medieval era a new culture formed, arising from the Greco-Roman-Christian tradition combined with folk cultures from Europe. Some historians have suggested that this medieval culture was not as concerned about condemning homosexual relations, and tolerated emotional expressions of love between people of the same sex. But by the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries, Europe was in the midst of an extremely homophobic outburst. Part of this antihomosexualism was due to Church dogma, and to political opportunism. Jealous political leaders used outlandish rumors to associate homosexual behavior with heresy and treason. By emphasizing the evilness of homosexuality, these factions could justify confiscating the wealth of those accused. The frenzy that resulted also had much to do with simple scapegoating. Europe convulsed itself with mass executions of anyone perceived as different: Jews, Christian nonconformists, woman-centered folk spiritualists known as witches, and "sodomites." The term *sodomy* was taken from the biblical story of God's destruction of the ancient city of Sodom. The original moral of this story is that Sodom was destroyed because of its inhospitality to strangers, but later writers emphasized a sexual interpretation. Especially during the Inquisition the Christian establishment killed and tortured Jews, heretics, witches, and sodomites alike, and not so incidentally confiscated condemned persons' property, thus increasing its own wealth. With this combination of economic, political, and psychological factors, same-sex relations had become a dogmatic issue.[1]

SPANISH HOMOPHOBIA

By the time European explorers landed in America, Europe was more firmly committed than any other culture in the world to persecuting sodomy. While homophobia was typical of Christian Europe generally, the Spanish seemed to be at the forefront of this persecution. In Spain the Inquisition reached sadistic extremes in its suppression of sexual diversity. Sodomy was defined loosely as any nonreproductive sexual act (usually a same-sex act but sometimes anal sex between a male and a female). Sodomy was a serious crime in Spain, being considered second only to crimes against the person of the king and to heresy. It was treated as a much more serious offense than murder. Circumstantial evidence or uncollaborated testimony was easily accepted as proof of the crime. Without any concept of religious freedom, or separation of church and state, sodomy was also

considered a mortal sin. Those convicted by the inquisitorial courts were burned at the stake.[2]

Why were the Spanish so morbidly incensed over a sexual act? In what way did it threaten their society so severely as to be classified as more serious than murder? In many ways the Spanish were not much different from other Europeans in their homophobic reactions. Yet they had additional reasons to be upset over sodomy, quite likely growing out of their struggle against the Moors. These North African Muslims had occupied the Iberian peninsula for over seven hundred years, and for just that long the European natives had been resisting. Since warfare depleted the population, Spanish culture encouraged propagation.[3] As in some other societies that emphasized population growth, the Spanish tried to suppress birth control, abortion, and nonreproductive forms of sexuality. In an attempt to regain their homeland—similar to the struggles of the ancient Hebrews—the Spanish emphasized the same pro-population values that they had absorbed from the Jews via Christianity. Moreover, since all Europe had been devastated in the fourteenth century by the bubonic plague, with an estimated loss of half its population, even more pressures were added for maximizing reproduction.[4]

The Spanish had an additional reason for opposing homosexuality. In technology and intellectual thought, the Islamic civilization of the Moors was clearly more advanced than that of the Castilians. If the Spanish were going to challenge their culturally superior Muslim enemy, they were going to have to overcome their sense of inferiority by overcompensating—they had to see themselves as superior. They obviously could not do this in regard to technological or intellectual matters, so they had to turn to ideological values. In short, the Spanish had to create a culture that emphasized its difference from the Moors. Christianity, with its intolerance for other religions, served that function, supplying a unifying theme around which the non-Muslim Spanish could rally and proclaim their superiority. Their religious fanaticism sustained them in their struggles to drive out the Moors, and it left a heritage of intolerance and persecution of nonconformists.[5]

One aspect of Moorish society that clearly stood out as dif-

ferent from the Christians was its relaxed attitude toward same-sex relations. After centuries of continuous warfare, Spanish men displayed contempt for behavior that they associated with their Islamic enemy. When the Spanish regained control of the peninsula by the late fifteenth century, this offered the Church an unprecedented opportunity to impose its rules on the newly conquered lands. By confiscating the property of condemned individuals, the Church could gain a vast base of wealth in Spain as well as eliminate possible competitors for control of the population. This, along with the need for maximizing population growth and differentiation from the Moors, makes it clear why the Spanish treated sodomy as such a serious breach of civil and religious standards. Behind their fanatical condemnation was a striving for economic and political power, and uncertainty about being able to keep their Christian culture free from any taint of Moorish influence. They might not be able to challenge the Moors on technological or intellectual grounds, but they could do so by emphasizing "morals"—social taboos that the Muslims did not share.[6]

THE SPANISH IN THE AMERICAS

Before 1492 the Spanish had so little contact with other cultures, except for their enemy the Moors, that they could not know that homosexual behavior was commonly accepted among many of the world's cultures. But no sooner had they finished the colossal effort to expel the Moors than the discovery of the New World brought them face to face with another cross-cultural struggle. To their horror, the Spanish soon discovered that the Native Americans accepted homosexual behavior even more readily than the Moors. Since this was an inflammatory subject on which the Spanish had strong feelings, the battle lines were soon drawn. Sodomy became a major justification for Spanish conquest of the peoples called Indians.

The Spanish recognized, as would the other Europeans who followed them into the Americas, that the peoples of the New World represented a vast diversity of cultures. Nevertheless,

most of the commentators did not often bother to make such distinctions in their rush to condemn Indian eroticism. In one of the least condemnatory accounts of Indian sexuality, for example, Pedro Cieza de León wrote in his "Chronicles of Peru" that the two worst sins of the Indians were cannibalism and sodomy. But he cautioned against condemning all Indians on these grounds:

> Certain persons speak great ill of the Indians, comparing them with beasts, saying that their customs and living habits belong more properly to brutes than to men, that they are so evil that not only do they make use of the abominable sin but also that they eat one another. . . . It is not my intention to say that these things apply to all of them. . . . If in one province they practice the abominable sin against nature, in many others it is regarded as unseemly and is not practiced or indeed may be abhorred. . . . So that it would be an unjust thing to voice a general condemnation of them all.[7]

In his rush to defend Indians, Cieza de León does not question the Spanish antihomosexual consensus, but only points out that not all Indians practiced sodomy. For those who did, he equated them with cannibals, worthy of no defense.

The Spanish did find, however, that same-sex acts were quite common. In many cases this was first observed through native art. Particularly in Mexico and Peru, there was a rich artistic tradition of erotic art. Sexual customs were depicted in detail, including homosexual behavior. For example, Bernal Diaz, on an exploration of the coast of Yucatán in 1517, reported discovering many clay "idols" in which "the Indians seemed to be engaged in sodomy one with the other."[8] Fernandez de Oviedo, the chronicler for the king, wrote about another expedition to a Yucatán coastal island on which Diego Velazquez reported entering a Maya temple and being shocked to see a large wooden statue of two males engaged in intercourse. In Panama in 1515, Oviedo himself saw some of this intricate artwork: "In some part of these Indies, they carry as a jewel a man mounted upon another in that diabolic and nefarious act of Sodom, made in gold relief. I saw one of these jewels of the devil twenty pesos gold in weight. . . . I broke it down with a hammer and

smashed it under my own hand."[9] The Spanish melted down untold quantities of Indian artwork in precious metals, but they took a special delight in destroying these "jewels of the devil."

As a result of this systematic destruction, we cannot know the extent to which pre-Columbian art expressed homosexual themes. Unfortunately, this obliteration did not end with the colonial era. Even as late as 1915, a Peruvian art collector knew of many Moche and Vicus ceramic pieces depicting "sodomy or pederasty . . . [which] a misunderstood modesty has led many collectors to destroy." The director of the Peru National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology points out that such censorship over the centuries continues at the hands of modern "iconoclasts."[10]

The Spanish destruction of art is typical of their refusal to see things in a different light. They did not use this knowledge to gain a wider understanding of sexual diversity, or to question their strange notion that the only function of sexual desire is procreative. Upon no authority other than the Bible, they declared that any other sexual act than that designed to reproduce was "against nature." Accordingly, they could only report in amazement the high incidence of same-sexuality among the Indians. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, accompanying Hernán Cortés during his conquest of Mexico in 1519, commented frequently on the widespread practice of same-sex relations as a well-established custom.[11] The chronicler López de Gomara reported that the Indians "are sodomitic like no other generation of men."[12]

The Spanish were also amazed that homosexuality was often associated with cross-dressing, and that the practice had religious connotations. Cieza de León reported in 1553 that he punished the Indians of Puerto Viejo in Peru because of temple prostitution. He wrote in disgust: "The devil held such sway in this land that, not satisfied with making them fall into so great sin, he made them believe that this vice was a kind of holiness and religion."[13]

Instead of learning lessons about human variability in erotic attraction and gender role, the Spanish used the existence of homosexuality as evidence of Indian inferiority. In his first re-

port to Emperor Charles V, conquistador Hernán Cortés wrote on July 10, 1519, that the Indians of Mexico "are all sodomites and have recourse to that abominable sin." Bernal Díaz del Castillo said Cortés paused in the fighting along the coast near Xocotlan long enough to order his Indian allies: "You must not commit sodomy or do the other ugly things you are accustomed to do."[14]

These matters were emphasized by the Spanish conquistadors and writers for more than just human interest. The Indians' acceptance of homosexuality provided a major justification for the conquest and subjugation of the New World. With their belief that same-sex behavior was one of God's major crimes, the Spanish could easily persuade themselves that their plunder, murder, and rape of the Americas was righteous. They could fight their way to heaven by stamping out the sodomites, rather than by crusading to the Holy Land.

The condemnation of Indian homosexual behavior was a major factor in proving the virtue of the Spanish conquest, and the conquistadors acted resolutely to suppress it by any means necessary. The priests of course tried to convince the Indians to change voluntarily, but sometimes the military leaders did not even give the natives an opportunity to change. For example, the conquistador Nuño de Guzmán recalled that in 1530 the last person taken in battle, who had "fought most courageously, was a man in the habit of a woman, which confessed that from a child he had gotten his living by that filthiness, for which I caused him to be burned."[15] Likewise, Antonio de la Calancha, a Spanish official in Lima, sang the praises of Vasco Núñez de Balboa, who on his expedition across Panama "saw men dressed like women; Balboa learnt that they were sodomites and threw the king and forty others to be eaten by his dogs, a fine action of an honorable and Catholic Spaniard."[16]

Even Francisco de Vitoria, the leading Spanish liberal theologian who argued that the pope and the emperor had no dominion over American Indians, made a few exceptions. The natives, he avowed, could not be legally dispossessed of their lands except for three reasons: cannibalism, incest, and sodomy. The Spanish did not, however, merely take the lands of the Indians.

The Europeans' mere presence led to native decimation in numbers unprecedented in human history. A major reason the Spanish were able to prevail over the Indians was that the Europeans brought with them many deadly germs to which the Indians had no immunity. Europeans at this time had very high levels of pathogens left over from the plague. Diseases that only sickened the hardened white survivors caused the American natives to die in huge numbers. Old World diseases were without a doubt the deadliest weapon of the conquistadors, killing probably ninety percent of precontact populations.[17]

The Spanish did not realize why the Indians were wasting away from disease, but took it as an indication that it was part of God's plan to wipe out the infidels. Oviedo concluded, "It is not without cause that God permits them to be destroyed. And I have no doubts that for their sins God is going to do away with them very soon."[18] He further reasoned, in a letter to the king condemning the Mayas for accepting homosexual behavior: "I wish to mention it in order to declare more strongly the guilt for which God punishes the Indians and the reasons why they have not been granted his mercy."[19]

The Spanish did not understand that the diseases had more to do with the will of microbes than the will of God. With such misunderstandings, the theologian Juan Gines de Sepulveda stated: "How can we doubt that these people so uncivilized, so barbaric, so contaminated with so many sins and obscenities . . . have been justly conquered by such a humane nation which is excellent in every kind of virtue?"[20]

Almost as soon as they were able to establish control, representatives of the Church and the state began imposing their notions of proper behavior on the Indians. As early as 1613 in Florida, Spanish priests were trying to get Timucua Indian men and boys in confessional to admit being "sodomites."[21] A Spanish missionary who saw some "*maricas*" among the Yuma Indians during a 1775 expedition in California condemned them as "sodomites, dedicated to nefarious practices. From all the foregoing I conclude that in this matter of incontinence there will be much to do when the Holy Faith and the Christian religion are established among them."[22]

What happened when the Spanish had a chance to intervene

is seen in an incident that occurred at the mission near Santa Barbara, California, in the 1780s. When a Chumash *joya* and his husband visited another Indian who was a laborer at the mission, the suspicious priest burst into their quarters and caught them "in the act of committing the nefarious sin." The priest reported in indignation that he punished them, but not "with the severity it properly deserved. When they were rebuked for such an enormous crime, the layman [Indian man] answered that the *Joya* was his wife!" What the Indian man stated as a justification for his relationship, the missionary took as an outrage.

After this incident, the priest reported, no more of "these disreputable people" came to any of the southern California missions, "although many *Joyas* can be seen in the area. . . . Almost every village has two or three." Obviously the berdaches and their husbands had quickly learned to avoid the Spanish, but the priests were not satisfied with this. The writer concluded: "We place our trust in God and expect that these accursed people will disappear with the growth of the missions. The abominable vice will be eliminated to the extent that the Catholic faith and all the other virtues are firmly implanted there, for the glory of God."[23]

The Spanish began a concerted effort to wipe out berdachism in California, and by the 1820s a missionary at San Juan Capistrano was able to report that while berdaches were once very numerous among the Mission Indians, "At the present time this horrible custom is entirely unknown among them."[24] Evidently the Spanish were successful in this suppression, because I was able to locate no trace of even a memory of a berdache tradition among Mission Indians today.

With the harsh impact of disease, military conquest, and cultural imposition that the Indians experienced from the Spanish, it is difficult to learn native reactions to the suppression of homosexuality. Yet the Spanish documents do tell us a few things. After stating that most of the Peruvian Indians of Puerto Viejo "publically and openly [practiced] the nefarious sin of sodomy, on which they greatly prided themselves," Cieza de León complimented the local Spanish authorities for having "given punishment to those who committed the above mentioned sin,

warning them how our all powerful God is displeased. And they put fear into them in such a way that now this sin is used little or not at all."[25] By 1552 the historian López de Gomora reported that Native American sodomy was being successfully wiped out by the Spanish.[26]

NATIVE RESPONSE

How did the Indians react to the intense suppression of berdachism that the Spanish enforced? It is hard enough to get the Indian viewpoint from the documentary record on any subject, and especially difficult on something like taboo sexual behavior. The Spanish claimed that they had wiped out homosexual practices. Certainly the Spanish got the impression that "sodomy" no longer existed, and without a doubt it was not openly engaged in as it had been before the arrival of the Europeans. But that does not mean that a recognized and respected status for berdaches no longer existed, or that private same-sex behavior vanished.

To find evidence of such continuity is extremely difficult. The researcher must be a detective, searching for a shred of information that might tell how native cultures adapted to these enforced changes on their ways of life. Traditionalist Indians tend not to record their thoughts in written form, and certainly not their thoughts about anything that would only bring them trouble from whites. As a result, there is a large documentary gap beginning with the establishment of colonial control, and it seems unlikely that documents will be found that verify the continuity of accepted and common homosexual behavior among Indians. The lack of documentation requires present-day ethnographers to investigate the position of contemporary Indians, to see if a respected berdache role survives. Such research cannot be done by just any fieldworker, since Indian people long ago learned not to open up to whites on this topic. It requires a person with sensitivity and a feeling of trust developed with informants.

One such ethnographer is Clark Taylor, who had the advantage of being openly gay during his fieldwork among the Zoque

Indians. As a result of his open identity, Taylor's informants confided in him. They reported that among the Zoque, as well as with the Huichol and the Cora Indians, berdaches still play a part in modern-day Indian rituals in springtime. They do not share the *mestizo* values of machismo, and do not think of gender variance and male-male sexual behavior as deviant.[27]

Ethnographic reports on the Indians of present-day central Chile offer a clue to one type of reaction to Spanish suppression. Among the precontact Araucanians, the Mapuche, and probably other peoples, shaman religious leaders were all berdaches. When the Spanish suppressed this religious institution because of its association with male-male sex, the Indians switched to a totally new pattern. Women became the shamans. So strong was the association of femininity with spiritual power that if the androgynous males could not fulfill the role, then the Indians would use the next most spiritually powerful persons. In striving for effective spirituality, they responded in a creative way to Spanish genocidal pressures.

One possible conclusion that might be drawn from this change would be that the Indians merely turned against the berdache priests. But such a sudden and unified move would seem unlikely when considering the previously high status of the shamans. More likely the Indians may have employed a clever strategy to remove the berdaches from a public institutionalized role, to protect them from Spanish wrath. Once the berdaches were no longer in public leadership positions they would not be obvious to the homophobic Spanish officials.[28] Gender variation and same-sex behavior could continue in private, unnoticed by the Spanish overlords.

Such examples may lead us to speculate that once Indians realized how much the Europeans hated sodomy, indigenous groups in various areas of the Americas quickly adapted to colonial control by keeping such things secret. This meant that berdachism would no longer be associated with ceremonialism. We have seen that the religious aspect is an important element in berdachism, but does this mean that without it berdache status would disappear? Evidently it does not. In fact, there are ethnographic reports of certain tribes in which berdache status from the beginning did not involve religious office, and though

such cultures were probably rare, they do demonstrate that berdachism is not restricted to a society in which it serves an active religious leadership function.

More recent examples reveal that berdachism can survive without religious connotations. If the religious element of a group's berdache tradition has not survived, what elements do continue? The evidence suggests that the three features most notable in modern Indian groups are an androgynous personality, a woman's or mixed-gender work role, and the passive role in sexual behavior with men. The continuity of a respected social position for such nonmasculine males indicates that these three features are at the core of berdache identity. All three are equally important elements, and are considered to be personality traits that are intertwined. These traits are today more important even than cross-dressing or spirituality.

It was not until after she had been doing fieldwork among the Isthmus Zapotecs of Oaxaca, Mexico, for several years that Beverly Chiñas developed the kind of trust that would allow informants to talk openly with her about this topic. The Zapotec word for berdaches, *ira' muxe,* which means "males who manifest some degree of effeminate behavior," can also be applied to known homosexual or bisexual males, even if they do not display feminine behavior. Chiñas found that Zapotecs do not agree on a precise meaning beyond this, nor on exactly to which individuals it should be applied. But the definition does show a strong connection between nonmasculine personality and homosexual behavior. "*Ira' muxe* are respected by Zapotecs, who emphasize their differences from the general heterosexual population." *Ira' muxe* have no special religious role, but Zapotecs "defend them and their rights to their sexual and gender identity because 'God made them that way.'" Zapotecs reject the idea that *ira' muxe* could choose to be or could be forced into being different from the way they are. Berdachism is seen as a reflection of a person's basic character.[29]

SURVIVAL AMONG MAYAS TODAY

Knowing of the sporadic reports of continued berdache behavior in Latin America, I resolved to investigate a culture about

which there was abundant evidence of aboriginal homosexuality: the Mayas. After my fieldwork among berdaches of the northern Plains tribes, I next made a trip to Yucatán to see if I could collect any information on modern Maya berdaches. Since the early Spanish documents contained many references to sodomy among these people, I decided to test my assumptions that such traditions have not disappeared. By luck, I met a man in Key West, Florida, who had previously lived in Yucatán and who had brought back with him a young Mayan as his lover. He had no knowledge of Mayan history, but what he said fit with precontact patterns. He stated, "Maya Indians have a very accepting attitude toward sex; 'If it feels good, do it.' Homosexuality is very open and common, with boys between the early teens to the mid twenties. But after then, men have much social pressure exerted on them to get married to a woman, and to stop dressing effeminately."[30] What he said reflected a remarkable continuity from precolonial Mayan culture, with its institutionalized male marriages of boys and young men.[31]

In trying to understand modern Yucatán folk traditions deriving from the Maya heritage, it is necessary to recognize the unbroken aboriginal influence. Though technological society has made inroads into the daily life of the traditional people, especially in the last decade, when improved transportation made outside access easier, Yucatán retains its separation even from the rest of Mexico.[32] Yucatán is most famous for its surviving archeological ruins, with their large pyramids and intricately carved temples. At several of the ruins, most notably Uxmal, it is difficult to ignore the fascination that the Mayas had with the male penis. Huge stone phallic symbols occupy central positions in the ceremonial grounds.

