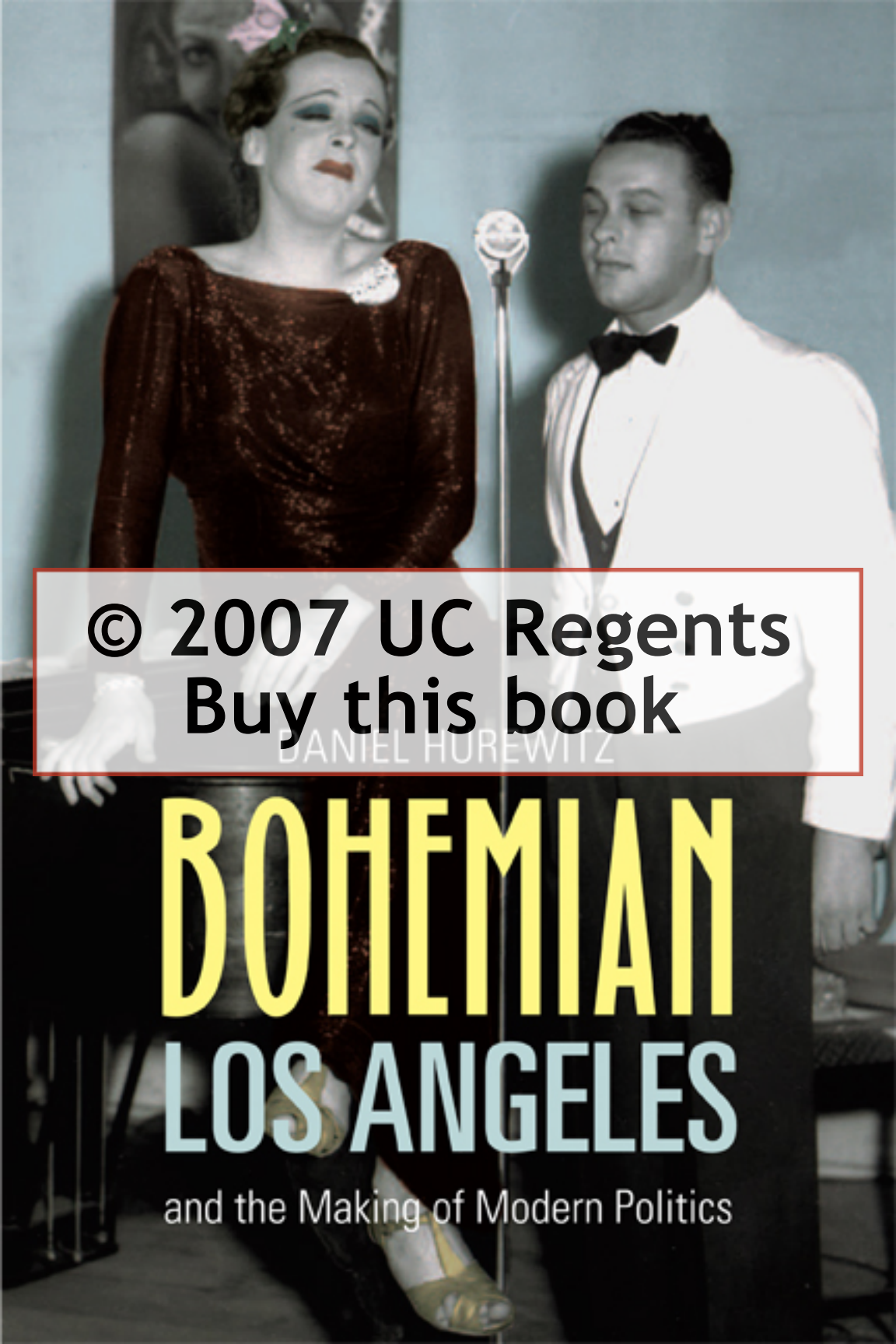

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Traversing the Hills of Edendale