The situation of homosexually inclined males in Yucatán is much different from that of members of the urban gay subculture of the United States. Because homoeroticism is much more diffuse in the society, there are not separate subcultural institutions for homosexuals. There are, however, known meeting places for males who want to have sexual relations. In small villages, this will usually be a certain area near the central plaza. In the cities, it may be on certain streets. "Cruising" for partners is much easier than in the United States, where the population

is polarized between "gay" and "straight" men. In Yucatán, with its more fluid approach to sexuality, there is much more of a chance of meeting someone of the same sex for erotic interests. There is also not a strict separation by age as in the United States, so that even males below the age of eighteen may enter a steam bath. What they do in the privacy of their room is considered no one else's business. Puberty, rather than the arbitrary age of eighteen or twenty-one, is seen as a more proper dividing point concerning sexual matters.

After my arrival in Yucatán, I soon learned that the society provides a de facto acceptance of same-sex relations for males. It did not take long to establish contacts, and my informants suggested that a large majority of the male population is at certain times sexually active with other males. This usually occurs in the years between thirteen and thirty, when sexual desire is strongest, but it also involves men older than that. Marriage to a woman does not seem to have much effect on the occurrence and amount of homosexual behavior.

The limitation that the culture imposes is not to prohibit male-male sexual behavior entirely, but instead to regulate it by placing males in active masculine (*hombre* or *mayate*) or passive feminine (*homosexual* or *loca*) roles. *Homosexuales* are *de ambiente,* having an androgynous ambience. They take the passive role in either anal or oral sex, and are considered the true homosexual. They often share a sense of community with other androgynous males, revolving around drag names, "campy" language, and gender-referenced humor. While they are not seen as "real men," they occupy an accepted position in society and are not subject to homophobic violence as in Anglo-America.

Their masculine sexual partners, the *hombres* (literally "men"), have no sense of identity as homosexuals. As long as they effect a macho demeanor and at least express some interest in getting married to a female at some time in the future, they are free to follow their sexual desires with males. They have no burden of being labeled "abnormal," because in fact their behavior is normal for that society. The surprising configuration of their society is that a particular person might take either role in sex, depending on the particular relationship established with

the other partner. Some persons, referred to as *internacionales,* take both roles sexually, but most males identify with one role more than the other and assume either an active or passive role. It is generally assumed that the more masculine of the two will take the active role in sex, but this may vary sometimes. Passive homosexuals have told me of instances when their *hombre* boyfriends played the passive role in sex, but this was done only after a level of trust had been established so that such role reversal would be kept secret. Sex with a male is not something to be embarrassed about, but role reversal is.

Perhaps the best way to explain the social role of homosexual Mayas is to examine the words of particular people. In a small Maya village, it is easy to be introduced to those who are known as *homosexual.* As the man who introduced me said of such persons, "Everyone knows they're homosexual, and accepts them. There are people like that everywhere in the world. There are some homosexuals in every Maya village." With such a matter-of-fact attitude he introduced me to a young man in his mid-twenties who did not seem very feminine but not macho either. He was a typical *de ambiente,* with a pleasant, friendly personality. He was popular with the men in his village, being nicknamed El Sexy. When I met him, I noticed a macho man making a noticeably sexual come-on to him, publicly and without any sense of subterfuge. Later, when he was riding with me in my car, a boy smiled and yelled to him, "I see you have found your husband," referring to me. It was not a negative or derogatory joke, just a relaxed kidding that reflected the general knowledge of the villagers that my informant preferred men. He enjoyed the joke immensely.

The men had no reluctance to be seen with him, and had none of the stiffness so apparent in "straight" males in the United States. When he goes to the village tavern, or *cantina,* the men may dance with him. During carnival time, he dresses as a woman and is especially popular as a dance partner. Everyone accepts him. He says of his respected position:

> The other people appreciate me very much. Because I behave properly. *Hombres* will have sex with each other when they get drunk, but

I consider that to be bad. It should only be done with an *homosexual,* then it's alright. I would not have sex with another *homosexual;* I don't consider them to be completely men. They're like a third group, different from men or women.

He never takes the initiative in sex, since the men always come to him. He has had relations with most of the men in his village, from teenagers to the elderly. "They know I'm good," he remarks. The men take him to a place, usually behind the church or in the sports field. Since he lives with his mother, he never brings a man home for sex, although he does do social entertaining there. His mother seems quite comfortable with his male visitors, and had no objection to me staying in their home. Since everyone sleeps in a separate hammock, sex is not usually associated with the bedroom. Sexual acts, male-female as well as male-male, are more likely done outside in the bush. Despite his character and behavior, which in the United States would be defined as gay, "El Sexy" plans to get married to a woman after he is thirty, "so that I won't be alone." He might decide to have children, but otherwise he feels that marriage will not inhibit his sexual activities with men.[33]

A few days later, a young man who was visiting let it be known that he enjoyed sex with males. He does not identify himself as homosexual, but rather as *hombre.* He explained that his *hombre* social role required that he take only the "active" role. To do otherwise (at least where others would know about it) would require a changed social role that he was not prepared to make.

For those who follow the cultural dictates of taking on a clearly defined homosexual role, there is an easy acceptance by society. This can apply even for those who follow the role for their entire lives. In another Maya town in southern Yucatán, I visited a forty-year-old man who dresses in a mixture of men's and women's clothing. He owns a popular beauty shop, and is one of the most prosperous persons in the town. When I and a friend visited him, he was calmly doing a manicure for a middle-aged, proper-looking woman. While I talked with him, the woman's husband continually exchanged erotic glances with the young man who accompanied me. As the beautician sat with his thinning hair in pink rollers, he talked freely about his

sex life while continuing the woman's manicure. One cannot even imagine such a situation in the typical Anglo-American beauty parlor. He told me:

> Everyone knows I'm *homosexual,* and I am well respected. There are hundreds of *homosexuales* in town, most openly so, but I am the only one who dresses as a woman. The people treat me as a woman, and there are never any problems. I attend mass devotedly; the priest often visits my house for meals because I'm one of the best cooks in town. People respect my good citizenship. The men come to visit me for sex; I have to turn them away. I had a lover for several years, and we walked around town holding hands being completely open. No one objected. I feel no discrimination for being different.

Next I visited a fifty-five-year-old Maya in the same town. He dresses as a man, and is not recognizably feminine. But he has identified as *homosexual* for his entire life, and everyone in his village knows this. He rents out hammock spaces in his house to local high school students, whose parents want them living near the school in a trustworthy environment. He allows men to visit him for sex only during the weekends, when the students are gone.

He had recognized himself as homosexual when he was still a young boy, and had had an open and active sex life with men since his early teens. His family and everyone in town knew, and he had never had any problems. He never felt in danger, and my statements about the attacks against gay people in the United States seemed almost unbelievable to him. He could not even conceive of why someone would want to hurt others merely because they were homosexual. He had not noticed any changes in people's attitudes toward homosexuality since his youth, and stated that attitudes had always been accepting. For those who accept their society's mores and the available roles open to them, there is a recognized and respected position that continues aspects of the aboriginal tradition of the berdache.

MESTIZO MALES

While the Spanish writers were not correct in their belief that they had wiped out the berdache traditions among the Indians,

their antisodomy campaign did have a significant impact on the emerging *mestizo* society. Since relatively few Spanish women came to America, most of the early colonists were men. They had sex with Indian women, and produced biracial progeny that were also bicultural. As a result, the *mestizo* culture absorbed opposing notions of sexuality from the aboriginal and Spanish heritages. With Spanish influence being so strong, it is not surprising that homophobia is an element of *mestizo* social attitudes.

In Mexico at least, an antihomosexual feeling may also be a reflection of condemnation of same-sex behavior by the Aztecs. Unlike most of their neighbors, the Aztec conquerers who invaded central Mexico from the north a century before the Spanish seem to have had taboos against homosexuality. Like the Spanish, the Aztecs were a militarized conquering people, and both societies pursued an ideal of absolute machismo that condemned effeminacy. The modern Mexican *mestizo* identifies with the Spanish or the Aztecs, rather than with the more traditional civilizations of classical Meso-America. Those other cultures, with their easy acceptance of homosexuality, are seen as weak.

Many people do not publicly admit to being Indian, and claim not to understand a Native American language when in fact they do. This acculturative pressure, which is just beginning to be felt in more remote areas, has existed in central Mexico for centuries. The process of acculturation has caused tremendous problems in personal identity that have an impact on sexual behavior. With such conflicting cultural values in *mestizo* society, there are contradictory messages for homosexually inclined individuals.

The major impact that the Spanish campaign has had on modern *mestizo* culture is a decline in status for androgynous males. These individuals have lost the respected status they had in many traditional cultures, and instead are often criticized as being traitors to the macho ideal. Yet, even in *mestizo* culture, the Spanish were not able to wipe out the behavior they so detested. Ironically, what emerged was a kind of de facto cultural approval for masculine males who wish to have sex with these

homosexuales. Establishing who is *homosexual*, however, leads to a confusion of roles. Erskine Lane, a gay man from the United States who has lived in Latin America for several years, expresses this confusing situation: "The gay gringo who lingers for awhile in Spanish America soon comes to understand how Alice felt when she fell down the rabbit hole. Disorientation in a topsy-turvy wonderland where many old familiar standards of sexual behavior no longer apply at all and most of the others have been reversed. Who is gay? What is gay? For a while you're not sure any more."

Lane characterizes *mestizo* males as almost completely bisexual in their behavior. Yet, they manage to avoid defining themselves as such. By their view, manhood is defined as one who takes the active role in sex. The sex of the person he sleeps with is less important than the position he takes in the sex act. "The macho can actively court and pursue other males; he can even, in some circumstances, admit to a preference for males, all without compromising his heterosexuality." He can do this, however, only as long as he plays the inserter, or "man's," role.[34]

This feeling is illustrated by one *hombre* who would take only the active role in sex, saying "If I let him fuck me I'd probably like it and then I'd do it again. And then I'd be queer." This fear of the enjoyment of anal sex partly explains the strict separation of active and passive roles in *mestizo* society. Lane asked some of his macho male sexual partners which sex they really preferred. This kind of question was puzzling to them, and they had to think about it before giving an answer. One responded: "It really wouldn't matter to me . . . I guess I really have no preference, but sometimes I think it feels better with a man." The North American writer concluded: "The pansexuality of some guys here amazes me. Male, female, fat, skinny, tall, short, young, old, whatever. No apparent preference. Or, if they have a preference, it is overridden by the supreme macho mandate, which simply says Fuck!"[35]

A similar pattern has been observed by Paul Kutsche, an anthropologist who did fieldwork in Costa Rica. He speaks of the relaxed attitude about sex that is common among mestizo males, and explains it as due to their general approach to life:

"Latins are less prone to pigeonhole other individuals or themselves, and more prone to approach each event existentially without [having categories determined by] the foregoing events."[36] Though it is easy to see the continuities of aboriginal culture in these sexual patterns, among modern *mestizos* the androgynous male has lost the high status and religious association that was formerly held by Indians. The pejorative term *maricón* means effeminate, swish, but not homosexual per se. So while a masculine man who has sex with other males is not an object of concern, the androgynous male is the brunt of jokes.[37]

Just as the status of women has declined with the imposition of a misogynist Spanish culture, so too has the status of nonmasculine males. There are many similarities between these two groups, in that the social position of both is contradictory. There is the *madre,* who is saintly and sexless, but there is a contrasting species of female, the *bicha*. These social constructs are models of femininity, and an androgynous male fits into this pattern. Lane concludes, "He may be treated with something resembling tenderness or with something bordering on contempt. Or, more probably, with a strange mixture of the two. Just as the woman is treated."[38]

In such a cultural context, specifically "gay" establishments—like bars where homosexuals congregate—are rare. Until recently at least, attempts to organize a separate subculture were met with repression. Police may arrest customers if an openly gay bar opens, and an attempt to start a gay newspaper would most assuredly meet with police opposition. But the focus of such repression would not be against the sexuality itself, as it would be in the United States. It would be against the political implications of the rise of a separate gay subculture. Since same-sex contacts can occur in just about any location, there is little need for separate subcultural institutions. As a consequence, people are not polarized into opposite identities based on sexual behavior. So the irony is that while the androgynous male may be derided, as women are derided, there is still a place in society for him. Lane contrasts the situation in Anglo-America, "where a flamboyant painted queen wandering into a straight bar by accident may get thrown out, beat up, or abused.

Here he will more likely be invited to dance by some admiring macho."[39]

Since Latin American *mestizo* cultures are the product of two cultures with such opposing attitudes toward gender variation and same-sex behavior, it is understandable that they should have contradictory and confusing tendencies. The fieldwork in Latin America reported in this chapter indicates that in areas where a precolonial berdache tradition existed, and where the Indian traditions are still followed, berdaches continue to be respected. Such is also the case in North America. But for *mestizos,* the contradictory position of homosexually inclined males, whether feminine or masculine, is a product of the historic changes forced on Native Americans by the Spanish. It is part of the heritage of cultural genocide.

8 *Seafarers, Cowboys, and Indians: Male Marriage in Fringe Societies on the Anglo-American Frontier*

Before the mid-nineteenth century, Anglo-American culture seems to have had little impact on the berdache tradition in Native American societies. The English were latecomers to the New World, and their involvement in North America and the Caribbean was initially concerned with establishing colonies populated by Europeans and Africans. Rather than ruling Indian populations in an empire, as the Spanish did in Latin America, the English pushed the natives out of the way.

It was the existence of a frontier that at least allowed most Indian tribes to preserve their self-government for the next two centuries, even if eventually they had to leave their homelands because of the advancing frontier of white settlement. And it was the frontier that provided the setting for the emergence of all-male societies on the fringes of English occupation, first in the Caribbean and later in the Western interior. White men who participated in these fringe societies in the West interacted, and in some cases probably established relationships with berdaches.

Since we do not have documents in which a frontiersman admitted to an affectional relationship with a berdache, these suggestions are speculative. Given the attitudes of Anglo-American society, it is unrealistic to assume that a man would disclose such stigmatized behavior, especially in print. There were few white men who would even admit in print to sexual involvement with an Indian woman, yet the number of light-skinned "mixed bloods" in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Indian communities attests to its commonness. Since homosexual involvement does not produce offspring, and male-male marriage is not legally recognized, tangible evidence is difficult to find.

Those who insist on documentation may want to skip over this chapter, but existing evidence, though sparse, indicates a basis for at least sketchy generalization. My approach in this chapter is based on the reasoning that all-male fringe societies are not asexual, and that individual men who had less need for women would be precisely the type of men who would gravitate to male fringe groups. What follows should be taken as a tentative hypothesis, which I hope future research on the Old West can amplify.

PIRATES

The first all-male society in the New World originated in the Caribbean, where the Spanish lost control of their original claims. Other Europeans made competing claims to islands, promoting a state of confusion that was close to anarchy. In this climate, no one nation was in control. Lawlessness reigned, and individual groups of seamen found that they could profit handsomely by raiding the ships that were transporting huge amounts of wealth taken from the Indians. Thus were born the buccaneers. By the end of the sixteenth century, piracy had turned the Caribbean into the first of a series of "Wild West" areas, outside the control of established authority.[1]

A frontier, on which individuals could operate outside the controls of a national government, offered a revolutionary opportunity for male Europeans. From what we know, pirates generally came from lower-class families. As adolescents they often joined wandering bands of male youths, surviving by petty theft. Scouted by the law, these bands would usually stay isolated, camping in forests and hiding from people.

As a consequence, these boys went through their awakening years of sexual feeling in an all-male group without adult supervision. These boys, without an authority repressing their sexuality, no doubt learned their sex from the older boys. They seldom had association with females, and even less chance for heterosexual contact. So unless we assume that they were totally asexual, we can reasonably suggest that these boys were socialized into an all-male form of sexuality.[2]

Older boys in such bands were often captured by the law and pressed into service in the Royal Navy. There they learned seafaring skills, but they chafed at the authority and excessive restraints placed on them aboard a naval cruiser or a merchant ship. It was these men who most likely deserted to pirate bands. They were attracted to the democratic nature of pirate society, in which practically all of the members were from lower-class backgrounds like themselves. In contrast to their bitter memories of the navy, they gloried in the freedoms they enjoyed as buccaneers.

In these fringe all-male societies, existing outside the control of the church and the state, men had the choice of being sexual with another male or of being abstinate. Buccaneers rarely had opportunities to be around women, and evidence suggests that they seemed uncomfortable when associating with females. They did not keep women captives for sex, and reports of rape attacks by pirates were rare. Pirate folklore stressed that it was unlucky for them even to be around women.[3] For those men who stayed with a pirate band, homosexual behavior was not a variant option in their life; it was their sole sexual activity other than masturbation. Those who had grown up in vagrant bands had little or no opportunity to acquire heterosexual socialization. Sex with another male was the ordinary and acceptable way of engaging in erotic pleasure.[4] In contrast to the androgyny of the berdaches, the pirate form of homosexual activity emphasized masculinity.

There is very little direct evidence for this homosexual activity.[5] We know that officials often complained that Port Royal, Jamaica, a favorite pirate safe harbor, was "filled with sodomites."[6] And we know that when England began strictly enforcing sodomy laws, sailors were prominent among the accused and that their usual defense was that they did not know it was wrong.[7] Long-distance sailors have long had a reputation for same-sex expression. As recent as the early 1900s a British naval officer remarked, "Homosexuality was rife. . . . In some services (the Austrian and French, for instance) nobody ever remarks about it, taking such a thing as a natural proceeding. . . . To my knowledge, sodomy is a regular thing on ships that go

on long cruises. In the warships, I would say that the sailor preferred it."[8]

This acceptance of homosexual behavior may have declined in the twentieth century, but the reasons for its decline specify why it was likely to have been common among the pirates. A sexologist writing in 1914 declared that informants who were exceptionally knowledgeable about seafarer life-styles stated that "homosexual practices among sailors had decreased in recent years to a notable extent." The main reason for this decline was the change in the speed of steamships. Vessels were seldom at sea for more than two weeks, in contrast to the long sailing voyages which would take men away from land for several months at a time. This writer suggested that another reason for the decrease in homosexual behavior was a recent "rise of public sentiment, condemning it, among the men. This would operate, of course, to put a check on the conduct of individuals."[9] Obviously, such behavior had been more common earlier. With the pirates' backgrounds, their very long periods isolated at sea, and their rebellion against conventional society, we can hypothesize that they likely found male-male sex preferable to celibacy.

Another way to explain pirate sexuality is to argue by analogy from other all-male fringe groups, in which there is direct evidence of widespread homosexual behavior. One such group is hoboes. This group was a product of the era of railroading in the United States when unemployed males discovered that they could ride cross-country as uninvited guests on freight trains. From the Civil War to World War II, these men created a fringe society that, while not as independent and physically isolated from general society as pirates, did depend on long-distance traveling (but on rail instead of ships). By doing this, they isolated themselves from women and lived in all-male groups. Like pirates, many hoboes were from lower-class families and as youths had run away from home and grown up in the hobo group. From the 1870s to the 1930s, hobos were the kind of economic and social rebels that pirates had been earlier.

Two major studies of the social world of the hobo, in the 1890s and in 1919–20, both found that many hoboes accepted and indeed defended male-male sex. In rebelling against Victo-

rian social norms in general, they were more tolerant of sexual variance as well. These studies found that sexual interaction was almost entirely anal or between-the-thighs intercourse. Rather than promiscuity, the usual pattern was a pair-bonded couple—often an adult man with a teenager—who were devoted to each other and would stay together for years.[10]

While there may not be much evidence for what pirates did sexually, we can observe a pattern of pair-bonding that is very similar to what existed in hobo homosexual relationships. When buccaneers captured a ship, the only captives they would take with them were sailors and boys past about age ten. A boy was assigned to an individual, either as cabin boy for the captain, or as an apprentice for one of the ship's artisans. From evidence in court records of pirates' trials, these boys became very attached to their mentors.[11] Among the regular sailors, two men paired off with each other as "mates." If one of these men died, the rule within pirate society was that all of the man's property and share of the booty was inherited by his mate. In battle the two mates would fight as a team, and there are numerous stories of a pirate dying while trying to save his mate.[12] These were devoted, loving relationships; they were de facto male marriages.

Conceding the idea that pirates were sexual with each other, it might be claimed that pirate sex was no more than the "situational homosexuality" so well known among contemporary prisoners. This comparison is faulty, because of several critical differences. Prisons are heavily regulated, with rigid rules imposed by outsiders. These rules are antipathetic both to prisoners and to homosexual expression. Most prisoners regard their imprisonment as temporary, and their homosexual behavior as a temporary adjustment due to the lack of women. Prisoners have little unsupervised time together, and are subject to being transferred at any time. All of these things make for sexual behavior which is different from the marriage patterns that evolved in buccaneer communities during the seventeenth century.[13]

Though some of the pirates originally joined their crew as captives, those who chose to remain with the pirates made a conscious decision to live in a society without women. Many

of them coupled with another male on a permanent basis. Pirates, of course, had nothing to do with Indians. But they did evidence a pattern that repeated itself in later centuries. By the early 1700s the colonial governments had wiped out the Caribbean pirate communities. The only place that males could now go to avoid the oppressive rules of church and state was the Western frontier.

COWBOY SEXUALITY

With the exception of those men who married Indian women, males who remained on the frontier were those who—like buccaneers—were comfortable living outside of established rules and without women. They may not have originally gone to the frontier because of homosexual preferences (though some undoubtedly did), but they did not stay if they had strong heterosexual needs. The frontier was largely populated by men who were content to be asexual for long periods or who had sex with other males.

Looking at cowboys, a later group of frontiersmen, it is hard to imagine them as asexual. In 1871 the *Topeka Daily Commonwealth* printed a description of cowboys: "Life with them is a round of boisterous gayety and indulgence in sensual pleasure."[14] The cowboy is usually thought of in terms of his philandering with showgirls and prostitutes. A former cowboy acknowledged that most of them had venereal disease.[15] That is not a sign of abstinence. But can we attribute this solely to prostitutes?

What about when cowboys were not in the cow towns? Other than their brief annual or semiannual payday flings, most of their time was on the range or in the camps where women were conspicuously absent. Out on the range, isolated from mainstream society, there was no outside authority checking on them. The range boss was a senior cowboy himself. In this situation, cowboys paired off. A deep personal relationship often developed between two "partners" or "sidekicks." A poem published in 1915 by a ranch hand who had lived in South Dakota

and Arizona illustrates a cowboy's feelings after his partner's death.

I hate the steady sun that glares, and glares!
The bird songs make me sore.
I seem the only thing on earth that cares
'Cause Al ain't here no more!

And him so strong, and yet so quick he died,
And after year on year
When we had always trailed it side by side,
He went—and left me here!

We loved each other in the way men do
And never spoke about it, Al and me.
But we both *knowed,* and knowin' it so true
Was more than any woman's kiss could be.

.....

The range is empty and the trails are blind,
And I don't seem but half myself today.
I wait to hear him ridin' up behind
And feel his knee rub mine the good old way.[16]

Are we to believe that for most of the year this cowboy, who had such deep emotional ties to his partner, was totally asexual? While the autobiographies on which the cowboy literature is based do not of course mention sex among men, cowboy humor suggests a different view. In some limericks gathered from elderly cowboys, two suggest homoerotic elements:

There was a cowboy named Hooter,
Who packed a big six-shooter,
When he grabbed the stock
It became hard as a rock,
As a peace-maker it couldn't be cuter.

Young cowboys had a great fear,
That old studs once filled with beer,
Completely addle'
They'd throw on a saddle,
And ride them on the rear.[17]

Obviously such things were not unknown among cowboys. But for someone raised during the Victorian era, it was a rare

event that he would reveal his private sexual behavior. Yet there are a few such documents. One early twentieth-century Oklahoma cowboy, who decades afterward moved to California and became a sailor, later recalled how the trail boss urged each cowboy to pair off with one other man: "Always take another puncher along," urged the boss, "In a cow outfit, you and your fellows are members one of another." In his private correspondence, this cowboy confessed that these partnerships often eventually became sexual: "At first pairing they'd solace each other gingerly and, as bashfulness waned, manually [i.e., mutual masturbation]. As trust in mutual good will matured, they'd graduate to the ecstatically comforting 69 [mutual oral sex]. . . . Folk know not how cock-hungry men get." He pointed out how sex on the range was mostly mutual masturbation and oral sex, but it was not limited to what he called "cockulation." Attraction for another cowboy, he wrote, "was at first rooted in admiration, infatuation, a sensed need of an ally, loneliness and yearning, but it regularly ripened into love."[18]

Another man remembered that in his youth in the early 1900s he worked in an isolated all-male Western logging camp. Unlike the open range, here the group of nine men were snowed in for months during the severe winter. He wrote, "not one of us could be considered effeminate, neurotic or abnormal. Yet all but two engaged in homosexual activities. . . . The popular method, preferred by the majority, was sodomy, and it was in this logging camp that I was initiated into the discomforts, adjustments and ecstasies of this form of sexual activity." He continued:

> After the logging experience followed two years in a gold mining camp where some 55 men were employed. . . . Restlessness among the crew evidenced itself by a raid on the vaseline supply in the first aid cabinet, of which I was custodian. Here again, I was to learn the error of assuming that those engaged in homosexual activities were of a specific type. Out of the 55 men in camp, conservatively over half were getting relief from one another. The brawny, ultra-masculine types invariably started out increasing their sociabilities, taking booze with them when dropping in on different buddies throughout the camp. My time was pretty well monopolized in the

evenings by first one and then another of those inclined towards homosexuality.

Two of the most masculine of the crew (a tram operator and a jackhammer man) soon started pairing off exclusively, moving into a cabin together, even ordering exact duplicates of clothing out of the Montgomery Ward catalog. They were the envy of a number of us.[19]

While it may be questioned how accurate this one man's perception is, this remembrance rings true. In his massive survey of American male sexual behavior in the 1940s, Alfred Kinsey suggested that this type of experience was common. Kinsey pointed out that the highest frequencies of homosexual behavior his research team found anywhere in America were in isolated rural communities in some of the remotest sections of the West. This contrasted with the lowest rates among settled small farming communities, which are much more family oriented than the all-male fringe communities. The Kinsey report concluded:

> There is a fair amount of sexual contact among the older males in Western rural areas. It is a type of homosexuality which was probably common among pioneers and outdoor men in general. Today it is found among ranchmen, cattle men, prospectors, lumbermen, and farming groups in general—among groups that are virile, physically active. These are men who have faced the rigors of nature in the wild. They live on realities and on a minimum of theory. Such a background breeds the attitude that sex is sex, irrespective of the nature of the partner.[20]

Among such men, Kinsey added, "There is a minimum of personal disturbance or social conflict over such activity."[21] They were men living in a single-sex environment, and most of them were not asexual. They established full relationships, which were evidently no more restricted than male-female relationships in the mainstream of Western culture.

BACHELORS OF THE FRONTIER

How such male relationships operated on the frontier, and even later were accepted as part of society in the rural West, is suggested by an interview I conducted with an elderly woman in

Interior, South Dakota. She has lived her entire life on the homestead that her parents settled in the 1890s. When asked if she remembered any of the pioneer bachelors, she said, "Oh yes, there were many bachelors in the area, especially earlier when the area was newly settled. They never married. Some had a reputation of being a little weird, with very strange ideas." When asked if people thought it strange that they never married, she replied, "Everybody had a 'do your own thing' attitude so people respected each other's individual choice. There weren't that many women around, so it wasn't thought about if they didn't marry, or even show an interest in women."[22]

She then told about Charles Brown (c. 1880–c. 1960) and his roommate, George Carr (c. 1875–1958), neither of whom ever married. Both of them were originally from Iowa. Charles came to homestead when he was about age twenty-nine, bringing his parents with him. George came west by himself, and soon moved onto the Brown farm. They lived together for many years, until Charles moved to California because of bad health in 1936. George stayed another twelve years on the homestead by himself, but eventually got lonely and moved away. The sod house that they lived in has been preserved, and is now a South Dakota historic landmark. My informant remembered Charles as being "a loner," who did not associate much with others beyond his parents and his roommate. George, on the other hand, "was the best cook in the area, and he loved children. In winter he would take neighbor children on sled rides and cook big fried chicken dinners for them. All the neighbors loved him. He was like family, and we respected his different ways." This description is remarkably similar to descriptions in the literature about berdaches.

After talking about George Carr and Charles Brown for a good bit, she thought awhile and said, "The story of these bachelors has never been told." Up to this point I had not mentioned anything about sex, but I gingerly introduced the topic. I expected that a person of her generation might have reacted negatively, but when I asked if these bachelors might have had a homosexual relationship, she answered very matter-of-factly: "People back then didn't talk about *any* kind of sex. So they wouldn't think anything of it." I suggested that if they did have

sex together, such behavior would not have been known about simply because people accepted their living together in a relationship. After a long pause she said, "Now that I think about it, many of them probably were that way. We didn't talk about such things then. It was better than today, when everyone is paranoid about it."

Do we have documentation that George Carr and Charles Brown had a sexual aspect to their relationship? No. How do we prove that homosexual acts actually occurred in these male marriages? To hope to find proof is unrealistic, because private sexual behavior between consenting individuals rarely shows up in the historical record. There were no social scientists scouring the Caribbean and the West doing surveys of the pirates' and frontiersmen's sex lives. We cannot expect more of the historical record. There is, in fact, as the historian Martin Duberman points out, "only a tiny stockpile of historical materials that document the existence of *heterosexuality* in the past. Yet no one claims the minuscule amount of evidence is an accurate gauge of the actual amount of heterosexual activity that took place."[23] The "proof" of genital contact that is wanted to confirm a male marriage is not asked of historians discussing the heterosexuality of women and men who live together for many years, or even of women and men who have ephemeral love relations. The documentation that does exist for these bachelor couples is the same as that for heterosexual couples: These pairs of men on the frontier chose each other as their life companion, and lived with each other devotedly. That is what the historian can demonstrate.[24]

Beyond all this, it is also true that some men went to the frontier specifically *because of* homosexuality. Escaping to the frontier was a common reaction for individuals who were accused of any kind of crime. It was easier to leave than to face a possible jail sentence in their hometown. Someone accused of sodomy, or any related charge like "lewdness" or "gross immorality," would probably behave no differently.

In the earliest settlements, the English colonies enacted sodomy laws. The law code of Virginia in 1610, to cite the earliest case, specified a long list of capital crimes including impious or

treasonous speech, blasphemy, sacrilege, theft, and the "sins of Sodomie." In 1624 Richard Cornish was tried and found guilty of a homosexual attack on another man. Against the protests of a number of the other original (all-male) settlers at Jamestown, the authorities executed him.[25] Cornish was the first of many to die in the English settlements for committing "the sin not to be named among Christians."

Others survived, but only after being tortured by the government. In 1637 in the Plymouth Colony, the first known case of same-sex persecution in New England involved John Allexander and Thomas Roberts. They were convicted of "lewd behavior and unclean carriage one with another, by often spending their seed one upon another, which was proved both by witness & their own confession." Roberts, a servant, was severely whipped, but the instigator Allexander was sentenced "to be severely whipped, and burnt in the shoulder with a hot iron, and to be perpetually banished."[26] Perhaps some of these banished men, as well as the many others accused or even suspected of male-male sex, escaped to join the Indians rather than face the draconian laws of white society.

The historian Jonathan Katz has collected a number of nineteenth-century documents of European men who were exposed as homosexuals in their home countries, and whose response was to escape to the United States. One wrote back to Europe a letter describing his ordeal, and concluding: "In consequence of the disgrace which came upon me in my fatherland I am obliged to reside in America. Even now I am in constant anxiety lest what befell me at home should be discovered here and thus deprive me of the respect of my fellow-men."[27] Another wrote to his brother on the eve of his departure from Denmark, "My nerves have been very bad. . . . I am not heartless, but you will understand how hard it is for me to see any of my family."[28] No doubt some of those accused similarly in the United States went to the frontier, beyond the reaches of the law.

But it was not even necessary that accusations of sodomy be lodged against a person for them to go west. The Danish man just quoted, who had admitted in court his participation in a homosexual act, first settled in a small town in Illinois, where he was quite unhappy. He wrote back to his brother in disgust:

"So far the young ladies have been desperately wooing me in a very energetic American way. . . . I shall never really be at ease in this place. The town is too small, people are too inquisitive and prying and—there is too much religion. . . . I demand peace in my own territory. That I shall never get here. . . . I keep as much to myself as possible, but sometimes it is undeniable that I feel a little closed in." Reacting against the oppressive conformity of small-town life in the Midwest, like so many others this man went west. He eventually settled in San Francisco, but he wrote late in his life about his past years in the United States: "I have been cast from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the Mexican Gulf to the border of Canada."[29] It was natural for someone with something to hide to move to the transient areas on the frontier.

FRONTIERSMEN'S CONTACTS WITH BERDACHES

Having established that male-male sex occurred on the frontier, it is reasonable to conclude that some of the frontiersmen who made contact with American Indians most likely had more than a passing interest in berdaches. From early Spanish and French accounts, knowledge of berdaches had already spread among frontiersmen. These accounts, as we have seen from previous chapters, associated berdachism with sodomy. One of the earliest references in English to the direct observation of berdaches was written by Nicholas Biddle in an official journal entry of the Lewis and Clark expedition. On December 22, 1804, he noted that they saw "men dressed in squars [squaws'] clothes" among the Mandan Indians. Biddle later wrote, in explanation of this practice among the Hidatsas, that "If a boy shows any symptoms of effeminacy or girlish inclinations he is put among the girls, dressed in their way, brought up with them, and sometimes married to men. They submit as women to all the duties of a wife. I have seen them—the French call them Berdaches."[30]

In the years after the Lewis and Clark expedition, there was an intense interest in the new lands acquired in the vast Louisiana Purchase. Most of the information that Americans received about Western Indians came from the French sources, and the

accounts that mentioned berdachism emphasized same-sex behavior. The translated account of La Salle's expedition, published in 1814 in New York, characterized Indian men as having "a brutish sensuality," loving "boys above women."[31] A white explorer who had spent some time among the Kansa Indians reinforced this view in 1819. He wrote that "Sodomy is a crime not uncommonly committed; many of the subjects of it are publically known, and do not appear to be despised, or to excite disgust. One of them was pointed out to us." The explorer described this person as dressing like a woman, having long hair, and doing woman's work.[32]

The early comments usually express a matter-of-fact acceptance and a curious interest in berdaches. Thomas McKenny, founder of the United States Office of Indian Affairs, had learned all about berdachism from frontiersmen even before he went west. The fact that McKenny was so well informed indicates that frontiersmen knew quite a bit about berdachism. In 1824 he wrote about the Chippewa "man-woman." From a dream, he explained to readers of his book, such a person "considers that he is bound to impose upon himself, as the only means of appeasing his manito [guiding spirit], all the exterior of a woman. . . . It [is] impossible to distinguish them from the women . . . and [they] even go through the ceremony of marriage! Nothing can induce these men-women to put off these imitative garbs. . . . [They] live, and die, confirmed in the belief that they are acting the part which the dream . . . pointed out to them as indispensable."[33]

Another widely read author of life among Native Americans was Alexander Maximilian, a prince from the German state of Wied who traveled in the West from 1832 to 1834. He wrote that all Indian tribes had berdaches, and that the Crows in particular had many of them. From his time spent among this tribe he concluded that the Crows "exceed all the other tribes in unnatural practices."[34]

An even more famous writer was George Catlin, whose eight years' travel in the West, as well as his paintings of Indian scenes, gave his writings a particular authority. Catlin's book on Indians was so popular that by the 1860s it had gone through ten editions, and even to the end of the century was one of the main

sources by which people learned about aboriginal Americans. Among the Sauk and Fox in the 1830s, Catlin's attendance at the "feast of the Berdache" publicized the custom. After making it clear that the warriors doing the dancing were the sexual partners of the berdache, Catlin concludes his description with a suddenly vehement comment: "This is one of the most unaccountable and disgusting customs that I have ever met in the Indian country. . . . For further account of it I am constrained to refer the reader to the country where it is practiced, and where I should wish that it might be extinguished before it be more fully recorded."[35] Whether these sentiments were Catlin's personal views is uncertain, since he might have felt constrained to insert a negative comment to prevent controversy. Nevertheless, he did emphasize the berdache by drawing a sketch of the dance in his book, and he had practically invited homosexually inclined men to go west and see berdaches for themselves.

Another traveler, who made similar records of his travels but in a more positive vein, was William Drummond Stewart. Visiting the Blackfoot and Crow in the 1840s, he openly admired "a handsome youth, who was attached to the service of the rest. Having refused to take part in the warlike feats of the men, he had previously been consigned, under the name of Broadashe, to the society, the duties, and the dress of the women. There are youths of this description in every camp, resembling in office the eunuchs of the seraglio. Enjoying the flavor of the partisan, Broadashe was a follower, together with two squaws, of this band."[36] This last sentence described the berdache's sexual role, of which the admiring white visitor was well aware.

Throughout the frontier era, references to berdaches continued to appear. Some of these reports were from army officers. Henry Schoolcraft's survey of all of the tribes in the United States includes a reference indexed under "hermaphrodite" from a United States Army surveyor in 1849. Referring to a berdache who was most likely Papago or Yuma, a Lieutenant Whipple mentioned on meeting this person that "she cohabits with a man."[37]

Another army officer, William Hammond, disabused his readers of the idea that berdaches were physically hermaphroditic. In 1851, when he was stationed in Laguna Pueblo, he met a person called by the Indians *mujerado* (Spanish for "wom-

aned"), and when he visited Acoma Pueblo he met another one. The medical doctor did a physical inspection of both berdaches, and reported them both to have normal male genitals which were, however, somewhat "atrophied." Hammond claimed that the Indians intentionally demasculinized these individuals so that they would receive anal intercourse: "A *mujerado* is an essential person in the saturnalia or orgies, in which these Indians . . . indulge. He is the chief passive agent in the pederastic ceremonies, which form so important a part in the performances. These take place in the Spring of every year." Every pueblo, he was told, had at least one *mujerado,* and toward them "the Indians observed a great deal of reserve and mystery. . . . He is protected and supported by the pueblo, is held in some sort of honor, and need not work unless he chooses." He performs his daytime activities with the women instead of the men, "but this is more in accordance with his wishes and inclinations than from any desire on their part to avoid him."[38]

Stephen Powers was another popular writer who emphasized that berdaches were physically normal males. In a series of articles on California Indians in the popular magazine *Overland Monthly* in 1871–72, Powers indicated that whites commonly knew of the tradition. Frontier settlers advanced several theories to him to account for the phenomenon, including that the *i-wamusp* were forced to dress like women as a penalty for cowardice in battle, or that it was a punishment for "self-abuse." Powers pointed out that those theories were not true. Instead, he wrote, "All this folly is voluntary; that these men choose this unnatural life merely to escape from the duties and responsibilities of manhood." It is, he concluded, "another illustration of the strange capacity which the California Indians develop for doing morbid and abnormal things."[39]

Since white visitors easily learned about berdaches and about the acceptance of male-male sexual relationships among Indians, it is obvious that there might develop deep associations between berdaches and frontiersmen who actually lived with a tribe. The earliest evidence of this close association is from Peter Grant, a frontiersman who lived among the Sauteux Chippewa at the beginning of the nineteenth century. He admitted in his memoirs that he had known several berdaches. He did not denounce them, but on the contrary mentioned the Indian view

that they were "respected as saints or beings in some degree inspired." Grant evidenced a cheerful demeanor toward them, remarking that they were "stout strapping fellows."[40] John Tanner, a white man living among the Chippewa in the 1820s, even admitted to being sexually approached by a berdache! He met one of these *a-go-kwa,* whom he defined as men "who make themselves women." He reported, in his widely read autobiography:

> There are several of this sort among most, if not all the Indian tribes. . . . This creature, called Ozaw-wen-dib (the yellow head) was now near fifty years old, and had lived with many husbands. . . . She soon let me know she had come a long distance to see me, and with the hope of living with me. She often offered herself [sexually] to me, but not being discouraged with one refusal, she repeated her disgusting advances until I was almost driven from the lodge. . . . [Another Indian] only laughed at the embarrassment and shame which I evinced. . . . At length, despairing of success in her addresses to me, or being too much pinched by hunger, which was commonly felt in our lodge, she disappeared.

Four days later, Yellow Head returned with food for the hungry lodge, and Tanner was not too reluctant to accompany the berdache on a two-day journey to another lodge. Tanner continued his narrative upon the arrival at Wa-ge-to-te's lodge, where he ate as much as he wished.