HIGH ON A HILLSIDE OVERLOOKING Los Angeles' Silver Lake Reservoir stands the Villa Capistrano, the former home of film and vaudeville sensation Julian Eltinge. Built in the late 1910s with a typically Angeleno combination of Spanish, Moorish, and Italian elements, Eltinge's villa once commanded the surrounding area like a baron's manor. At the time, the neighborhood bore the poetic name of Edendale, and it bustled with the comings and goings of the early film industry. The topography undulated with little hills and valleys, and its roads twisted and bent, following the curve of the reservoir or the slope of an incline. At some points the streets billowed out into vistas, offering brilliant views across the plains of Los Angeles and out to the Pacific Ocean. At other points, where the hills were too steep, the streets simply stopped, replaced by stairwells that continued their climb.

Few homes sat near the gardens of Eltinge's villa. The tower and terraces and the estate's high perch on the hill spoke loudly of wealth and security, and they exuded a sense of unprecedented celebrity at a moment when movie stars were first coming into existence. According to one local chronicler, Eltinge "was one of the first actors to establish a palatial home in Los Angeles," and the press was captivated by its construction, tracking even the building materials that were being used. One film buff claimed that around the house there "gathered the scent of scandal," but even that was

an exotic and alluring scent: local realtors promoted their developments by their proximity to the villa, and in the 1920s you could purchase a postcard with a picture of Eltinge's manor to impress the folks back home.[1]

Today, though, Eltinge's villa hardly dominates the landscape. It sits crowded in with homes beside and beneath it on the hill. The neighborhood it overlooks, now called Silver Lake and Echo Park, beats with the seemingly new pulse of a vibrant creative multicultural scene. There is a steady line for bands playing on Santa Monica Boulevard. The Silver Lake Film Festival, launched in 2000, attracts larger and larger audiences with its music, video, and film presentations. The gay bars on Sunset—like the Mexican restaurants and dance halls down the way—fill regularly with men and women out on the town. And the houses and apartments are teeming, it seems, with screenwriters, painters, architects, and performers struggling to craft and create. In such a context, Eltinge's home—let alone his life—seems insignificant, unrelated to the hip bohemia that surrounds it: just another time-worn house on a hill.

Much the same could be said on the opposite side of the country, in the heart of New York City's new 42nd Street, where Eltinge's presence remains as another forgotten shadow. There on the corner of 8th Avenue, the AMC movie chain operates a twenty-five-screen multiplex out of a beautiful vaudeville theater that Eltinge built in 1912 with two business partners. In fact, in 1997, AMC lifted and moved the Eltinge Theater 168 feet so that its broad terra-cotta façade, triumphal arch window, and domed auditorium could serve as the lobby for their new multiscreen extravaganza. Now as moviegoers ascend the escalator to their screen of choice, they ride beneath three portraits of Eltinge painted onto what was once the proscenium arch of his stage. But Eltinge floats there unnamed and little noticed.[2]

That Eltinge lingers, standing watch over Los Angeles' contemporary bohemia—and hovering in the heart of New York's theater district—makes a certain sense. In the world of vaudeville, Eltinge was as successful as they come. According to some estimates, his weekly income in 1912 exceeded even that of President Taft. Indeed, the theater that was moved down the block had been financed in large part by the income he generated during his four-year run starring in *The Fascinating Widow,* a show written specifically for him. And Eltinge's success was hardly only local. His vaudeville shows toured the country and the world, garnering him fame and fans. He was invited both to perform for the king of England and to star in several early Hollywood films. Eltinge's success certainly warrants

his standing guard at the center of the nation's cultural and performance centers.