> Here also, I found myself relieved from the persecutions of the A-go-kwa, which had become intolerable. Wa-ge-to-te, who had two wives, married her. This introduction of a new intimate into the family of Wa-ge-to-te, occasioned some laughter and produced some ludicrous incidents, but was attended with less uneasiness and quarreling than would have been the bringing in of a new wife of the female sex.[41]

Another writer who reported being approached sexually by Indians was Victor Tixier, who lived with the Osages in 1839–40. When bathing in the river with Osage men, Tixier reported, "The warriors bothered us with indiscreet questions. . . . If we swam along beside them, they asked us to let them examine our bodies; we had to tell them very sternly to be of more decent behavior." Tixier was quite irritated by their "habits of sodomy,

which their curiosity seemed to announce and which they exercise, according to what they say, on their prisoners. These sons of nature are extremely lascivious."[42]

Popular writers like Tixier, Tanner, and Catlin, even if critical of berdaches on the surface, created an awareness among homosexually inclined men in the United States that they could find a life of acceptance and affectional fulfillment by joining the Indians. Beyond this, fictional literature stressed themes of intimate association between frontiersmen and Indians. No books of fiction were more widely read in the nineteenth century than James Fenimore Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales. The main character, Natty Bumppo, avoided women and felt more comfortable living isolated from them on the frontier. He gave his devotion to his male Indian companion Chingachook. While their relationship was of course presented as chaste, it is not a distortion to say that it was an Indian–white male marriage.[43]

The popularization of this Indian-white companionship, combined with the factual statements about berdaches in the press, cannot be totally discounted as a motive for at least some unmarried young men who went west. Demographers who study migration movements analyze them in terms of "push-pull" factors. A male who was erotically attracted to another male might be "pushed" out of his settled hometown because of fears of discovery by relatives and townfolk, and because of frustration at not being able to establish a relationship with another male. He might be "pulled" to the frontier by the knowledge that it was almost completely an all-male fringe society, and that "sodomy" was associated with the Indians. This is not to suggest that most men went west with these more or less conscious notions. But it does suggest that those historians who do not consider this motivation ignore an important facet of frontier life.[44]

BERDACHES' ATTRACTION TO NON-INDIANS

If we can conclude that white men desiring all-male associations may have been pushed in the direction of the frontier, there were also factors leading Indian societies to absorb them. During

times when there was no warfare with whites (and sometimes even when there was), Indian peoples often adopted escaping settlers. Faced with their own declining populations because of the ravages of warfare and disease, many groups welcomed the addition of healthy adult men of any race. Given the liberality of native customs of adoption, tribes were able to absorb outsiders into the kinship system.[45]

Again, this kind of phenomenon is hard to document. If they lived out their lives with the Indians, such persons were lost to the historical record. The main way that they showed up again was if whites recaptured them. Many of these recaptives fiercely resisted being taken back to U.S. society.[46] And if they did come back into white society, they would not admit that they had been married to an Indian (which was bad enough) who was a male (which was worse!). The same thing would apply to white traders who lived among the Indians. Men who joined a tribe either married an Indian woman or perhaps took a berdache as a wife (or maybe both).

A berdache provided, in fact, a very attractive situation for an outsider joining a new culture. As noted earlier, the berdache's prosperous household offered the comforts of home, and a willing spouse. Berdaches may have become more prosperous by having sex with white men for money. By the 1930s berdaches among the California Pomo were charging twenty-five cents for sex. While the source does not state who their customers were, we can speculate that Indians were not the customers since cash was not often used among them. We may surmise that the berdaches, like prostitutes anywhere, got their business from men with money.[47]

Berdaches had an extra incentive to marry outsiders. Since the husband of the berdache often got a lot of kidding, the outsider would be somewhat insulated from this and thus would more likely stay with a berdache. I could see this operating in my own case during fieldwork, as berdaches became attracted to me. Because I did not have relatives on the reservation, it would be easier for me to dismiss any gossip or joking that came with my association with a berdache. Some of my berdache informants made a strong case that I should stay with them on the reservation. In the case of one person it was quite difficult

for me to convince him that I had to leave.

If berdaches tried so diligently to attract me as a husband, with the same kind of persistence that so exasperated John Tanner, I surmise that our two experiences are part of a continuum. I know of berdaches now having relationships with non-Indian men, living as couples on reservations and accepted by their families. I would be surprised if they are the first generation to do so.

The best existing documentation of a love relationship between a frontiersman and a male Indian goes back much further than the present, and even long before the Leatherstocking Tales. In northeast Florida, a truly tragic tale unfolds in the Spanish record of 1566. The Spanish there were dependent on a Frenchman to interpret the language of the Guale Indians. How this man came to reside among the natives is unclear, but he lived with the eldest son of the chief. He knew their language better than the Spanish initially did. Though the Frenchman was paid by the Spanish, there was no love lost between him and the colonial authorities. The Spanish referred to him as "a great Sodomite."

Relations reached a low point when the Spanish discovered that the Frenchman was warning the Indians not to convert to Catholicism. He had, according to a report by the Spanish governor, "spit on the cross many times before the Indians, scoffing at the Christians." The Spanish therefore decided to have him killed. But they did it secretly because "the son of the cacique [chief] had more authority than his father, and loved that interpreter very much." The Spanish knew that if they killed the beloved interpreter, the Indians would be angered and might renew their resistance to colonial intrusion.

The Spanish concocted a plot, telling the interpreter that they would pay him well if he went with them for a few days as interpreter in another area. The governor also issued a secret order, commanding the soldiers on the journey to "have that interpreter killed with great secrecy, as he was a Sodomite." Though the interpreter agreed to go, upon his departure "the son of the cacique showed much sorrow because the interpreter was going, and prayed him, weeping, to return at once."[48]

The tragedy of this man's death is directly attributable to the

authority of the Spanish government. To survive, male-male relationships had to exist away from colonial control. It is precisely this fact that explains the scarcity of historical evidence of Indian-white male marriages on the frontier. In the late eighteenth century, however, the English frontier explorer James Adair mentioned one of these. He heard from the Creek Indians about "a lusty young fellow, who was charged with being more effeminate than became a warrior." This young tribesman closely associated with a white man who lived nearby, "an opulent and helpless German, by whom they supposed he might have been corrupted."[49] Who this German was, how he got to the frontier, and what his life was like with his effeminate Indian friend is lost to the record. The Creeks, who did not have a recognized berdache status and who disliked this behavior, reported it to the visiting white man. But for tribes who respected berdachism, how many would report such a relationship?

More often, people simply did not write about such involvements. One cowboy included in his reminiscences, written in 1903, a mysterious statement about an incident with a group of cowboys in the 1880s. He wrote simply, "The four of us left with the cows became occupied by a controversy over the sex of a young Indian—a Blackfoot—riding a cream-colored pony . . . distinguished by beads and beaver fur trimmings in the hair. . . . The young Indian was not over sixteen years of age, with remarkable features." The cowboy thought this person might have been a female, but since they were not sure another cowboy "took exception to the decision and rode alongside the young Indian, pretending to admire the long plaits of hair, toyed with the beads, pinched and patted the young Blackfoot."

The others worried that the Indian might take offense at these erotic suggestions, but the Indian did not resist. Instead, when the cowboy asked if the youth wanted to be "his squaw," the Indian gave "a broad smile, and in fair English said, 'Me buck.'"[50] To what extent did the cowboys become "occupied," and why would one of them remember this incident decades later, if it involved a merely casual encounter? Was this the author's way of relating a sexual episode he might have had with this attractive Indian "with remarkable features"? The sources do not reveal, but they at least suggest how easy it was for white males on the frontier to meet berdaches. The berdache's smile

indicated a friendliness toward the cowboys that might have ripened into a relationship.

Ironically, the best description we have of how one of these relationships might have begun does not involve an American Indian. It concerns Hawaiians, another native people whose *mahu* tradition is similar to the berdache. Charles Warren Stoddard, a young San Francisco writer who communicated his love for males to Walt Whitman, went to Hawaii in the 1860s. In 1869 he published a short story in the *Overland Monthly* that, as is clear from his letters to Whitman, is based on his personal experience in Hawaii. It is remarkable that such a homoerotic tale as "A South Sea Idyl" was accepted in so prominent a magazine. To get the flavor of his feelings, his story bears reprinting in part. Immediately upon meeting a young man named Kanaana, Stoddard recalled,

I knew I was to have an experience with this young scion of a race of chiefs. Sure enough, I have had it. He continued to regard me steadily, without embarrassment. He seated himself before me; I felt myself at the mercy of one whose calm analysis was questioning every motive of my soul. This sage inquirer was, perhaps, sixteen years old. His eye was so earnest and so honest, I could but return his look. I saw a round, full, rather girlish face; lips ripe and expressive . . . eyes perfectly glorious—regular almonds—with the mythical lashes "that sweep," etc., etc. The smile which presently transfigured his face was of that nature that flatters you into submission against your will.

Having weighed me in his balance—and you may be sure his instincts didn't cheat him (they don't do that sort of thing)—he placed his two hands on my two knees, and declared, "I was his best friend, as he was mine; I must come at once to his house, and there live always with him." What could I do but go? He pointed me to his lodge, across the river, saying, "There was his home, and mine."

. . . . . .

Thereupon I renounced all the follies of this world, actually hating civilization—feeling entirely above the formalities of society. I resolved on the spot to be a barbarian, and, perhaps, dwell forever and ever in this secluded spot. . . . How strangely I was situated: alone in a wilderness, among barbarians; my bosom friend, who was hugging me like a young bear, not able to speak one syllable of English, and I very shaky on a few bad phrases in his tongue. . . . [Yet,] if it is a question how long a man may withstand the seductions of na-

ture, and the consolations and conveniences of the state of nature, I have solved it in one case; for I was as natural as possible in about three days.[51]

For reasons that he himself did not understand, Stoddard later returned to San Francisco. In 1870 he wrote to Whitman, "I know there is but one hope for me. I must get in amongst people who are not afraid of instincts and who scorn hypocrisy. I am numbed with the frigid manners of the Christians; barbarism has given me the fullest joy of my life and I long to return to it and be satisfied."[52] Stoddard's testimony deserves attention because it explains the reactions that a young man joining the Indians might have felt. If Stoddard had truly fit into Hawaiian society, he would have disappeared and we never would have read "A South Sea Idyl." But the feelings he expressed give us some perception of what might have occurred on the American frontier.

It is realistic to conclude from the available evidence that some of the frontiersmen who interacted with Indians also interacted affectionally with berdaches. If frontiersmen could have adapted to a marriage with another masculine man, then surely it would have been less psychologically difficult for some of them to adjust to being the husband of an androgynous berdache wife. Such experiences were a transitory possibility, however, with the establishment in the West of the authority of church and state.

9 *Of Bibles and Bureaus: Indian Acculturation and Decline of the Berdache Tradition*

Male marriages, and berdaches themselves, could not survive undisturbed when representatives of the established social order arrived. Their history after the frontier era is part of the wider story of the effect of Anglo-American dominance on American Indian cultures generally. It is a story of cultural repression by the church and the state, leading to the decline of the old ways, and an acculturation to the new alien values. But it is also a story that is marked by a surprising continued persistence of Native American traditions, even into the contemporary era.

During the 1840s the United States established its clear title to the West by forcing Britain and Mexico to give up their claims to the vast area between Texas and the Northwest Coast. California and Oregon were the real prizes. Especially after the discovery of gold, white settlers began crossing the Great Plains to get to the Pacific coastal regions. Unlike the earlier period, when individual whites went to live or trade with the Indians, by about 1850 massive numbers of settlers were moving to the far West. In the decades following, the interior gradually came under white control as successive waves of miners, ranchers, and farmers sought to possess the land.

This invasion of their lands led Western Indians to react in much the same way as eastern Native Americans had done in the previous century: by armed defense of their homelands. Such clashes were usually settled not by total military defeat of an Indian group, but by a negotiated settlement between the United States and the tribal government. These settlements were certified by treaties, which gradually restricted Indian lands to areas called reservations. In return, treaties guaranteed that tribes retained most rights of self-rule within their remaining reservation lands.

By the 1870s, after most Western tribes had been settled on reservations, the government began to cancel promises made in the treaties. Congress stopped making new treaties with Indians in 1871, and the Supreme Court ruled that Congress had the right to contradict treaties—without getting the consent of the tribes. Government officials threatened to abrogate the treaties altogether, leaving Indians with no protections at all. Though Congress did not do so, in 1885 it did grant federal courts the right to prosecute major crimes that occurred on reservations. This abolition of the power of tribes to maintain their own justice systems violated numerous treaties. The Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Kagama* (1885) that Indian tribes were not states or nations, only "local dependent communities." Such a change was a significant demotion of status from the national recognition and powers of self-government promised in the treaties.[1]

In 1887 Congress passed the Indian Allotment Act, by which it hoped to do away with reservations by dividing the remaining lands into individually allotted plots. Since land was allotted to male "heads of households," this meant that women and berdaches lost ownership rights. Non-citizen Indians became almost totally powerless without the protection of their treaty guarantees and their tribal governments. They were left with a legal status called "nationals," which meant they were dependent wards under the paramount authority of Congress. By the end of the nineteenth century the federal government held virtually unlimited power over American Indians. Indians' position was in fact that of colonial subjects.[2]

Allotment and forced assimilation became the hallmarks of United States Indian policy, and as more land was lost each reservation became smaller and its resources overtaxed. The resulting poverty and despair within the reservations justified treating Indians as helpless and dependent wards of the government. The power of the federal bureaucracy over the daily lives of native peoples became virtually unchallenged. Native religions were outlawed, and though this violated the First Amendment's provision for freedom of religion, Indians were not citizens and so had no protection. White social and economic mores were enforced, and children were forcibly taken away

from their families to be placed in distant boarding schools. Such policies were rationalized on the grounds that the only solution for the "Indian Problem" was for Indians to be absorbed into the United States' melting pot and eventually to become citizens just like everyone else. The policy of forced assimilation ignored the fact that Native Americans had never asked to be assimilated.

Year by year, tribal governments were allowed less and less power, while local agents of the federal Office of Indian Affairs exercised more complete control. Pioneer ethnographer George B. Grinnell attested to the reality of life on the reservation when he wrote in 1899: "An Indian agent has absolute control of affairs on his reservation . . . more nearly absolute than anything else that we in this country know of. . . . The courts protect citizens; but the Indian is not a citizen, and nothing protects him. Congress has the sole power to order how he shall live, and where."[3]

GOVERNMENT SUPPRESSION OF BERDACHES

One of the aspects of American Indian life that the assimilationist program attacked was sexuality. In order to "civilize" the Indian, it was felt necessary to enforce the same standards as in white communities. United States government officials mirrored the anti-sexual attitudes of missionaries and public opinion, and they had the power to enforce changes. For example, in describing some sexually explicit ceremonial dances among the Hopi Indians, the government superintendent, P. T. Lonegran, wrote to the commissioner of Indian affairs on December 7, 1915, saying "These dances are too loathsome and repugnant for me to describe. . . . They are vulgar and I am almost shamed to send them through the mails." Prominent in these dances were the antics of the clown dancers, who used both homosexual and heterosexual humor as a way of providing comic relief in the otherwise serious ceremonies. Since the Hopi did not see sex as dirty or antireligious, and did not separate humor from ceremony, they must have been confounded by the whites' suppression of sex.

This confusion can be discerned in a Hopi clown's reactions to the arrogant actions of Emory Marks, the government principal of Oraibi School on the reservation. Marks wrote to the commissioner on December 11, 1920, recounting with pride how he had interrupted a dance. When he saw a Hopi clown display a huge artificial penis, to the merriment of the crowd, "I went up to him and stopped the performance . . . and told him that if he ever did a thing like that again, I would put him in jail. He told me that he did not know it was wrong, that it was a Hopi custom."[4]

Berdaches were also a target of this suppression. Since in many tribes berdaches were often shamans, the government's attack on traditional healing practices disrupted their lives. Among the Klamaths, the government agent's prohibition of curing ceremonials in the 1870s and 1880s required shamans to operate underground. The berdache shaman White Cindy continued to do traditional healing, curing people for decades despite the danger of arrest.[5]

But the government also reacted specifically against the berdaches. Probably the most direct attempts to force berdaches to conform to standard men's roles can be seen in actions by the government Indian agents. As early as the 1870s the agent among the Hidatsas forced a berdache to wear men's clothing and cut his hair short like a white man's. The berdache fled to the Crow reservation, where he found sanctuary.[6] Even the Crows, who had consistently been allies of the United States, were not safe from these governmental intrusions. Dr. A. B. Holder, the reservation physician, wrote in 1889 of the *badé* producing "sexual orgasm by taking the male organ of the active party in the [*badé's*] lips. . . . Of all the many varieties of sexual perversion, this, it seems to me, is the most debased that could be conceived of."

Holder knew of at least five berdaches at the Crow reservation headquarters. One boy at the agency boarding school was repeatedly discovered wearing female attire, and the officials punished him. But rather than conform, he escaped from the school and lived among traditional Crows as a berdache. Holder refused to believe the berdache had high status, but only attributed the other Crows' toleration to their "debased standard . . . showing that there is no bottom to the pit into which the sexual

passion, perverted and debased, may sink a creature once he has become its slave."[7]

Such attitudes were reflected in policies of the local government agent. In 1902, an anthropologist who visited the Crow reservation briefly mentioned that a few years previously an Indian agent tried without success to force *badés* to wear men's clothing.[8] Another anthropologist, arriving five years later, met the Crow Osh-Tisch ("Finds Them and Kills Them") and described this fifty-year-old berdache: "Dressed as a woman, he might have passed for one except for his affectedly piping voice. Agents, I learnt, had repeatedly tried to make him put on masculine clothing, but the other Crow protested, saying it was against his nature."[9]

Such offhand comments, typical of the brevity often accorded the topic in ethnographic accounts, leave one yearning to know more about these historic events. Fortunately, I was able to discover fuller accounts by interviews with Indian people themselves. Joe Medicine Crow, an elder in the Baptist church on the Montana reservation of the Crows, is also keeper of the tribal history among traditionalists. He remembered Osh-Tisch, who died in 1929 when Joe was seven years old. When I asked about the controversy over Osh-Tisch's clothing, he did not answer but told me to meet him the following day on the grounds of the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices. I arrived the next day and observed that the BIA building was surrounded by huge oak trees. As we walked among the trees I realized why Joe had asked me to meet there. He explained the incident with the BIA agents:

> One agent in the late 1890s was named Briskow, or maybe it was Williamson. He did more crazy things here. He tried to interfere with Osh-Tisch, who was the most respected *badé*. The agent incarcerated the *badés,* cut off their hair, made them wear men's clothing. He forced them to do manual labor, planting these trees that you see here on the BIA grounds. The people were so upset with this that Chief Pretty Eagle came into Crow Agency, and told Briskow to leave the reservation. It was a tragedy, trying to change them. Briskow was crazy.[10]

Considering how little power Indians had on their reservations at the beginning of the century, the strength of the Crows' pro-

test, forcing the agent to resign, is remarkable. The fact that the Indians saw an attempt to force the berdache to change as "crazy" tells us much about the high status Osh-Tisch held.[11]

Such native pressure could not be brought to bear when Indian youth were taken off the reservation to boarding schools far from their homeland. In an effort to wipe out Indian culture before children matured, government educational programs focused on teaching students to be like white people. What happened to a berdache in boarding school is indicated by a Navajo woman who remembered being taken to Carlisle Indian School, in Pennsylvania. Her cousin, a *nadle,* was also taken there. Since he was dressed as a girl, school officials assumed he was female and placed him in the girl's dormitory. The Navajo students protected him, and he went undiscovered.

Later, however, there was a lice infestation. The white teachers personally scrubbed all the girls, and were shocked when they found out that the *nadle* was male. The Navajo woman said, "They were very upset. He was taken from the school, and he never returned again. They would not tell us what happened to him, and we never saw him again. We were very sad that our cousin was gone." The family still does not know if the boy was sent to another school, or to prison, or was killed. After all these years, the Navajo woman gets upset thinking about her cousin who was taken away.[12]

Contemporary Indian androgynous males who were taken to government schools remember being forced to participate in boys' games and activities, and to dress like other boys. They recall this coercion by the teachers as one of the worst things about growing up.[13]

The Canadian government also made attempts to wipe out the berdache tradition. A Kwakiutl chief in British Columbia remembered what happened when his berdache lover was forced to take on a man's role about 1900: "The Indian agent wrote to Victoria [the provincial government], telling the officials what she was doing [dressing as female]. She was taken to Victoria, and the policeman took her clothes off and found she was a man, so they gave him a suit of clothes and cut off his hair and sent him back home. When I saw him again, he was a man. He was no more my sweetheart."[14] The change from feminine

to masculine pronouns indicates that the forced change of clothing and social role could cause the berdache to lose sexual partners as well as social status. Though this chief did not hesitate to detail his love life with the berdache when she was cross-dressing, he did not feel it appropriate to continue the relationship after she took on a man's role The government's policies thus had a social as well as a sexual impact on the berdache.

MISSIONARIES' IMPACT ON BERDACHES

The emotional torment of the berdache must have been severe. Among some tribes, the condemnation by whites led berdaches to commit suicide.[15] Indians could not help but be affected when they heard whites refer to berdachism as "the most repugnant of all their practices," or "a shameful custom,"[16] or, as a traveler among the Papagos in 1909–10 alluded to it, an "unnatural vice." That writer recounted that "Several startling instances were told me. . . . Even a married man with full grown daughters was subject to this depravity."[17] But whatever the influence of whites in general, it was missionaries who had the greatest impact on Indians.