Nevertheless, Eltinge is not a vaudeville or film star who is well remembered at the start of the twenty-first century: neither his home nor his theater is celebrated as a vestige of his life. Unlike figures such as Al Jolson, Fatty Arbuckle, and Louise Brooks—whose stage stardom and brief film careers burned them into the national consciousness—Eltinge's name and career have been lost to popular memory.[3] And they were not lost by accident. Eltinge's career is not remembered sixty years after his death because Eltinge was a particular kind of performer—a kind that made him a star in the 1910s but whose mode of performance was scorned by mid-century and largely forgotten at century's end: Eltinge was a spectacular female impersonator. A tremendously talented performer, he brought laughter to his audiences by portraying young men in straits so dire that they could be solved only by his disguising himself as a woman, and once in that guise, he astonished them with the beauty, style, and glamour he revealed. He was hardly the only female impersonator pounding the boards at the turn of the century: such performers were a much-enjoyed staple of the vaudeville world. But he was at the top of their class: the best paid, the best known, and the best regarded, even by those who normally had little patience for such performers. And the three figures floating in the 42nd Street theater are portraits of Eltinge at work, at the height of the career that was to be forgotten, Eltinge in costume as three beautiful women. Those figures open a window onto a lost world.

I did not set out to find Julian Eltinge. Instead, I stumbled across him while on a search for another man. That man, Harry Hay, had, like Eltinge, immigrated to Los Angeles in the 1910s and also became involved in the world of performance. But from there his life spun in an entirely different direction. Indeed, in 1950 Hay helped to found the Mattachine Society, the first long-lasting American homosexual rights organization. He was a key figure in shaping the social and political movement around sexual identity and was emblematic, fundamentally, of the birth of identity politics. As I began this project, I was curious about exploring the history of Hay and Mattachine as a way to understand the formation of late-twentieth-century American identity politics. Yet just as I set out to find Hay, I discovered Eltinge.

Hay and Eltinge lived in the same neighborhood in Los Angeles. Ten years ago, I interviewed a longtime resident of that neighborhood, hoping he would tell me something about Hay and gay politics in the 1950s; instead

he told me about Eltinge, who had built his palatial home just down the street. He pulled out an old newspaper clipping. It showed Eltinge in full stunning attire, and I was intrigued. What do you mean that a female impersonator was an international star, let alone a movie star, one hundred years ago? How could such a fact have been so well buried? The man hinted at rumors that Eltinge had sexual relationships with other men. Well, was he, in fact, homosexually active? And why did he come to live in this neighborhood? Was the neighborhood some sort of homosexual retreat? And was there some connection between Eltinge and Hay and his Mattachine organization? Those questions, tying the identity politics of the later twentieth century to the sexual and cultural world of the early century, began to race around in my head and ultimately gave birth to this book.[4]

Julian Eltinge and Harry Hay did not know each other. Eltinge became a star before Hay was born, and Hay reached his greatest influence after Eltinge had died. Yet Eltinge and Hay had a fair amount in common. These two tall white men loved to perform: one strode the boards of vaudeville stages around the globe; the other played small theaters in Los Angeles but performed even more dramatically as a public speaker, educator, and activist. One man married, the other did not, but both pursued sexual relationships with other men. And both men lived for several years in the hilly Los Angeles neighborhood once known as Edendale. In fact, both of their homes sat on the same hill rising along the eastern bank of Silver Lake Reservoir. Eltinge's home was built on the southern crest of the hill and faced west, across the lake; Hay's sat farther north, at the peak of the hill but with a more eastern orientation, toward the city's downtown. If you left the home of the first man and forged a path up and across the ridge of the hill, within minutes you would arrive at the second's home, facing out across a very different urban valley.

Perhaps you could throw a stone across the face of that ridge today; their homes were just that physically close. But in historical terms, the distance between the cultural world of 1918 that brought Eltinge to Edendale and the world of Hay when he moved into the neighborhood in 1942—let alone when he left in the 1950s—was enormous. The story at the heart of this book is the story of that cultural distance between them and how it was crossed. It is the story of how Eltinge's world was undone and remade into a world that we might recognize—of how a place like Edendale became a place like Silver Lake.

Of course, the ways that Los Angeles in the 1910s differed from the 1950s are myriad. But the path across that Edendale ridge which lies at the heart

of this book is the changing way in which people understood themselves—indeed, understood what their "selves" were. At one end of that path was a world of Victorian values where exterior character, public behavior, and performance were the very measures of selfhood. At the other end lay a profound emphasis on an interior realm of personality, essence, and identity. Indeed, the very possibility of identity politics, which so marked late-twentieth-century United States political life, lay in the transformation that intervened.