Along with the government agent, it was the missionary on a reservation who held the real power over Indian people's lives. These clergy had a stern sense of Christian duty, and endeavored to lift the unconverted to what they felt was a higher and better plane of spiritual life. The missionaries were characterized by a strong belief in the superiority of their own way of life. Unlike the frontiersmen, who often came west to get away from the restrictions of Euroamerican culture, the missionary came as its exemplar. They remained so convinced of the need for Christian civilization that they sought to spread their culture to non-Western peoples everywhere.

This meant that the missionary actually went into Indian areas with two goals: to teach the Christian religion, and to westernize the way of life. In its most extreme ethnocentric form, everything Western was sanctioned as the will of God, while everything belonging to the indigenous culture was evil. A Christian mission, therefore, could bring great disruption

into a non-Western society. It was in many ways a deliberate means of political control, an efficient means of controlling colonial peoples. The introduction of Western values, technology, and material culture rapidly challenged the traditional order of life. Native American populations split into factions as those who converted to Christianity began to condemn traditionalists.[18]

Beginning with the early French presence in North America, missionaries tried to prevent male-male sex. They even attacked the close special friendships among native men, in which, according to one Jesuit writer, "there is, or may be, much real vice. . . . Missionaries suppressed attachments of this kind on account of the abuses which they feared would result."[19] As with the Spanish, those few missionaries who generally took an understanding view of native culture still condemned berdachism. For example, the Baptist missionary Isaac McCoy, who expressed much more sympathy for Indians than most other clergy, in 1840 described meeting a berdache among the Osages thusly: "One of these wretches was pointed out to me. He appeared to be about twenty five years of age, was tall, lean, and of a ghost-like appearance. His presence was so disgusting, and the circumstances of the case so unpleasant, that I spoke not a word to him, and made few inquiries about him. He was said to be in a declining state of health, and certainly his death would not have been lamented."[20]

A Lakota medicine man told me of the pressures put on *winktes* in the 1920s and 1930s:

> When the people began to be influenced by the missions and the boarding schools, a lot of them forgot the traditional ways and the traditional medicine. Then they began to look down on the *winkte* and lose respect. The missionaries and the government agents said *winktes* were no good, and tried to get them to change their ways. Some did, and put on men's clothing. But others, rather than change, went out and hanged themselves. I remember the sad stories that were told about this.[21]

Likewise, another Sioux traditionalist reported:

> By the 1940s, after more Indians had been educated in white schools, or had been taken away in the army, they lost the traditions of re-

spect for *winktes*. The missionaries condemned *winktes*, telling families that if something bad happened, it was because of their associating with a *winkte*. They would not accept *winktes* into the cemetery, saying "their souls are lost." Missionaries had a lot of power on the reservation, so the *winktes* were ostracized by many of the Christianized Indians.[22]

Among the Crows, missionaries also had an impact. The leading elder medicine man of the Crows, Thomas Yellowtail (now in his eighties), told me: "When the Baptist missionary Peltotz arrived in 1903, he condemned our traditions, including the *badé*. He told congregation members to stay away from Osh-Tisch and the other *badés*. He continued to condemn Osh-Tisch until his death in the late 1920s. That may be the reason why no others took up the *badé* role after Osh-Tisch died."[23] Perhaps the most dramatic change occurred among the Navajos, where traditionally berdaches received such high respect. As early as the 1930s, when anthropologist W. W. Hill recorded numerous reverent praises of *nadle*, he also noted one informant saying, "The *nadle* are not so much respected nowadays. The older attitude is giving way to one of ridicule. . . . In recent times some of the school boys made fun of the woman's dress of Kla [a *nadle*], and he put on his pants"—began to dress as a man.[24]

Navajo *nadle* were beginning to realize that white society considered them "queer," and the object of jokes rather than respect.[25] By the late 1940s anthropologists were reporting that the remaining berdaches were all middle-aged or older: "It may be that the bachelors in their thirties who live in various communities today are [secretly berdaches] . . . who fear the ridicule of white persons and so do not change clothing."[26]

INDIANS STOP TALKING ABOUT BERDACHISM

How did berdaches respond to such drastic cultural changes forced on them? One of the most obvious reactions was to stop talking to white people about the tradition, and to do everything possible to avoid mention of the subject. One of W. W. Hill's Navajo informants was a well-known *nadle* named Kini-

pai. While Kinipai answered questions "cheerfully and readily" about Navajo culture in general, when Hill asked about *nadle,* "The result was that the informant gave instant evidence of acute emotional distress. She was visibly upset, very nervous, kept her eyes on the ground during the whole recital, kept rubbing her hands together, and squirming. She lost her voice completely for a few moments and when she began to talk, spoke in a whisper, and her accounts and her answers were so incoherent that the interpreter had trouble in getting the sense and was forced to question her repeatedly."[27]

Indians being questioned by anthropologists sometimes complain that the nosy whites cannot take an obvious hint to avoid certain subjects. One particularly insensitive interviewer was Leslie Spier, who did fieldwork among the Klamaths in 1925 and 1926. Not only did Spier snidely characterize berdaches as "psychologically abnormal," but he was arrogant as well. One of Spier's informants, then in his sixties, had been a berdache in his teens and twenties, but had given up dressing as a berdache by the 1890s (Spier did not think to ask why). In response to Spier's inquiries, the Klamath falsely claimed that he had once been married to a woman, and his wife had died twenty years ago. It evidently did not occur to the anthropologist that the Indian might have lied to prevent further questioning. When Spier asked why he had never remarried, the Indian replied simply, "Some men like it that way."[28]

Spier's insensitive and nonproductive questioning leaves his conclusion, that berdaches were scorned and taunted by other Klamaths, open to question. Either he did not recognize that Klamaths might have changed their attitudes as a result of white influence, or he did not see that his own obvious antipathy for berdaches might have influenced the responses he received.[29] Even with a group like the Yumas, who clearly respected the berdache's spiritual gift from the dream world, Spier slanted his report by stating that berdachism came about due to "too much dreaming."[30]

This type of prejudice typifies the writings of some other researchers.[31] Even some ethnographers who appreciated the social utility of berdachism still used negative terminology and concepts. George Devereux referred to Mohave homosexuality

as "a social disorder," when his data showed it was far from that. Robert Lowie remarked that the Crows won "the championship in unnatural practices." Other researchers, either through ignorance, embarrassment, or outright prejudice, simply never asked the right questions. Too often, ethnographers either ignored evidence of homosexuality, or only briefly mentioned it as if it were a perversion.[32] In my own research, as I interviewed ethnographers who had spent time among Indians, on more than a few occasions my questions concerning berdaches were met with visible embarrassment.

Another problem is that anthropologists who have gathered good data on sexuality have been reticent to put it in print. This is typified by the writings of Matilda Coxe Stevenson, who ably described the social position of berdaches during her fieldwork at Zuni in the 1890s. Yet when she addressed the question of the berdaches' relationships, she could not bring herself to use such terms as "husband" and "marriage." She would only go so far as to mention that the *lhamana* "allied himself to a man" and remained with him for many years. Yet rather than pursue the nature of this de facto marriage, Stevenson said, "There is a side to the lives of these men which must remain untold. They never marry women, and it is understood that they seldom have any relations with them."[33] Why their relationship "must remain untold" reveals more about Western inhibitions concerning homosexuality than about berdachism itself.

It is not surprising that the Zuni, having been exposed to such attitudes, learned not to mention such things around whites. When Elsie Crews Parsons went to Zuni later, in 1916, she did try to get more information about one of these marriages between a berdache and a man, and reported, "The 'marriage' was discussed with me as an economic arrangement, and with not the slightest hint of physical acts of perversion on the part of either 'husband' or 'wife.' . . . It is not at all unlikely that this oblivious manner was assumed to check further discussions—for reasons I do not know."[34]

Even as early as the 1850s, the Pueblo Indians had learned to keep secret from whites the ceremonies in which sex was involved. Having investigated the subject of the *mujerado* in Laguna and Acoma pueblos, Dr. William Hammond reported

some "pederastic ceremonies" that "are conducted with the utmost secrecy, as regards the non-Indian part of the population. . . . I could not ascertain, with any degree of certainty, whether the *mujerados* were public property for pederastic purposes at any other times than at the annual orgies, but I am inclined to think that the chiefs or some of them have the right so to employ them, and that they do avail themselves of the privilege. They avoided all reference to the subject, and professed the most complete ignorance of the matter when I questioned them directly thereon."[35]

In the twentieth century, as Indians have become still more aware of white attitudes, they have become more secretive. Even when a researcher tries to get accurate information, the heritage of Western homophobia makes it difficult to get modern Indian people to talk about the berdache tradition. Among many modern tribes, after years of missionary indoctrination, sexuality is not discussed. By the late 1920s, an ethnographer doing fieldwork among the Yokuts Indians of California could locate only one informant who would acknowledge the existence of berdachism, though berdaches had an important role in Yokuts funeral ceremonies. Similarly, when Nancy Lurie did fieldwork among the Winnebago in 1945–47, she reported that informants "tended to be reticent to discuss the matter of the berdache. Their embarrassment may indicate that knowledge of the subject was withheld." One seventy-year-old woman, when asked about berdache, "became very angry and said in Winnebago, 'Why did you ask about that? That is something we want to forget and not talk about!'"[36]

The information that modern researchers such as Lurie have received from informants about aboriginal berdache traditions is a tribute to the closeness and trust developed in dealing with a delicate topic. Even more delicate is the question of the continuation of a berdache tradition in contemporary times. As one Lakota *winkte* told me, "Indians don't want to be mocked any more by the outside white world, it has happened so many times. So, we keep it secret about *winkte*." The experience of an ethnographer at Hopi in the 1970s is instructive about ways in which Indians keep berdachism hidden. Informants talked freely about a teenage boy in their family, without mentioning

sexuality and gender role. When the ethnographer later met the boy and recognized obvious berdachelike behavior, and tried to get an informant to talk about the boy, "he was very reticent to discuss anything about him. . . . It seems clear that he's figured out that I understand the boy's situation and is now being quite protective. All he would say was that ——— has a special friend who takes care of him by supplying many of his material needs."[37]

Because modern Indian people distrust any outsider whom they fear might approach berdachism from a disrespectful position, they will often claim when asked that berdachism has completely disappeared. Though Alfred Kroeber early pointed out the impact on research of Western condemnatory attitudes, some modern anthropologists accept statements of denial at face value. As lesbian researcher Paula Gunn Allen (herself an Indian) points out, many recent anthropologists have misperceived berdachism, and assumed it has died out; "Perhaps this is so because it is felt—at least among ethnographers' tribal informants—that it is wise to let sleeping dogs lie."[38] Because of these factors, openly gay or lesbian researchers have obvious advantages in obtaining accurate information. Over and over again in my research, berdaches mentioned that they would not be disclosing this information had I been heterosexual. It was because of a sense of trust developed out of what they saw as a connecting link between us that they were relaxed enough to talk openly.

ACCULTURATION AND INDIANS' NEGATIVE ATTITUDES

While the suppression of the berdache tradition originated from the prejudices of white government officials and missionaries, ultimately the changing ideals of Indian people themselves have had the most direct impact on berdaches. Under the devastating impact of the church and the state, traditional religious ceremonies were suppressed and ideology revolutionized. When Indians converted to Christianity, many absorbed Christian notions about the evilness of sex, and disrespect for the shamans

and their ceremonies. By internalizing white ideals, they undercut the basis for respect of things they had previously accepted.

When U.S. officials suppressed the Hopi dances in 1920, for example, they included in their report affidavits from several Christian converts. One man named Talasnimtiwa dictated his story, saying, "I am telling these awful things about the old ways of the Hopi Indians only because I have become a Christian and I want these evil things known to the Government in order that they may be stopped among my people." Another, Kuanwikvaya, said, "There is nothing good in the Hopi religion. It is all full of adultery and immorality. I cannot tell all the dirt and filth that is in these ceremonies." And a third, Tuwaletstiwa, offered, "Before I became a Christian, my life was unspeakable evil. . . . When a Hopi becomes a Christian he quits attending these dances. He knows the evil in them is so great."[39]

In 1944 an ethnographer among the Hopis reported that while homosexuality had formerly been quite common, it was infrequent by the 1930s because of white influences. Another fieldworker among the Hopis forty years later was told by informants that while same-sex behavior is considered normal for boys and young men, "lifelong homosexual orientation is highly frowned upon." By the time males are in their twenties it is expected that they will "grow out of it." An androgynous young man is seen as "an embarrassment to his family and he wouldn't be able to find someplace to live [as part of the Hopi community] unless he changed and got a wife, even if he did continue to have men come to see him."[40]

Any tradition that combined both sexuality and traditional religious ideas, like berdachism, received much genocidal pressure. When people no longer respected the vision quest, or sought their individual life role in its guiding spirit, then the days of respect for the berdache were numbered.

Peggy Sanday has demonstrated cross-culturally the importance of religious mythology in justifying the consideration of women as equals of men. Gender egalitarian societies often have creation stories which give important roles to women. Without the active explanation in myth, there is no ideological underpinning for a high female status.[41] The same may be true for the berdache. In cultures where berdaches have high status, there is usually mythological justification for the practice. It is not

enough that the religion be neutral or tolerant. It must actively explain the phenomenon in a positive manner.

Just as the status of Indian women declined with the adoption of patriarchal Christianity, so did berdaches. Since Christianity views men as superior, with a creation story specifying a male god creating a masculine being and only later taking the female from the rib of the male, then the berdache is likewise inferior because he is "less than a man." No longer is he combining the power of both women and men; in Christianity he is seen as subverting his natural male superiority to take an inferior female form.

Non-Western peoples who come under colonial control often feel disillusioned with their traditional religion, because it did not protect them from conquest, or in the case of American Indians, from the ravages of disease. The religion of the conqueror seems more powerful, and therefore is attractive as a means of absorbing some of the power of the white man. Religious justification of the berdache's vision quest was rejected in favor of the Bible, which as translated offered no explanation for the existence of gender or sexual variance. The only words of guidance came from the list of taboos in Leviticus 18:22, "Thou shall not lie with mankind, as with womankind; it is abomination," and Deuteronomy 22:5, "A woman shall not be clothed with man's apparel, neither shall a man use woman's apparel; for he that doeth these things is abominable before God." With the collapse of native ideology justifying berdachism, there was no defense against these new taboos.[42]

Under such influences, it is not surprising to hear stories such as that recorded about the Winnebagos, who had previously treated berdaches as highly honored and respected persons, but who had "become ashamed of the custom because the white people thought it was amusing or evil. By the time the last known berdache attempted to fulfill the role [about 1900] his brothers threatened to kill him if he 'put on the skirt.' This berdache then affected a combination of male and female clothing, fearing that he would die if he did not at least attempt to follow directions given him in his vision of the moon." By the 1940s, the Winnebago word for berdache, *siange,* was used "as an insult or teasing epithet."[43] According to a Lakota berdache informant, the Christian "Holy Rollers" consider him to be "pos-

sessed by the devil." Another said his grandmother wanted to accept him but felt that her Christian belief told her he should be heterosexual. His grandfather (who was not Christian) was accepting.

The emasculation of Indian men's roles also led to a decline of berdachism. Especially in societies like the Lakotas, men got much of their status from participation in warfare. Their other major contribution to society was through the hunt. Once a tribe was restricted to a reservation, and game was depleted, a man was left with little to do. Forced settlement had a dramatic impact on men's roles, and many responded by retreating into a cynical defeatism that they could relieve only with alcohol. Men could no longer go off on the hunt or the raid. In many cases Indian peoples were actually forcibly prohibited from ever leaving the reservation. At least women had more continuity in their domestic work. Men had no choice but to begin farming, which among Plains Indians was previously considered women's work. In such a situation, there was not as much contrast between women and men. The berdache's role as mediator between two clearly separate spheres waned. Conceivably, without warrior-hunter roles berdaches could have become more prestigious, but the absorption of European values through Christianity prevented this.

Being taken away into the armed forces in World War II and the Korean War, and taking off-reservation jobs, immersed Indians into white society as never before. A Cheyenne man says, "My generation, growing up in the 1930s, '40s, and '50s, did not get a knowledge of the traditions. There was a lack of appreciation for the native culture then. Because of television and the automobile, many Cheyennes have similar attitudes as whites." An Arapaho traditionalist elder says plainly that *a-whock* died out by the 1950s "because young people did not continue the old tribal traditions."[44]

In this context, hostility toward berdaches grew. Even some Indians who claim to be traditional have absorbed homophobic attitudes. For example, in a statement ignorant of historical fact, writers from Sinte Gleska College on the Rosebud Sioux reservation had this to say about homosexuality: "Socially deviant persons neither were honored, nor would a ceremony ever be

allowed for them. In fact, our past society was so well-organized that the phenomenon of a 'sexually warped' person is almost nonexistent. The moral codes of the Lakota people did not allow for oral sex." Having talked with some of the authors of this statement, I know that they are aware of the sexuality of *winktes*. Perhaps their denial can be explained by another statement in the same pamphlet: "such assertions [about homosexuality] are seriously damaging to the image that the [white] American people have of all Indian tribes."[45]

This new homophobic myth is reflected in a statement by Mike Myers, speaking for the Indian newspaper *Akwesasne Notes* in 1978. Reacting to publicity about Indian homosexuality, he stated, "We have asked traditional people of the Nations most often cited to us (Navaho, Sioux, Cheyenne) if gays existed in their cultures. In all cases the answer has been NO." Asking elder Indians about "gays" distorts the meaning of such a question, because it does not account for the aboriginal ceremonial function of berdaches. If Myers had instead asked about *nadle* or *winkte,* or used other native language terminology instead of a Western concept based wholly on homosexual acts, he would have received very different answers.[46] Myers reflects the homophobia absorbed from white sources. Such is the loss of memory after the spiritual basis of berdachism is removed.

One Lakota man I interviewed who claims to be traditional told me he considers *winktes* to be lower in status, saying it is not good for a man to act like a woman. He seemed uncomfortable talking about the subject, and it is this type of response that has led some anthropologists to get a distorted view of the aboriginal tradition. Yet even this man did not condemn homosexual behavior. His complaint about *winktes* was against their androgyny. When I later mentioned this condemnatory attitude to another traditionalist who knew this man, he replied only, "Some who claim to be traditional really have absorbed white attitudes."

The best summary of this new homophobia is offered by the contemporary gay Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny:

> The modern Indian has been programmed by white society so that his former mores and measurements have been changed to fit his

ever-assimilating environment. With the loss of his religious rites, culture, there is probably no place for the contemporary berdache within that social structure. There are no warriors to entertain on the warpath; no scalps to dance over; no mountaineers to court, subdue and copulate with; and certainly no ceremonial dances exclusively devoted to the berdache. Many 'traditionalists' have become racists, sexists, and are generally disquieted when among homosexuals. Hollywood, T.V. and the Church have had a heavy influence on the changing attitude of Indian thought.[47]

Despite the accuracy of Kenny's statement, any generalization about twentieth-century Indians must include many exceptions. While a more homophobic reaction is perhaps found among acculturated Indians, their attitudes vary from condemnation to indifference to acceptance. Still, as a general rule, Indians are more accepting of other people's differences than are white people. It is because of this acceptance, and the continuing influence of traditionalism, that the berdache role has survived in some tribes.

SURVIVAL OF BERDACHE SHAMANISM

How could the berdache tradition survive under such pressure? It has endured in the same way that other aboriginal traditions of Native Americans have survived. The old ways persist thanks to attitudes and thoughts of a core group of cultural conservators. Yet, each generation adapts to different circumstances, and the traditions are modified in response. Traditions are vibrant and alive; they are part of life. Within this process of change, however, enough of the essence of the old idea continues, so that cultural continuity is maintained. Most Indians who have kept their traditions and ceremonies also seem to have kept the respect for the berdache.

Since berdaches were often associated with shamanism, the strength of their prestige often kept them protected. In 1883 the United States Department of the Interior set up Courts of Indian Offenses, run by cooperative Indians, as a means of handling minor crimes. These courts handled the majority of cases on reservations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

turies. Court records abound with cases relating to hetereosexual acts—adultery, polygamy, cohabitation, licentiousness, bastardy, and fornication are some of the case labels appearing most frequently.[48] Yet, as long as this court system was Indian-operated "sodomy" cases were notably absent.[49]

Also absent were cases involving the arrest or sentencing of shamans. Even cooperative Indians feared the supernatural powers of the shamans, so shamans were left alone by the colonial court system.[50] Among the Klamaths, for example, though the government agents made a major campaign against shamanism in the 1870s and 1880s, the ceremonies continued. If people believed that their health and indeed their whole continued existence as a people were dependent on the enactment of certain ceremonies, they would risk punishment to participate in them. Many of the ceremonies dealt with health, and berdaches were notable for their curing ceremonies.[51]

Perhaps the fact that berdaches were holy persons meant that they, like shamans, were left alone. Respect for the berdache's ability to help a person was balanced by fear of the berdache's ability to harm. Contemporary berdaches still believe in this power. Terry Calling Eagle says with quiet confidence, "If someone ever makes fun of me, something bad will happen to them. Once a half-breed woman said I was a disgrace to the Indian race. I told her that a century ago, I would have been considered that much more special. She died shortly after, and I think it was because she had insulted *winkte*. The spirits take action when sacred things are insulted."[52] For Indians who held this belief, it was a powerful incentive to help protect berdaches and keep them hidden from outsiders.