Americans today think a fair amount about identity, and they do so in ways that are the results of multiple historical trajectories. On the one hand, contemporary Americans typically live some portion of their lives searching for themselves, taking to heart that countercultural imperative and believing that there is a "self" for them to "find." That interior self, we believe, stands as the irreducible core of our uniqueness: it is our essence, our persona, the very particular expression of our psychic DNA. According to philosopher Charles Taylor, Americans have embraced the imperative that "there is a certain way of being human that is *my* way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. . . . [T]his notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*." This ethic of unique self-fulfillment has yielded a "search for authenticity" that, according to historian Doug Rossinow, has become a "pervasive yearning in the United States." As Jeffrey Weeks explained in the 1990s, we now "need a sense of the essential self to provide a grounding for our actions, to ward off existential fear and anxiety and to provide a springboard for action."[5]

For many Americans, particularly gay men and women, sexuality has been raised up as the epitome of that authentic self. Weeks claimed that in the search for "self-identity" the ultimate goal was "sexual identity"—meaning a consistent pattern of choosing sexual and romantic partners based on their sex. In making such an assertion, Weeks echoed French scholar Michel Foucault, who charged that modernity cast sexuality as "the truth of our being." While that claim may be too broad, it is clear that in our age a sexual identity has become accepted as one of a handful of essential private truths about who we are.[6]

These private truths are treated so naturally in our lives as to seem eternal, as if people have always everywhere gone on searches to find themselves. And yet far from being natural, the very notion of a self or an identity—let alone an interior self that you can find—are the products of a distinct cul-

tural and intellectual history. As Taylor pointed out, only a few centuries ago, "being in touch with . . . God, or the Idea of the Good—was considered essential to full being. But now the source we have to connect with is deep within us. This fact is part of the massive subjective turn of modern culture, a new form of inwardness, in which we come to think of ourselves as beings with inner depths."[7] That modern turn toward a valorization of subjectivity developed slowly, over the last two or three centuries, and had far-reaching consequences. It was one of the historical currents that pushed Americans over the course of the twentieth century toward a growing fascination with their inner selves.

At the same time, beyond the personal imperative to find ourselves, individual identity in the United States has also taken on a powerful public and political significance. In the last few decades, Americans have been asked repeatedly to consider the political and social implications of a defined set of personal identities. They have joined organizations to fight for equal pay for women and marched in Washington, D.C., demanding equal rights for gay men and lesbians. They have engaged in debates to argue whether race-based affirmative action violated fundamental American principles or whether a single-sex golf club or military academy had the right to stay that way. Concerns about discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality have become prevailing themes in American political life.

To some degree, these public battles over identity are a contemporary expression of a long-standing preoccupation within American political history. Americans have been fighting about the meaning and power accorded to group memberships since the nation began. During the debates over the drafting of the Constitution, James Madison wrote compellingly about the need to structure the government in a way that protected minority political factions. One hundred years later, activists and reformers built organizations and strategies to safeguard industrial workers. And in the intervening years, abolition and women's suffrage advocates constructed arguments that served as foundations for the claims about racial and sexual discrimination put forward by the black civil rights and women's liberation movements late in the twentieth century.[8]

Nonetheless, identity politics battles about race, gender, and sexuality in the late twentieth century carried a new emphasis and a new language that distinguished them clearly from their earlier predecessors. As L. A. Kauffman explained, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century social movements were "firmly rooted in the public sphere tradition of emphasizing public institutions as the crucial loci of political contestation." Without neglecting

the importance of public institutions, late-twentieth-century identity politics also acted, though, on "the belief that identity itself—its elaboration, expression, or affirmation—is and should be a fundamental focus of political work." Political activists—even among African Americans and women, whose movements' roots rested firmly in an earlier century—now came to prioritize a language that emphasized "self-esteem," "self-fulfillment," and individual "authenticity." "Freedom," as one scholar explained, "lay in being able to decide for oneself what and who one was and what choices were appropriate or fulfilling." Echoing Chief Justice Earl Warren's 1954 opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools created "a *feeling* of inferiority," these new identity politics underscored the feeling and deep experience of identities; the harm done by demeaning language, images, and politics; the necessity of cultivating positive identities; and the nurturing value of distinct identity-based communities and cultures.[9]

Thus, for late-twentieth-century Americans, identity carried two seemingly distinct meanings. One was private, interior, and uniquely idiosyncratic; the second was public, political, and communally shared. One seemed to express the modern turn toward interior subjectivity; the other carried forward traditional liberal debates about the multiple factions of a pluralist society. Late-twentieth-century identity politics marked the convergence of those two trends, wherein the pluralist politics of the public sphere focused extensively on personal identities and their inner meanings. The "identity politics" that buffeted the United States in the later twentieth century were simultaneously deeply private and fundamentally public.[10]

That convergence began well before the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, the transition from Eltinge to Hay—from the 1910s to the 1950s—suggests how these two trends in American life became intertwined: how, that is, the inner life became the subject of heated political action. Typically identity politics are viewed as a by-product of the student and civil rights movements of the 1960s and '70s. This book argues, however, that their roots lay much earlier, in the first half of the century. The emerging emphasis on internal "authentic" identity took on political significance in the years between Eltinge and Hay.[11]

As a window onto that transformation, this book focuses specifically on the politicization of homosexuality and the rise of gay politics. Gay politics, both because they were relatively new in 1950 and because they emphasize precisely the importance of emotions and inner desires, offer a powerful case study for thinking about the emergence of American iden-

tity politics. In the transition from Eltinge to Hay, homosexual desire and politics collided, and that collision demonstrated fundamental changes in American political life.

Those changes can be seen in two important differences in how Eltinge and Hay understood their lives. First, while both Eltinge and Hay had sexual affairs with men, Eltinge resisted any efforts to suggest that those affairs revealed some fundamental truth about who he was. By contrast, the handful of men that gathered with Harry Hay in 1950 for the initial homosexual rights meeting came to agree that their interpersonal sexual and emotional desires—their lusts and affections for other men—were central to, if not the centerpiece of, their personal identity. Calling themselves the Mattachine Society and labeling themselves individually as "homophiles," they embraced the project of crafting a collective perception of their lives in which their sexual desires—conceived as a "sexual identity"—formed the fundamental or essential core of who they were. While not the first Americans to think of themselves in those terms, they were the first to articulate that identity so self-consciously and to organize a community around it so successfully. Unlike Eltinge, who seemed to celebrate the very multiplicity of his identity, the Mattachine members understood their sexual activities to be directly connected to who they fundamentally were, as individuals and as a community.

Second, the Mattachine members agreed for a time that their singular identity had immediate political implications. It was the cause for their uniting in a community, and it provoked them into significant acts of political activism. The organization lasted well into the 1970s and inspired several other groups that formed a network of activist chapters which quickly spanned the country. Mattachine and its cohort of organizations eventually called themselves the "Homophile Movement." While Eltinge did not see himself as either a political player or a political subject, Mattachine members marked their sexual activity as both central to their personal identity and the basis for communal political action. Beyond simply discussing their sexual lives, the members devoted their efforts to meeting with police, psychologists, clergy, and occasional legislators in order to challenge medical, religious, and legal sanctions against homosexual activity. In California at the time, for example, arrests for acts of same-sex flirtation or sexual activity regularly landed men in prison for several months or years. These were conditions that Mattachine and the homophiles hoped to change.

For Harry Hay and the members of Mattachine, then, their sexual lives gave them both an identity and a political agenda. But if the Eltinges of

the 1900s did not have or require such a notion of identity, where did one come from? And if Eltinge was so celebrated, why did Harry Hay feel so embattled? Why and how did a culture of celebratory titillation become a politics of conflict and demand? What ultimately produced homosexual identity politics? Those questions about changing notions of identity and communal politics lie at the heart of this book.