Another possible means of survival was simply for the berdache to dress always as a woman, and be accepted by whites as such. Even aboriginally many berdaches would dress as women (or at least close enough that white observers thought they were women). A Russian official in Alaska in the early nineteenth century reported confidently that *shopans* among the Kodiak Islanders were "formerly so prevalent that the residence of one of these monsters in a house was considered as fortunate; it is, however, daily losing ground" because of the interference of the

Russians. But he also reported that they were so much like women that white observers did not realize they were males. He mentioned the case of a Russian Orthodox priest who nearly married one of them to a man, before another Russian happened to learn that the bride was a *shopan*. By such tactics, others were able to pass as women. Despite the Russians' projections of berdachism's imminent disappearance, a full century later observers reported that *shopans* continued to be fairly common.[53]

Matilda Coxe Stevenson reported of the Zuni *lhamana* We'wha: "so carefully was his sex concealed that for years this writer believed him to be a woman." Later, We'wha started doing laundry for whites and "ultimately became as celebrated as a Chinese laundryman, his own clean apparel being his advertising card, and was called upon not only by the officers' families at the [Fort Wingate army] garrison but the white settlers near and far." While visiting Washington, D.C., for a six-month period We'wha had full run of the women's bathrooms, and reported back gleefully to the other Zunis that white women were all frauds: We'wha saw them remove their wigs, false teeth and bosom padding. The Zunis reportedly got much entertainment from the fact that this "woman" became such a social hit among the government elite, including Speaker of the House John Carlisle and President Grover Cleveland.[54]

Though contemporary Zunis do not talk much about *lhamana,* We'wha is still referred to reverently as a cultural hero.[55] In other tribes, such cross-dressing has continued up to the present. A white educator living on the Northern Cheyenne reservation reported his surprise upon learning that the "woman" living across the street from him for two years was really a male.[56]

The cross-dressing may be selective, as with a Crow *badé* today who usually dresses androgynously on the reservation, but if he wants to go into the white towns nearby with his women friends, he will dress as a woman. By doing this, he can act femininely without causing notice from whites. Another berdache, a Lakota *winkte,* fell in love with a white man in the Air Force. Realizing they could not be together as two men, he began to dress as a woman. He lived with the airman as his wife for sixteen years. He brought along his two Indian adoptive

children and they became a typical military family. Though he participated in social events in the base town, including attendance at military dances, no Air Force authorities ever realized he was male.[57]

In order to survive, many berdaches stopped cross-dressing altogether. One Navajo *nadle* in the 1930s, a popular singer for the Blessing Way ceremonies, blended in by dressing always as a man. But his name, Stick Bounder, was suggestive of his berdachism to those who were familiar with the woman's gambling game it referred to. Navajos characterized him as being noted for his "feminine accomplishments, but also practice[d] pederasty." But whites did not understand the subtle clues of his social status as a berdache. Another anthropologist wrote of a masculinely dressed berdache, "Had there been no rumors or whispers, no white person would have picked him out of a Navajo crowd as abnormal."[58]

Even in the 1970s, Navajo *nadle* continued to wear a few articles of distinctive clothing [for example, a special type of sash] with their men's dress, so that other Navajos would be able to recognize them as berdache while whites would be ignorant of the distinction.[59] The popularity of unisex clothing in the 1960s allowed more flexibility in men's dress, so that a berdache might not stand out as much.

Since many Indian people continued to think of berdachism, and also of homosexual desire, as personal inclinations that individuals had a right to express, they naturally worked to keep the white legal system from interfering with berdaches.[60] A contemporary Lakota points out that it was not difficult to keep things secret from the white authorities, because government officials and missionaries were too few in number to keep tabs on the traditionalists throughout the reservation. Most whites, he remarks, "didn't really care very much about anything other than getting the Indians' land and wealth. Indians just keep things like this unknown to whites who don't understand our sacred ways."[61]

Even when whites knew about berdachism, the Indians sometimes used clever rationalizations for the practice which would justify it in Western eyes. In the 1840s a Catholic missionary near Vancouver recorded a statement about an Indian

named Rose Thrael Nisqually (1797–1847), presumably of the Nisqually people south of Puget Sound, who was "disguised as a woman for a long time past." The missionary wrote, "For a man to disguise himself as a woman was not unusual among natives, who claimed the ruse offered them greater safety in travel and in spy activity."[62] While it is not clear why missionaries believed this explanation, it does indicate the ability of the Indians to keep their customs intact by manipulating white authorities.

CONTINUED RESPECT BY TRADITIONALISTS

Traditionalism survives among modern American Indians by more than manipulation. Religious ideology is often the slowest part of culture to change, and among Native Americans it is often the last thing left that is not dominated by whites. The Euroamericans took or destroyed the physical things Indians possessed: the land, the wealth, people's physical freedom, and even control over children's education. Many Lakota traditionalists, the followers of Red Cloud's way, feel there is little possibility of challenging this white control. It only brings grief to try.

Faced with such outside domination, many people might despair. But the Lakota shamans and berdaches with whom I spoke do not. Their comfort is that white domination is limited. It is restricted to the rational world of the here and now. They feel that they can survive as a people if they can retreat into the other world, the supernatural aspect of life that transcends and goes beyond the limits of rational reality. Shamans and those sacred people like the berdaches possess the only kind of knowledge not challenged by Western culture, the knowledge of a distinct other world outside of rationality. Traditionalists feel that whites, with their emphasis on the rational, are not capable of exploring this other world. Reflecting the limits of their rationalist thought, whites do not know that such a world exists.

Traditionalist Indians do not isolate themselves from the elements of the here and now. As long as they recognize that there is a world beyond the rational, they may partake in the day-to-

day aspects of modern life in the same way that a person without spiritual insight would. For example, an Omaha *mexoga* I visited considers himself, and is considered by others to be, a traditionalist. Yet he served in the army during World War II, traveled to North Africa and Europe, and after the war lived in the city of Omaha for two decades before retiring to the reservation. His traditionalism is not judged on the basis of his exposure to modern rational ideas and ways of doing things, but on his awareness of another realm.

The evolution of berdache status in modern times and its relationship to traditionalism can be seen with the Pueblo Indians. While the Pueblos have been affected by Christianity, Hispanic machismo, and off-reservation jobs since 1940, the older population continues the old ideas. Berdaches do not dress differently, but they are still respected. In the early 1970s, three of the traditional Pueblo governors were berdaches.[63]

One of these respected elderly berdaches was interviewed in his New Mexico pueblo about 1978. He does not appear effeminate, but always plays the passive role in sex with the "straight" men of the pueblo. His behavior lies comfortably within the norms of this culture, and his place in the community is so secure he feels no need to question it. Younger Indians, however, do not feel this sense of tranquility. They have absorbed Chicano ideas about machismo and Anglo ideas about sexual orientation, and the result is stress and confusion.[64]

There are often generational differences within families, with the more traditional older people challenging their acculturated children. A Crow *badé* recalls how when he was six years old he enjoyed playing house with girls and dressing up like a girl, but his acculturated mother and mother's brother punished him for this. "But I sneaked around still, and did it secretly. I've been like this as long as I can remember. I practiced the baton with girls, and became so good that by seventh grade they asked me to perform at basketball games. No boy had ever done baton before, but I was even better than the girls. My uncle walked out ashamed, and later beat me for this. But my grandfather intervened, and told me about the old days when people respected the *badé*. After that my uncle and mother laid off me."[65]

Such generational differences, a response to the conflicting

messages being received by modern Indians from two different cultural traditions, make for a confusing situation. As early as 1916 Elsie Clews Parsons reported from Zuni: "I got the impression that in general a family would be somewhat ashamed of having a *la'mana* among its members. In regard to the custom itself there seemed to be no reticence in general and no sense of shame."[66] What are we to make of such a statement, which on its face seems contradictory? We could claim, as some anthropologists have done, that this represents an ambivalent attitude on the part of traditionalists. Or we can see it as a reluctance to talk about such a family member in front of white people, or even as a possible response to the impact of Western culture on twentieth-century Indian societies. Weighing all of the evidence about berdachism, I favor the latter interpretation.

Among those Indians who have lost faith in the old ways, the topics of gender nonconformity and homosexuality may evoke confusion and a sense of tragedy. But traditionalists exhibit no such disturbance. The Sioux medicine man Lame Deer remembered a conversation he had with a *winkte* in 1971: "I wasn't even sure of whether I was talking to a man or to a woman. . . . To us a man is what nature, or his dreams, make him. We accept him for what he wants to be. That's up to him. . . . There are good men among the *Winktes* and they have been given certain powers."[67]

A *winkte* who continued dressing androgynously even in the 1970s was reported being fully accepted as a respected member of the community and was only rarely ridiculed by the acculturated Indians—but never by traditionalists.[68] An elder Lakota woman told me, "We consider *winktes* to be sacred persons, still today. We're not like white people who don't accept half-and-half people. The attitudes of the traditional people toward *winktes* have not changed. The whites did not mess with *winktes* because they did not recognize them."[69]

Omaha traditionalists expressed to me the same feeling; there is no change for those who respect the old ways. There is a need for more fieldwork among different tribes to assess the feelings of traditionalists. It would not be surprising if more continuity is found than studies of acculturation suggest. When Ruth Underhill could report about Papagos in the 1930s that berdaches were accepted "entirely without opprobrium," would we expect

that feeling to have disappeared totally today?[70] Students of modern American Indians are beginning to realize that the disappearance of Native American culture has been overemphasized; Indian people hold on to their ideas more thoroughly than their outward appearance suggests. While acculturation occurs, cultural persistence is an equally important theme in recent Indian history. The survival of cultural elements among Indians of eastern North America, who have been in intensive contact with Euroamericans for hundreds of years, leads one to think that such continuities exist for Indians of the West as well.[71]

We can see such continuities among the Navajo. As anthropologists earlier noted that *nadle* were common among the Navajo,[72] so this heritage has not disappeared today. A middle-aged *nadle* today reports his awareness of a sharp contrast between the way he is treated when he is off the reservation, where he is not respected, and the way he is treated by traditional Navajos. He is paid respect, he says, because it is the *nadle* who keep the men and women together as a unit.[73] A white gay man who lived among Southwestern Indians for nearly a decade, and who well understands the traditional ways, reports a gathering in 1978 of over 250 *nadle* in a sacred area of the reservation, and thinks *nadle* are increasing as more Navajos revitalize their culture. Though Navajos will not talk about berdachism to nongay whites, he reports that *nadle* have a special ceremonial role in the night dances before the winter solstice.[74]

This man stresses that the following sentiments, expressed by an educated Navajo who still values her old-style upbringing, are typical among traditional Navajos. She speaks with pride about her uncle who is a *nadle*.

> Even today among traditional people, especially in the isolated rural areas, *nadle* are well respected. . . . One that I know is now a principal of a school on the reservation. Everyone knows that he and the man he lives with are lovers, but it is not mentioned. . . . Missionaries and schools had a bad effect on stigmatizing homosexuality among more assimilated Indians, so it's not as open as in the past. But among traditionals *nadle* never even went underground. It has just continued; they are our relatives—part of our family.[75]

This form of social continuity is remarkable given the extent to which Western culture is antagonistic to berdachism, and it tells

us much about the strengths of cultural persistence when families support berdaches.

Because the berdache institution has been subjected to extreme repression, it has declined in the twentieth century. Berdachism may have gone underground, and it may have lost a religious role, but it has not disappeared. If white suppression of berdachism is a case study of cultural genocide, the continuation of the practice is an example of the strength of cultural persistence among contemporary Indian peoples. This persistence has had a surprising effect on modern Western society as well.

10 *Survival and Pride: The Berdache Tradition and Gay American Indians Today*

The berdache tradition has not only survived, but knowledge of it has had a significant impact on the rise of the gay liberation movement in Western culture. That movement has in turn had an impact on younger contemporary Indians. With this two-way cultural exchange, the status of gay people and the status of American Indians have some interesting parallels in the United States today. An examination of the origins of gay liberation in Europe and North America helps us understand these parallels.

A strong homosexual rights movement began in Germany in the late nineteenth century, and quickly spread to England. One of the techniques this movement used to provoke questioning of social norms was to publicize the acceptability of homosexual behavior in other cultures. The earliest substantial, nonjudgmental account of Native American berdaches, in a chapter called "Homosexual Love," appeared in a book by Edward Westermarck in 1908. This anthropology professor at the University of London, who was most likely homosexual, documented worldwide manifestations of same-sex relations.[1]

Soon after that, Ferdinand Karsch-Haack, a professor at the University of Berlin, published a massive compilation of source materials on same-sex relations among the peoples of Native America, Oceania, Southeast Asia, and Africa. *Das Gleichgeschlechtliche Leben der Naturvölker* (1911) has never been equaled in its comprehensiveness for cross-cultural information about homosexual behavior. Karsch-Haack was a member of Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld's homosexual emancipation organization, the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. The cross-cultural emphasis on berdachelike institutions in various areas of the world

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helped form Hirschfeld's ideas on homosexuals as constituting a "third sex."[2]

Unfortunately, the Native American concept of a mixed-gender or alternative gender role became confused with the Western tendency to emphasize physical aspects of biological sex. Hirschfeld's writings are filled with references to the soft feminine bodies of individuals with male genitals. By equating these "intersexed" people with "homosexuals," such an approach ignored the fact that a masculine man could also be exclusively homosexual in his behavior.[3] In looking for a biological foundation to justify homosexuality, this view distorted the Native American emphasis on a berdache's spirit as more important than his physical attributes.

The notion of a different "spirit" of homosexuals, however, also existed. By the late nineteenth century pioneer homosexual writer Karl Ulrichs had begun to write about the people that he called "Urning," as a distinct class of person. His ideas spread to Britain, and influenced the rise of the idea of "the intermediate sex" in the writings of Edward Carpenter. This pioneer English homosexual emancipationist published a book in 1914 titled *Intermediate Types among Primitive Folk,* which became the major source of ideas on American Indian berdaches for the founders of the homophile movement in the United States.[4]

The most influential theorist in the founding of the modern U.S. gay activist movement is Harry Hay (at certain periods of his life he has also been known as Henry Hay). Born in 1912, he has lived most of his life in Los Angeles and was to a great extent responsible for the emergence of gay activism in that city. During his youth Hay often spent his summers on a relative's ranch near Yerington, Nevada, next to a Washo Indian settlement. He became fascinated by Indians and attended traditional Washo dances. At age thirteen he was blessed by the elderly Paiute prophet Wovoka, whom Hay remembers as a very old man, blind and with a heavily wrinkled face. The Ghost Dance prophet touched the boy and said a prayer in his native language. Hay later recalled that the Indians told him Wovoka had said that "we should be good to this boy, for he will be a friend to us later."[5]

This incident, as well as Hay's fascination with some Hopi

dancers whom he later met, had a dramatic impact on Hay in his later years. In 1951 he and others founded the Mattachine Society, named after a French fraternity of unmarried men who conducted dances and rituals during the Renaissance. His idea, he later recalled, was to base the organization on "a great transcendent dream of what being Gay was all about. . . . Organizing the Mattachine was a call to me deeper than the innermost reaches of spirit, a vision-quest more important than life." Hay's emphasis on spirituality was likely a reflection of the impact of American Indian thought on the formulation of his identity as well as his language. He had proposed "that it would be Mattachine's job to find out who we Gays were (and had been over the millennia)."[6]

Such an emphasis meant that historical and cross-cultural investigation would be the focus of this search. Hay presented several papers on berdachism. In 1953 conservative leaders, without the founder's vision, took over the Mattachine Society and abandoned these investigations. Hay and other activists who favored a more radical perspective withdrew from the organization and focused on a gay group that had begun publishing *ONE Magazine*. Within a few years ONE Institute was sponsoring classes and educational seminars as well. Harry Hay's influence at ONE Institute emphasized the Indian view of homosexuality. In 1956 he began visiting the Pueblo Indians in New Mexico, establishing contact with gay Indians there.[7]

Hay encouraged Jim Kepner, an active writer in ONE, to offer anthropology classes that would emphasize berdachism. Kepner based his 1956 class on the writings of Carpenter, Westermarck, and other anthropologists. He recalls that more conformist homosexuals did not want to identify with "savages," or to confront the fact that they might be "different" in more ways than sexual behavior. Says Kepner, "They were trying to blend in by claiming that gays were no different than anybody else, except for what they did in bed."

The intellectually oriented activists at ONE Institute, influenced by the anthropological findings on berdachism, and by theories of an intermediate sex, emphasized the androgynous character of the person. Hay had rejected the word *homosexual* in favor of *homophile*. Kepner says, "The berdache was a symbol

that we were there from very earliest times and had specific honored roles." Activists at ONE, building on early Mattachine ideas, were asking homosexuals to question: "Does this androgyny give us a different vision, a double vision, that enables us to see things differently and creatively? Do we have special talents? How can we best contribute these talents to society? Are the gay contributions in art and creative thought similar to those of the berdaches to their societies?"[8]

In 1959 W. Dorr Legg wrote an article called "The Berdache and Theories of Sexual Inversion" that was published in the *One Institute Quarterly.*[9] Legg, a leader at ONE Institute, recalls: "We in the early movement were very familiar with berdache as an institution." He felt that Clellan Ford and Frank Beach's 1951 book, *Patterns of Sexual Behavior,* had a tremendous impact, since it concluded that a majority of non-Western cultures accepted some form of same-sex eroticism as normal. This finding, Legg emphasizes, "placed the homophobia of Western society in a different perspective."[10]

Inspired by such an approach, Donald W. Cory's book *Homosexuality, A Cross-Cultural Approach* reprinted Westermarck's essay "Homosexual Love" and George Devereux's essay on Mohave homosexuality. Dorr Legg felt that American Indian berdaches "were especially significant because they are an American source, not something so easily dismissed as a strange exotic practice from the opposite end of the world. It showed that homosexuality is not alien and foreign, but was right here in America, from a very early date. We recognized that berdachism was not exactly the same as a modern gay identity, but it was part of the larger homosexual question."[11]

Meanwhile, interest in berdachism was growing in homophile publications. In 1959 (inspired by Hay's papers and Legg's article) the Denver chapter of the Mattachine Society invited the anthropologist Omer Stewart to speak on berdachism. *Mattachine Review* published his speech soon after. In 1963 Harry Hay wrote an essay on Pueblo berdachism in *One Institute Quarterly.* And, inspired by that article, another ONE writer went to the Mohave reservation to interview a modern homosexual Indian.[12]

By the late 1960s Hay and his lover, John Burnside, decided

to devote their lives to the Pueblos, and to spread ideas of gay liberation to the Indians. They left Los Angeles in 1970 and moved to a Tewa Pueblo as permanent residents. Omer Stewart had assigned one of his graduate students, Sue-Ellen Jacobs, to do research on berdachism, and referred her to Hay's essay. As luck would have it, Jacobs passed by the Pueblo in 1970, just three months after Hay moved there, and they began a close association. Jacobs's paper, published in the *Colorado Anthropologist* in 1968, soon circulated among gay academics—especially among anthropologists who were seeking to establish a gay study group within anthropology. Jacobs sent out many reprints upon request, including one to Jonathan Katz, who was collecting documents on Native Americans for his book *Gay American History.*[13]

Katz was aided by several gay historical researchers, most notably Stephen W. Foster and James Steakley, a specialist on the early German homosexual movement. The two main sources of knowledge about berdaches, the anthropological reports and the earlier historical documents collected by the European homosexuals, thus found their way into *Gay American History.* Katz's 1976 documentary collection ensured that berdaches would become a well-known aspect of the gay movement's sense of its past. By the 1970s non-Indian Americans were taking a more respectful attitude toward Native American cultures, and this was reflected in the gay movement.