Asking such questions builds on the work and ideas of other scholars. American historians have illuminated increasingly well, for instance, the early-twentieth-century urban subcultures in which men frequently had sex with other men without perceiving themselves as possessing a homosexual or gay identity.[12] When distinctly homosexual identities eventually did emerge, some have argued, they did so principally as a result of wider economic changes. Like John D'Emilio, these scholars insisted that capitalism and the wage-labor system allowed individuals to separate from the family economy and construct lives around non-procreative sexual desires: they could, essentially, leave the family farm for the city and become homosexually active without suffering dire economic consequences. Capitalism, D'Emilio wrote, both "created a social context in which an autonomous personal life could develop" and "provided the conditions for a homosexual and lesbian identity to emerge."[13] What is more, others have claimed, American gay identity became distinctly political because as more and more homosexually active men and women moved to the city, they faced increasing police oppression; that oppression politicized them, both teaching them strategies of resistance and cultivating a sense of community.[14]

These are important arguments, and they provide a vital framework for this book. The tale here certainly begins with a homosexually active subculture not unlike what other scholars have found in New York or Portland, Oregon—a world devoid of gay identities, for which Eltinge was somewhat emblematic. And embedded here as well lies a narrative of oppression, loss, and collapse, for Eltinge's world was attacked and unmade in the years that this book covers. At the same time, however, the Mattachine Society was more than a reflexive response to growing police hostility. Harry Hay's identity politics represented a far-reaching effort of creation and construction that was generated by more than blackjacks and police boots. The drive toward identity politics lay deeper and wider in the culture than that. Its roots lay in a broad array of social arenas where fundamental questions about the self and politics were renegotiated in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Those negotiations were powerful enough that we carry their legacy well into the next century.

The broad cultural transformation that yielded gay identity politics involved many more people than Hay and Eltinge: they are simply the iconic figures—the bookends—who mark a start and finish for this project. But in between them, this book investigates Los Angeles, and particularly Edendale, to demonstrate the wide cultural change.[15] That broad transformation is clear in the two distinctive "nonsexual" communities that settled among the hills of Edendale in the period between Julian Eltinge and the beginnings of Mattachine. The first was an arts community. Even in the 1910s, Edendale housed some of the first film studios in Southern California. But beginning in the mid- to late 1920s, a large number of painters, writers, sculptors, and architects—and their clients and promoters—also began to settle in the hills of Edendale, even as the film companies departed. Among them were painters like Millard Sheets, who captured the look of the rapidly growing city; printmakers like Paul Landacre, who created a new vocabulary for wood-block printing to portray the geography of California; and supporters like Jake Zeitlin, whose bookstore became a gathering place for creative conversation and inspiration. The principal art schools of the city were located in a cluster just south of the neighborhood. Some graduates took studios—others made homes—in the foothills north of them. One of the schools, the Chouinard School, funneled students into the animation offices of the Disney Company, which remained in Edendale until the 1930s. The others formed a network of sketch clubs, galleries, and publishing teams.

The second community consisted of leftist progressives with Communists at its core. The fellow travelers far outnumbered the Party faithful, but in the 1930s and 1940s the Edendale hills became littered with union organizers, civic activists, and Party leaders. Among the most active were people like Miriam Brooks Sherman, a pianist, wife, and mother and one of the strongest leaders of the Los Angeles Communist Party, and Carey McWilliams, never a Party member but a progressive activist and intellectual who helped frame the fight on behalf of migrant farm workers and Mexican immigrants and went on to become editor of *The Nation.*

The period at the heart of this book, especially the Depression years, represented a vital phase for each of these groups. For Communists, the 1930s have been referred to as the "heyday" of American Communism, when communist ideals—if not Party membership—became more widely embraced by the American public. And yet, we know far too little about what it felt like to be a part of the Party, why people were drawn to it, and why they stayed. We are used to hearing about the dogma and strategies of

Communists, but we hear much less about their emotional and expressive lives. And even though self-expression or emotion might seem the bailiwick of artists, it was a vital component to the experience of political participation in the Communist Party.