In his introduction to *Gay American History,* Katz wrote that the existence of acceptable same-sex behavior among Indians holds a special fascination for "Lesbians and Gay men who are today beginning to repossess the national and world history of their people—part of their struggle for social change and to win control over their own lives." The attempt by the European conquerors to wipe out "sodomy" was, he concluded, "a form of cultural genocide involving both Native Americans and Gay people. Today, the recovery of the history of Native American homosexuality is a task in which both Gay and Native peoples have a common interest."[14] Writings about berdaches appeared repeatedly in 1976. Maurice Kenny, a Mohawk poet, wrote an essay in *Gay Sunshine* about the berdache tradition, while the national gay newspaper *The Advocate* proclaimed: "Gay Was

Good with Native Americans." Two bestselling gay books, Arthur Evans's *Witchcraft and the Gay Counterculture* (1978) and Mitch Walker's *Visionary Love* (1980), emphasized the berdache.[15]

In 1979 the Quebec gay movement even named its magazine *Le Berdache*. Its lead article suggested that the Indian view was superior because it integrated the berdache into society, not as a barely tolerated marginal anomaly, but as a valued spiritual entity. The emphasis in these articles was on the spiritual message of the berdache tradition. The most recent essay along this line is by J. Michael Clark in the gay magazine *RFD,* which argues that gay people should reject the homophobic Christian church, because its denial of gay spiritualism has left gay people as "sexually aberrant, soulless" marginal persons. But in rejecting Christianity, Clark argues, gays should not abandon a spiritual quest: "The challenge instead is to discover alternative resources for spirituality that are appropriate to our existential standpoint as gay and exiled persons." Clark sees the berdache as an alternative, which "can remind gays of a forgotten, primordial past and of the demand to fulfill a sacred destiny."[16]

The impact of the knowledge of such a destiny has been dramatic in the emergence of a proud gay identity. Judy Grahn, a leading poet in the lesbian and gay community, recalls her feeling upon first learning of the respected position of the berdache: "I put my face into my hands and sobbed with relief. A huge burden, the burden of isolation and of being defined only by one's enemies, left me on that enlightening day. I understood then that being Gay is a universal quality." When Grahn later wrote her worldwide survey of words related to homosexuality, *Another Mother Tongue: Gay Words, Gay Worlds,* the berdache was prominently highlighted.[17] Will Roscoe, a gay writer, expresses the attraction of the berdache as a model.

> I have chosen not to see in these dress-wearing men (and warrior-hunter women) a ridiculous or pathetic figure, but a life devoted to a unique and specialized role. I think of the marvelous blackware pottery of the Rio Grande Pueblos, its gleaming, polished surfaces smooth and cool to the touch—and I have no difficulty imagining the rationale and the rewards of specializing in a work otherwise

considered female. My own consciousness has thus absorbed the berdache.[18]

To Roscoe and others, knowledge of berdachism supplies a sense of roots, a feeling of being part of a long tradition in America, "to know you're not alone and not the first; to know you have, like the [Cheyenne] *hemaneh,* sources of inner strength to overcome obstacles and to do it, in gay fashion, with a flair."[19]

URBAN GAY INDIANS

Knowledge of the berdache tradition has had a significant impact on the development of gay liberation, but within the last two decades the gay movement has had a strong impact on younger Indians. The situation of modern gay people and modern Indians is similar in many ways. Individuals of both groups happened to migrate to the big cities as a result of the massive draft and defense industry during World War II, with urban Indian communities and gay communities emerging about the same time.

There are major differences between a culture one is born into, with a family that socializes one from infancy, and a subculture that individuals enter later in life. Still, both gays and Indians share a sense of being different, of being something other than what white America says is proper. In the same way that Indians were stigmatized as inferior savages, homosexuals were stigmatized as sick and sinful. As a result of this stigma, many individuals of the two groups found themselves lost in the mainstream culture, with high rates of alcoholism and suicide reflecting this low self-esteem.

Militant action by the American Indian Movement paralleled that of the Gay Liberation Front, while both had been inspired by the Black Power movement of the 1960s. Indians and gays both came to realize that in order to gain their rights, they had to fight discrimination by the mainstream and also attack the low self-esteem of their own group's members. Problems like alcoholism and suicide have dramatically declined in recent

years, due to the cultural renaissance of Pan-Indianism, and the rise of Gay Pride. As Indians and gay people have built resources for a positive self-image, they have begun to build their communities constructively and to take control of their lives.

Many young Indians have recognized these parallels, first in a personal sense and later in a political sense. We can see the personal impact of gay liberation on younger Indians especially in the social evolution of an individual from a berdache pattern to a gay pattern. A Papago man who today identifies as gay recognizes elements of the berdache tradition in the way he was treated on the reservation. Born in 1955, he was of slight build and nonmasculine character as a child. He had always felt different from the other children, tending toward artistic concerns. When he was eleven years old, his older brother introduced him to sex. In his teen years he always took the passive role in anal sex, and was always attracted to older, masculine men. He absorbed his culture's notion that the passive role "was the only role for someone like me. I did not feel restricted by it, but that was just the way it was done and so that is what I wanted to do." He sometimes dressed in women's clothing, and his family accepted his inclinations. Everything pointed toward a berdache role for him.

When he was still in his teens, however, his parents left the Papago reservation and moved to Phoenix. By the time he was eighteen, he connected with the urban gay subculture. He learned to enjoy taking the inserter role in sex, and is now much more versatile in his sexual behavior with men. But though he has been influenced by the more flexible standards of gay life in a social as well as sexual sense, there are continuities from his past. He continues to be attracted to older masculine men, feels a strong sense of spiritualism, and places a high value on family relationships. He feels that life will not be complete if he does not raise a child, so he is looking forward to adopting children and would even consider having sex with a woman in order to have children.[20] As with many urban Indians, his life represents a gradual and partial adjustment to urban patterns, rather than a total break from his tribal culture.

The impact of Western culture is often felt in the families of acculturated Indians whose children have homosexual experi-

ences. In an incident not that different from what happens to many white gay youth, a controversy emerged in Laguna Pueblo in 1978. A westernized father found out that his teenage son was in a relationship with another adolescent boy. He severely beat the boy, and then ordered tribal police to put the son in jail. A Pueblo gay man who lives in Albuquerque rescued the boy from jail and, to prevent the boy from being returned to the abusive father, took guardianship of the teenager. In Albuquerque the boy finished high school and later became a top Indian student at the University of New Mexico.[21]

Though this is an extreme example, it does point out the contrast between the respect given to berdaches in traditionalist families, and the abuse heaped on many young homosexual Indians by their Christianized parents. In the one case, families remain loving and unified, while in the other the family is discordant and fragmented. Many such young Indians leave their communities and migrate to the cities. By the early 1970s, Harry Hay reports, this trend was common among many young non-macho Pueblos who did not want to be stuck with a set role. They thought of themselves as different from regular men, and were attracted to masculine gay men. But they have been influenced by the gay lifestyle to be more open, and are facing the rejection of the more acculturated Indians. They have an open gay consciousness, and want to have a full relationship with a man, without the strict role definitions of the berdache tradition.[22]

Hay himself felt a certain disillusionment with the contemporary Pueblo attitude. "The gay must be passive and humble himself, and not show intimate contact in public while still having sex in private." With his liberationist values of publicly expressing relationships with other men, Hay reacted against the secretiveness of Pueblo "straight men who want a woman-substitute." Despite his awareness that berdaches were respected for their ceremonial roles, Hay understood why younger gay Indians would want to leave the reservation.[23]

For other urban Indians, especially those born in the city and not influenced by a reservation, there has been a sharp divergence from their ancestors' customs. Many younger Indians who are homosexually inclined have never been exposed to any

alternative except the urban gay identity. I have interviewed Navajo men in gay bars in places like Salt Lake City and Denver who have never even heard of *nadle*. If their family left the reservation, and especially if they converted to Mormonism or other Christian religions, knowledge of such traditions would not be transmitted. Cut off from a sense of tradition, young homosexual Indians are left, like gay non-Indians, with only their sexuality as a means of defining themselves. If they are cast out of their urban Indian family and community on the basis of their sexual differences, it is a fatal blow for many. With racism still strong in many areas, the general society is seen as more threat than refuge. And so a rejection from the Indian community hurts all the more.

Even if a notion of the berdache tradition were transmitted, it might not be with the same respect as on the reservation. Certainly this is due to Western influences, but it is also because many Indians do not consider their traditional religion to apply when they are outside their homeland. Ronnie Loud Hawk says, "People are afraid to criticize *winkte,* because they fear the *winkte* spiritual power. . . . People know that on the reservation the spirit of Big Bull is watching them, so they cannot criticize *winkte*. But if they were away in the city, away from the kin groups, then they might be antigay. That is a different thing."[24]

Gay Indians have to deal with both homophobia, from Indians and non-Indians, and racism, from gays and nongays. In response to this double isolation, young gay Indians in San Francisco organized in 1975. Gay American Indians (GAI) was founded by Randy Burns (Paiute) and Barbara Cameron (Lakota). "We were first and foremost a group for each other," Cameron said. "Bringing together gay Indians is our most important current task." Burns came to the city by himself to attend college, and did not know anyone, gay or Indian. He read an article in a gay newspaper about the respected place of berdaches in many traditional Indian societies. This helped to inspire him to get together with other gay Indians.[25]

San Francisco was a city with a large Indian population, as well as a highly visible gay community. At first Gay American Indians met some resistance from the general Indian community. The director of the city's American Indian Center sug-

gested that they would be offending people by putting up GAI posters, but Burns and Cameron continued anyway. They found that the older traditionalists were not condemnatory, but many of the middle-aged Indians wanted to keep the topic of homosexuality from being talked about. Given the government's earlier attempts to use "sexual perversity" as an excuse for taking Indian children away from their parents, such reluctance is understandable. GAI members felt, however, that it was time for Indian people to stand up for their past traditions rather than to hide them. Randy Burns says, "In the Indian community, we are trying to realign ourselves with the trampled traditions of our people. Gay people were respected parts of the tribes. Some were artists and medicine people. So we supply speakers from the group to appear at Indian gatherings. Sometimes we are booed or jeered, but it doesn't last long."[26]

More young gay Indians continued to migrate to San Francisco in the 1970s, attracted (like gay non-Indians) to the visible gay community. Many young people arrived there with little besides their hopes for the future. GAI members helped them get referrals for housing and jobs or student loans, and provided social opportunities in a mutual support group. The younger Indians tended to have more formal education than the general Indian population, with the result that they adjusted well and advanced in their new home. Within five years of its founding GAI had 150 members and was earning the respect of the Indian community. I met Randy Burns in 1980, and he was proud of the achievements of the organization. "At the beginning straight Indians snickered at us, but since the gay movement has made strides and since more gay Indians have come out, they now treat us respectfully."[27]

GAI members are proud of their heritage, and they are aware of the berdache tradition. Though he is a Paiute, Burns tells the accounts of *nadle* in the Navajo creation story. He sees the message of the berdache as important no matter what tribal background a person comes from. He wants to prevent the sense of isolation and despair that faces some teenage gay Indians, who react by committing suicide when they recognize their homosexuality. If their family knows and accepts them as gay, then suicide seldom occurs. GAI members feel a sense of responsi-

bility to help others adjust when they are lost and do not know where to turn. They have celebrated their tenth anniversary as an organization, and have grown to over six hundred members nationwide. They have published a bibliographical guide to berdachism, and are planning an anthology of essays, short stories, and poetry.[28]

YOUNG INDIANS ON THE RESERVATION

Through both GAI and gay people's increasing presence in the media, gay liberation is reaching young Indians on the reservations. One of those who migrated to an urban gay community is Michael One Feather, who was born in 1958 on a South Dakota reservation, and was raised almost entirely by his grandparents. Though he now makes his home in Los Angeles, he retains many ties to the reservation. Typical of the two worlds that contemporary gay Indians must straddle, he is both a sophisticated urbanite and a Lakota traditionalist. A gentle person, Michael is proud of his androgynous manner and of his respect for Indian traditions.

When he was growing up, Michael remembers that he always saw himself as different. Long before any sexual urges led him to identify as gay, he knew that he was not like the other children. He enjoyed designing flamboyant clothing and artistic things as a child, and generally isolated himself from others his age. He preferred to spend time with his grandparents, or by himself. He has been sexually active since he was ten years old, always with men who were older than he.

When he was twelve years old, other kids called him *winkte*. He recalls: "I asked my grandmother what it meant, and she didn't tell me but said not to listen to them." Later, other boys in his school explained it to him: "they used the word *winkte* for what we call gay." Because the kids at school were using *winkte* as a word of ridicule, he took "gay" as a more positive term. He used the word *gay* to describe himself, not *winkte*. "I had seen references to gays in magazines, and had an Indian friend who was raised in a nearby town, and he showed me a copy of the

gay newspaper *The Advocate*. He connected me to the gay world, and told me what it was all about."

He did not know much about *winkte,* beyond the jokes of his age-mates. "I didn't know about its spiritual role until I took an American Indian studies class in high school. The teachers said that *winktes* were holy people who should be respected. A long time ago they went on the warpath with the warriors and took care of them and nursed them." When Michael mentioned this to his grandparents, his grandfather did not react negatively but his grandmother, with her Christian beliefs, told him that he should not be that way. This did not faze him because, Michael recalls, "I never took my grandmother's statement seriously. At age fourteen I just decided to do things the way I wanted to do it."

By the age of fifteen he was ready to leave the reservation. "I was looking for my freedom to be gay. The only way I could see to do that was to work my way into school fieldtrips and go off to other cities." On a summer school trip to Minneapolis after a teacher pointed out a gay bar, "I snuck out of the hotel room and went down there. I met two Sioux Indian drag queens on the street, and they got me into the bar. I liked it and wanted to go back." Returning home from the trip, he stayed at his grandparents' for only a week before deciding to go back to Minneapolis. He had saved some money from a part-time job, which he used to buy a one-way ticket to Minneapolis.

Once he got to the city, the two Sioux he had met earlier let him stay with them. "They showed me the drag scene, and introduced me to a wonderful world that I enjoyed a lot. I started dressing as a woman, and earned money by giving blow jobs to straight guys who thought they were buying a woman. One time a guy discovered I was male and that was kind of scary, but usually it was quickies in their car so they never knew. I worried a lot about getting arrested by police, though."

When he was still sixteen Michael met a thirty-two-year-old white construction worker at a nightclub. "We fell in love and I moved in with him. It was a good relationship. He enjoyed taking me out to straight places with me dressed as a woman. We got a kick out of fooling the straights." But later both of them started drinking too much alcohol and the relationship went

downhill. "After we were together six years, he left me for a woman. That hurt me. So in 1981 I left Minneapolis and returned to my grandparents. But then after a little while my lover drove all the way out to the reservation to make up with me. He apologized and begged me to come back with him. It was so romantic. We both drove back to Minneapolis to try to make our relationship work. But unfortunately it didn't, so I came back to the reservation again."

On his return Michael was asked to join a small Indian dancing group, since he was known as a very good "fancy dancer." Under his leadership the group became famous throughout the Plains for competition at international powwows. To support himself and the group he applied for Native American culture grants, a skill he had learned in high school. "I had a knack for writing things about my heritage and my culture, and putting it into a grant. Our grants always got accepted. I always put in for far places, since I liked to travel." This dance group became known for the accuracy of their dances, with his grandparents and other elders serving as advisors.

Most people knew about Michael being gay, but it was not discussed. What they noticed were his efforts to keep alive an important aspect of their culture. Another gay Indian dancer, who had been in California, told him about the well-developed gay communities there. By that time Michael was feeling restless: "I had accomplished everything I wanted in the dancing. There was no more excitement. So then I answered an ad in the *Advocate* from a guy in West Hollywood, and he paid for my ticket to Los Angeles. Social life on the reservation was not too exciting, so I left."

Michael came to Los Angeles and stayed at the man's house for three months. Disoriented by the move, he began to drink too much. Finally, his roommate asked him to leave. He had to look for a new apartment and a job. "It was hard, but I knew when I was out here I was free. When I see how many gay people there are in Los Angeles, with its own gay city now in West Hollywood, I knew I had found my home. It is a place to go and be accepted. I have no desire to go back to the reservation to live."

But he does go back to visit, and regularly talks with his

relatives on the telephone. His grandparents did not want him to move so far away from home, "But they understand why I like it out here. I let them know that I finally became self-supporting." He is proud that he has not touched a drop of alcohol for three years. He likes his job, and spends his free time working for the International Conference for Lesbian and Gay People of Color. "I'm happy to be able to take care of myself, to be able to start to grow." His pride and self-confidence have never been greater.

In the last few years, since Michael left his reservation, gay liberation has been having more of an impact there. Michael says, "Today on the reservation there are so many gays and lesbians emerging more visibly, and more rumors about who slept with whom. People are becoming more open-minded, due to the impact of the urban gay rights movement. Since more young Indians are influenced to come out as gay, their openness forces other Indians to change their attitudes and accept gays."[29]

BERDACHISM AND GAYNESS

Differences

While both berdachism and gayness involve sex with men, there are dissimilarities. Part of the difference between berdache and gay roles is in terms of gender identity. Some homosexually inclined Indians today, especially those who have been exposed to urban gay communities, may not wish to make a choice between being a berdache or a masculine man. They see themselves as gay, not berdache, and do not want social acceptance if it means they will be treated like a halfman-halfwoman. They want to be treated as men.

In traditional Indian values, men who are not berdaches are expected to marry women. With some signifcant exceptions, many tribes put pressure on men not to marry a berdache but only to visit him for sex. There was not a recognized way for two masculine men to become formally married. In rejecting a berdache role for themselves, some younger homosexually inclined men also reject family pressure to take a wife.

These men want a full-time relationship with another gay-

identified man, rather than always being propositioned by masculine men for secret sexual encounters. And they do not like exclusively taking the passive role in sex. They were socialized in the gay subculture to expect a flexible exchange and blending of roles with their partner.

These issues point up the differences between a berdache role, overlaid with its alternative gender traditions, and the idea of two masculine males having a gay relationship. But the differences should not be overstated. While most people tend to follow the accepted pattern in which they are socialized, long-term relationships between a berdache and a man do offer the privacy and trust within which sexual flexibility can take place. Homosexual behavior might be the same as in Western society, but the meanings that society constructs around these relationships differ considerably.

Still another difference is that a separate gay community arose largely as a refuge from the persecutions of an antagonistic culture. Individuals migrated to such a community to escape a home from which they were often alienated. When berdaches had an accepted role within the family and the community, there was no reason to migrate to a separate urban subculture. A berdache might share a sense of sameness with other berdaches, but there was no estrangement from the general society.

One *winkte* I interviewed said he did not think he would be a good gay lover. He did not mean in terms of sexual behavior, but in terms of his commitment to family, his love for children, and his desire to remain on his reservation. Living in a separate community of people like himself was not his goal in life. He did not even have a desire to visit the city, where he imagines a faceless anonymous mass of people lost without their extended family connections and their communion with nature and the spirit world.[30]

For their part, some white gay men resist the analogy to berdachism. In many ways modern gay subculture is more similar to frontier male fringe societies, in which two masculine men paired up, than it is with the gender-mixing berdache tradition. In a letter attacking the Quebec gay magazine for taking the name *Le Berdache,* a gay writer complained that the name implies an integration into society rather than a separate gay sub-

culture. More importantly, the berdache represented too feminine and mystical a role, which this writer felt was not what male homosexuality was about. He preferred to emphasize pairings of masculine men with each other, not a masculine man with "a parody of a woman."[31] Given the trend in the gay community toward a more macho image, and the consequent disparagement of drag queens, it is surprising that the berdache model has been as popular as it has.

Traditionalist Indians see the mystical and gender aspects as the greatest strength of the berdache. I asked a Lakota *winkte* if a certain gay-identified Indian we both knew would be considered a *winkte*. He said no, because the man was not androgynous enough and was not spiritual: "*Winktes* are very spiritual. When Indians say *winkte,* they mean a male who is effeminate, like a woman. 'Gay' and *winkte* are different. *Winkte* is a gay with ceremonial powers."[32] Because of this lack of spirituality traditional Lakotas sometimes look down on gay-identified people. One says:

> *Winktes* at one time were regarded as sacred, but that has declined, and today it is like gay—like in California. Even today elderly *winktes* are respected as holy persons, especially by elderly and traditional people, and feared because of their spiritual power. They could put a curse on people, so you had better respect them. Younger people will call other youngsters *winkte* but I don't think they are really *winktes* because they have no spirituality. They are just gay; there's a difference. Maybe they got that way from drinking or smoking. Most of them don't even know about the *winkte* tradition. If they did they wouldn't drink.[33]

Gays are not condemned by traditionalists because of their sexual behavior but because they are not fulfilling their spiritual role in life. A woman whose uncle is a *winkte* says, "People who don't respect their Indian traditions criticize gays, but it was part of Indian culture. It makes me mad when I hear someone insult *winktes*. A lot of the younger gays, though, don't fulfill their spiritual role as *winktes,* and that's sad too."[34]

Spiritual justification is the crucial element underlying a respected role for *winktes*. A shaman admits that people currently define someone as *winkte* on the basis of their homosexual re-

lationships and androgynous character, but "today it is hard to know really who are *winkte*" because so many do not fulfill their spiritual powers. As Terry Calling Eagle says, "Some *winktes* today are not dependable, to help others spiritually."[35] Even though he would be classified as exclusively homosexual if he were in white society, Terry does not identify as gay. He sees his spiritual role as more important in his self-identity than the fact that he has sex with men.

I am most indebted to this forty-six-year-old *winkte,* with whom I lived in the summer of 1982, who led me to understand this distinction. He patiently explained Lakota culture while preparing me for participation in some of the most sacred ceremonies: sweats, smoking of the sacred pipe, Yuwipi, and my own vision quest. At the Sun Dance I attended, it was he who led the prayers blessing the Sun Dance pole, as it was placed in the ground. He and the medicine man who guided my learning, helped me appreciate as never before the intense spiritual role of berdache.

Terry Calling Eagle talks continuously about spiritual matters, and spends his days helping people prepare for ceremonies. He also helps people in very practical matters—visiting with the infirm, taking them to the doctor, helping them sell beadwork, conveying messages for people without telephones, cooking for them, and doing a multitude of other small tasks. He says, "If I practice the *winkte* role seriously, then people will respect me. I've worked as a nurse, and a cook in an old age home. I cook for funerals and wakes too. People bring their children to me for special *winkte* names, and give me gifts." I observed some of this gift giving, in which people brought him things informally as well as in "giveaway" ceremonies. He always had a large pile of blankets and gifts piled in the corner, which he would in turn give as presents to those in need. When I asked him why he did all this, he replied, "If I show my generosity, then others help me in return."[36]

As we sat in his room, with pictures of his smiling adoptive children hanging on the walls, along with posters from the American Indian Movement and souvenirs from his participation in the 1973 Wounded Knee occupation, I saw that he is

indeed different from the average man. He defines his existence around his helping role and his intense spirituality.

Both Berdache and Gay

The relationship between a berdache identity and a gay identity can be seen especially in the case of present-day individuals who have switched back and forth between the two. A traditionalist Kiowa berdache, when he moved to San Francisco in the early 1960s, wore a mixture of men's and women's clothing, and wore his hair long like a woman. But in the city he gradually stopped identifying as a "male-female," and was influenced by his urban friends to begin identifying as "gay."[37]

In some respects, a gay identity is closer to a traditional berdache role than is a transvestite identity. A Hupa berdache who left his reservation in his late teens began dressing entirely as a woman and passing as a female. His previous role on the reservation was different—more androgynous than feminine. After several years living as a woman in mainstream American society, he decided, "I wanted to identify as a male. I was tired of people reacting to me as a woman. I liked the feeling, but I got tired of it. So I decided I would be gay." He cut his hair short, and started socializing in the gay community. "I had to be comfortable that society accepted me, and I figured that being gay would be more acceptable. Everything before then I had geared as female, but I accepted that I don't have to go into a lot of role playing, and can do anything as gay. I could go to work and be comfortable. As a woman I only knew how to be taken care of by a man."[38]

It is interesting that, on moving into Anglo-American culture, with its notions that there are only "two opposite sexes," this berdache first chose a woman's status. Later, he chose a man's status. Finally reacting against the either/or choice forced on him, a gay identity offered him a more flexible androgynous role. For him, gay identity seemed closer to what he had experienced during his years on the reservation than had been the transvestite life-style he lived in the interim. Today he seems not particularly feminine, being more accurately characterized as a gentle man.

Such identity changes can occur more than once in a person's life. A Yaqui Indian now in his thirties, who was raised as a berdache, was respected as a dreamer and a mediator between the genders. He did a mixture of women's and men's work, and was sexually active with men. About 1970 he migrated to Los Angeles, where he merged into the gay community. He continued to gravitate to androgynous work, becoming a florist and later an owner of a unisex clothing boutique. Though he was successful in the city, he missed the spiritual element that had been so important in his life. In 1982 he gave up all his material gain to return to his people. Today he is an apprentice to an elderly berdache, training to be a healer. He has sex only with males, similar to his behavior when he was in the city, but the emphasis in his life now is on his spirituality. He again identifies, and is identified by his community, as a berdache.

Since such individuals have clearly not disappeared, we cannot say that the berdache tradition has died. The degree to which berdachism overlaps with gay identity depends on the particular tribe, of course, but it also depends on how the tradition is conceived. During her 1930s fieldwork on the Potawatomi reservation, Ruth Landes knew two young men in their twenties who were "potential berdaches, now frustrated by cultural changes." Landes suggested that the demise of the tradition was due to Western influences: "the berdache could not survive fundamentalists' outrage in the general American world." Yet even though she described them as "incomplete berdaches," the characteristics she mentioned lead one to wonder just what had changed.[39]

Landes portrayed these individuals as "rather delicate. . . . He walks like a woman, he talks like one, he likes housekeeping . . . his manners rather mincing, unlike the other boys." They were skilled beadworkers, excelling in a craft that only women normally pursue. These "berdache-seeming young men were assumed to be visionaries" and were well respected as "supernatural, extraordinary." An elderly Potawatomi woman described such a person as "something unusual the Good Spirit put here for a purpose." If such persons had been taught the traditional Indian ways, this woman said, "then we would have heard something extraordinary" from them.[40]

So even though the customs had changed, the type of person was seen as the same. One such Potawatomi was remembered in terms that seem typical of descriptions of berdaches. His name was Louis Nowgizhik, but he preferred Louise. He was known for his cleanliness, his hardworking productivity, and his sewing. Because he was such a good cook, a prosperous Potawatomi family hired him. One of the daughters in this family later described him fondly: "He made a strawberry pie with the loveliest crust. His rhubarb pie was wonderful!" Louise started off wearing a big apron over his pants, but later got rid of the pants in favor of dresses. After that he began to style his hair like a woman and to wear fancy combs in it. Landes's informant recalled:

> We laughed but told him he looked nice. He was pleased. . . . He was crazy over my brothers. . . . He joked and giggled around boys like a boy-struck girl. . . . At my father's dances, he danced like a woman, with a man partner. . . . People used to come and stand around watching him. He was a curiosity, but they respected him. He didn't seem to mind; he seemed to like the attention. . . . He or 'she'—Louise liked the 'she'—was so tall, taller than most men, that he didn't look much like a woman . . . [but] his manners were beautiful.

When Louise died in his old age, the Indians respected his wish to be buried in women's clothes. "No indeed, the Indians never made light of him. They thought 'she' had some great 'power.'"[41]

Similarly, some Hopi women interviewed in 1965 about a modern male Indian expressed sentiments that are practically the same as statements of a century ago. They emphasized that such androgynous males were hard workers and owned a lot of cattle. About his character these women said, "his actions want to be like that of a woman, he acts like a woman, and he talks like a woman. . . . We liked him. . . . There's nothing the matter with them. It's just their actions. . . . We don't care. We tease him about it, but he doesn't care either."[42]

A psychologist who in 1976 interviewed another such male of a Southwestern tribe described him as "a gay man." Yet the way his family and tribe reacted to him was more like that of a

berdache. He was comfortably accepted in the tribe, never suffering humiliations or attacks, nor had any restrictions been placed on his nonmasculine behavior. He was considered the best basket maker and sewer in the tribe. Typical for berdaches in the Southwest, his skills in woman's work were an object of praise by all. The psychologist wrote his reactions, "His appearance is neuter, not feminine, effeminate, or masculine." The interviewee was not uncomfortable discussing his sexual behavior with men or his gender variance. "There were no signs of psychosis . . . nor was there the impression of a person afflicted with chronic anxiety, depression, or their transformations."[43]

Clearly there have been major changes in the berdache tradition, but we must look at these modifications as part of an ongoing process of culture change. Native American cultures were not static before the coming of Europeans, and it is unrealistic to expect them to have remained unchanged since colonization. The changes occurring in this century should not be seen as a sudden transposition foisted on a static institution. Instead, we must look for continuities within the context of change. In this respect, there is much continuity from the past, in American Indian cultures generally and in the berdache role in particular, even up to the present.

Though some young Indians identify as gay and not as berdache, because they are not involved in the traditional ceremonies,[44] others see the two categories as essentially similar. This similarity is evidently not something that has existed just since the emergence of gay liberation. During her fieldwork among the Omahas in the 1930s, Margaret Mead recalled that she was visited by a white friend "who had been living an avowed homoerotic life in Japan, who was not a transvestite but who had a complete repertoire of homosexual postures. Within an hour of his arrival, the single berdache in the tribe turned up and tried to make contact with him."[45] The berdache's interest indicates that he saw a commonality with the white homosexual, beyond cultural definitions.

This cross-cultural commonality is not restricted to Anglo gays. A Hupa berdache who moved to San Francisco in the 1970s began to associate with a group of Hawaiian migrants

who identify as *mahu,* a traditional gender-variant role in Polynesian culture that is similar to berdachism. They felt a close sense of "sisterhood." In 1979, he recalls, "I took a troup of Hawaiian queens back to the Hupa reservation. Everyone treated them with a lot of respect, and cleared a special place for them to do the traditional Hawaiian dances. People on the reservation went wild over this."[46] He was not the only one who saw cross-cultural similarities based on their similar gender and sexual identities; the Indian community responded likewise.

Many contemporary Indians, when asked to define their word for berdache, interpret it as "gay" or "homosexual."[47] "You can easily recognize *winktes,*" a Lakota man told me before I visited his reservation. When I asked how, he replied, "The same way you recognize a gay, very open and flamboyant. *Winkte* went underground a few decades ago, but has now reemerged as openly gay."[48] When I was on the Cheyenne reservation, and I would ask people to define *he man eh* (sometimes pronounced as "hoim-a" or "e hi e mun"), they translated it as "a male who acts like a female." Knowing that I was going to Los Angeles, they said, "You'll see a lot of people like that out there."[49] Among tribes that no longer have a ceremonial role for berdaches, modern Indians equate berdaches with androgynous gay men.

It took a long while to figure out that when they said "gay" they did not mean it in exactly the same way that whites use the term to apply to anyone who is homosexual. When I first arrived on reservations, I was surprised that elderly Indians generally preferred to use the word "gay" rather than "homosexual." They see the latter term as focusing on sexual behavior, whereas their focus is on a person's character. "Gay," with its connotations of life-style beyond sexual behavior, seems to fit in more closely with an Indian understanding. The Indians use "gay" to apply only to those who are not stereotypically masculine. A young Omaha man remembers asking his elderly uncle why he was not like other men. The uncle replied, "Because I am *mexoga*—I am gay. That's just the way I am." This young man defines *mexoga* as "a very gentle man, but not a woman."[50] Using gay in this way, they would not count mas-

culine-acting homosexuals as part of this status. They assume that berdaches will be involved sexually with men, but that is not as important in defining them as their character.[51]

An elder Crow traditionalist explains that Osh-Tisch was the last *bade'* to dress differently. "Since then the younger ones dress like men and blend in more. There are some today, transvestites, homosexuals, or gays you call them, but they don't have any ceremonial role." I asked what was the difference between *badé* and "gay" and he said they were the same.[52] When I asked other Crows about *badé* (without mentioning any association with homosexuality), they consistently said it meant "gay."[53] Russell Means, a leader in the American Indian Movement, likewise compared gays and berdaches: "The Indian looked upon these unique individuals as something special the Great Mystery created to teach us. These people had something special to tell us."[54]

BERDACHISM AND THE REVIVAL OF TRADITIONAL VALUES

There is an association between respect for the traditions and respect for berdaches. Crow people point out that there was a sharp decline in respect for the old ways in the 1920s, which was the decade that *badé* status seems to have waned. Today there are no *badé* who reached puberty (the age at which berdachism usually becomes manifest) before 1960. Since 1960 there has been a cultural revitalization among the Crows, and a more respectful attitude toward berdaches emerged. A Crow man told me that berdachism comes from "the same causes as homosexuality in other cultures" but the difference is how the larger society reacts to it. If an individual has an androgynous personality, then "Indian people tend to be more accepting than whites."[55]

Ronnie Loud Hawk says, "I get my holiness from the Sacred Pipe. From that holiness the Sioux people show respect. In the last few years, respect for *winkte* has increased, more than it had been, as more people return to respect for the traditions. Some mixed-blood Indians condemn 'queers,' but the traditional people stick up for them."[56] This new pride in the traditional

heritage has meant that the cultural renaissance for American Indians has also brought with it a renewed sense of self-confidence for those who identify as berdaches and as gay. A woman who is half Navajo and half Lumbee remembers when her cousin came out as gay in the late 1960s. The Lumbee side of the family, who did not have a berdache tradition, condemned the cousin. But the Navajo side was consistently supportive. The Navajo grandmother told the children not to be upset, because their respected great-uncle, a *nadle,* was "also like that."[57] The grandmother saw *nadle* and *gay,* in their essence, as the same.

Younger gay Indians, upon coming out to their families, will sometimes have an elderly relative who takes them aside and tells them about the berdache tradition. A part-Choctaw gay man recalls that his full-blood Choctaw grandmother realized he was gay and told him how people like him traditionally worked closely with the medicine men: "What she told me made all the difference in my acceptance of myself. She said many of the holy men were gay and it was totally acceptable. They were almost seen as belonging to the tribe as a whole"—that is, as kin to everyone.[58]

This respectful attitude eliminates the stress felt by families that harbor homophobia. As a consequence, berdaches feel very close to their relatives. Michael One Feather says:

> My grandparents accept my being gay, and we have a really good relationship. My grandmother got over her Christian prejudices, and like others has returned more to the traditional Indian way of looking at it. She told me that one male out of every generation in our family is a *winkte* and she had to accept it. She explained that in the old days people let them live and did not ridicule or bother them. There was the Indian belief that if anyone treated them badly then something bad would happen to them. Even in her Christian days she never tried to stop my homosexuality, or try to make me get married. It helps me to know of the *winkte* tradition.

Michael One Feather's elders prominently mention several *winktes* in their recounts of the family's history. They are descended from the famous Lakota leader Sitting Bull, and it is mentioned in family stories that Sitting Bull had a *winkte* wife.

There is no embarrassment in these stories, and no sense that this is a skeleton in the family closet. Instead, such stories stress that *winktes* are the holy people chosen to do sweat lodge ceremonials in association with medicine men. How different it must be for a nonmasculine boy growing up to hear family stories about respected ancestors who shared his gender identity, as opposed to a youngster who feels that he is the only one in the world like himself.

When Michael One Feather returned to live on the reservation as an adult, traditionalists recognized his spiritual gifts. He was widely respected for his devotion to the traditions in his leadership of the dance group. He also studied with a prominent medicine man, who paid particular attention to him. The shaman, according to Michael,

> talked to me a lot and interpreted dreams of mine. He said I could foretell the future. I've often predicted things that would happen, so people realize that I am a seer. Though the Christianized Indians ridicule it, the older generation understands the proper meaning of *winkte* and respects it. The medicine man respects me as a *winkte*. If an older person calls me a *winkte,* I would take it as a compliment. I identify both as a *winkte* and as gay. They are the same.[59]

From this perspective, differences in the behavior of the berdache and the gay man should not be overstated. Berdaches were socialized into a culture where they were expected always to take the passive role in sex. Michael One Feather did that, and never felt sexually restricted by such a role. But after he moved to the city, and became more experienced in urban gay sexual behavior, he has learned to enjoy taking the active as well as the passive roles in sex. Today he has modified his sexual behavior, just as he has modified his dress. At times he will costume himself in a dress, but is as likely to wear a muscle shirt and blue jeans, though he usually wears stylish androgynous clothing.

Michael likes the flexibility of his urban gay lifestyle, but he has added that to his Lakota traditional *winkte* role rather than denying it. He has inventively adjusted, bringing his bicultural background to a rich self-identity as *winkte* and gay. He sees different styles in both traditions, but no contradiction in either

role as a particular culture's expression of what he sees as a basic aspect of his character. The gift of tribal spirituality, combined with the flexibility of urban life-style; that is the potency of his dual identity.

Members of San Francisco's Gay American Indians also have combined these identities. GAI co-founder Randy Burns says, "We are living in the spirit of our traditional gay Indian people. The gay Indian person is probably more traditional and spiritual and more creative than his or her straight counterpart because that was the traditional role we played. The old people will tell you that. . . . We were the Go-Betweens. Because of our skill and our education today, we are the go-betweens, between the Indian community and the governmental bodies."[60] In San Francisco, with their contacts with the politically influential gay establishment, GAI uses their position to aid the Indian community in general.

Service to the community is an idea that continues to be emphasized for berdaches on a number of reservations. Joseph Sandpiper, a Micmac man who is identified as *geenumu gesallagee* ("he loves men"), told me that there are a number of prominent Micmac leaders who are like himself. They wear men's clothes, but will often wear a woman's sash as symbol of their status. Joseph served two terms as chief of his reserve, and he is now putting himself through college in public administration so that he may return with new skills to help his tribe. He is the Go-Between for his people, mediating with the outside world. Though everyone on his reserve knows that he is sexually active with men, he has never felt any prejudice on the basis of his sexuality. The only time people got upset with him was when he decided to leave the community to go to school. They felt he was abandoning them when they needed his leadership.[61]

Respected leader Salyoqah Channey (Seminole) expresses appreciation for the work that GAI members do for the San Francisco Indian community, saying, "They're being very, very helpful because they're enlightening non-Indians to our needs. They're doing a real civic duty. They're trying very hard to help our people." Randy Burns responds with pride, "When you have elders coming to us, asking us to be part of their ceremony, that's spiritual, that's cultural, that's Indian."[62]

Those who favor the revitalization of traditional culture point out the wisdom of berdachism as a benefit for Indian society generally. Not only does this respect prevent family disunity when a family member becomes berdache and/or gay, but it also helps to ensure that the member will actively contribute to the well-being of his relatives and his community. Poet Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) points out that the berdache role as Go-Between for women and men also fulfills a valuable social function. With a respected person to serve as mediator between the sexes, marital discord is inhibited in Indian families.

"If you make people hate berdaches," Paula Gunn Allen states, "they will lose their Indianness. The connection to the spirit world, and the connection between the world of women and men, is destroyed when the berdache tradition declines." The adoption of Western prejudices by modern Indians is, she concludes, an important aspect of "psychological colonization. If you hate the traditions, you hate part of yourself as Indian. If you hate yourself, that weakens your resolve to oppose white colonization. If we could stop Indian homophobia, other aspects of cultural revival can occur. We must recolonize ourselves. The issue of self-determination for Indian people means acceptance of lesbians and gays is central to accepting ourselves as Indian."[63]

Traditionalists' respect toward berdaches is suggested by another leading Indian poet, Maurice Kenny (Mohawk), in his 1979 poem that he titled "Winkte."

> We are special to the Sioux!
> They gave us respect for strange powers
> Of looking into the sun, the night.
> They paid us with horses not derision.
> .....
> For the people of the Cheyenne Nation
> There was space for us in the village.
>
> And we were accepted into the fur robes
> Of a young warrior, and lay by his flesh
> And knew his mouth and warm groin;
> Or we married (a second wife) to the chief,
> And if we fulfilled our duties, he smiled
> And gave us his grandchildren to care for.

We were special to the Sioux, Cheyenne, Ponca
And the Crow who valued our worth and did not spit
Names at our lifted skirts nor kicked our nakedness.
We had power with the people![64]

An Indian from Arizona states, "Among my people, gay is a special status. . . . The more unique someone is, the more valuable they are, the more unique their vision, the more unique their gift, their perspective, everything they can offer is something that other people can't offer. . . . The thing that's different about where I come from, is that all human beings are respected because all human beings have potential, all human beings have value."[65]

Examined from the perspective of two traditions, Indian society and the Western gay subculture, American Indian berdachism today demonstrates that despite intense pressure from white people, Native American culture has not succumbed to cultural genocide. This tradition had to change and even go underground, but it has not vanished. By creatively adapting, berdaches—like American Indians generally—must be seen not as the vanishing American, but the persisting American. It has managed to survive because of the respect that traditionalist Indians feel for the strength and the magic of human diversity. Some of this strength can be discerned in a 1964 statement by a Mohave berdache, which is perhaps the most important message of all.

I don't think I would like to change. I guess I'm just on my own personal little warpath—not against whites but against heterosexuals who think that everyone should be like them. I'm not always happy, but I'm always me. And they can like it or lump it. Life's too short to spend your time being something you don't want to be. Like the old saying, "To thine own self be true." I'm true to my self and my own nature. I think that's all anyone has a right to ask of me.[66]