For artists, these decades were filled with a significant struggle over the purpose of art, with some artists pushing for an art that spoke directly to the public and addressed larger social concerns, while other artists advocated an art that was deeply personal, idiosyncratic, and emotional and often quite abstracted from the realm of representation. While art histories analyze changing forms of expression and content, they generally tell us much less about the organizing efforts and community-building projects of artists. Nevertheless, those endeavors, which we might expect in a history of Communists, were vital to the lives of Edendale artists. Indeed, in the throes of their representational battles, artists built communities for themselves that increased their impact on the larger American community.

Finally, for homosexuals, these decades mark a transition between two fairly well documented eras: an early one when sexual activity between men was rarely read as indicative of a singular personal identity and was indulged in by a host of men who little contemplated the unity or disunity of their desires; and a later period when sexual activity did seem to demonstrate a particular identity and that identity had growing legal and political ramifications. The how and why of that transition, however, remains elusive for historians.

For each of these communities, these decades marked a vital shift, and the relative simultaneity of these shifts is more than a mere coincidence. These shifts were deeply connected. They were each a piece of a larger shift, a shift from one world to another, a shift from Eltinge's vaudeville success to Hay's political battleground. All three neighboring groups were working through related questions of self-understanding, articulation, and public presentation. All three communities strove to reformulate the relationship between the private self and the larger polity. The Mattachine members' story is part and parcel of the wider stories. Ultimately, their politicization of sexual identity was directly influenced by the debates about the abstract notions of "self" and "politics" carried on by their neighboring artists and leftists.

Curiously, Los Angeles is rarely mentioned as the launching pad for serious American political movements, let alone gay history. And yet, as urban

scholar Moira Kenney wrote, "Los Angeles is the greatest hidden chapter in American gay and lesbian history." Well ahead of New York or San Francisco, it provided a starting point for the nation's political movement for homosexual rights—as well as the first gay scholarly group, lesbian publication, and gay religious organization. Los Angeles was a crucial cauldron, but not simply Los Angeles. The impulse to narrate the transition from Julian Eltinge to Harry Hay and Mattachine by way of artists and Communists rests on the fact that these groups not only lived in Los Angeles in general but also specifically shared Edendale: they all lived, quite literally, among the hills and valleys surrounding Eltinge and Hay. Edendale mattered because Edendale—as a place—was fairly unique compared to the rest of Los Angeles.[16]

Even though Edendale lay only a couple of miles from downtown, its physical make-up was quite distinct from the city's extensive flatlands. The neighborhood was overrun with hilly lots and streets that were precariously steep. When much of the area was developed, engineers had not devised sophisticated street grading techniques. Thus many steep roads simply ended in the long stairwells that provided the only access to the homes farther up the hill. Residents, in a sense, were locked in, and even after the streetcars began carving their way into the neighborhood, the area retained a sense of near-rural seclusion: it was that very isolation that had attracted most of the city's first film studios to settle there in the 1910s.[17]

Amid the land booms that repeatedly swept Southern California from the late 1880s to the 1920s, campaigns to attract residents to Edendale consistently spoke out against the perception that the area would be forever inaccessible. In 1887, for instance, developers Byram & Poindexter advertised their "Ivanhoe" project with boasts that the center of Ivanhoe was only four miles from the downtown courthouse and that the route could be traveled (for only five cents) by steam dummy railroad "OFTEN enough and FAST enough to accommodate business men." More than thirty years later, when nearby Silver Lake Terrace was completed, its promotional brochure still shouted from the cover that it was a mere "15 minutes from Broadway [in downtown Los Angeles]" and that a new thoroughfare, Silver Lake Boulevard, connected the neighborhood to the pulse of the city.[18] Nevertheless, Edendale long seemed somewhere else, not of the city.

Geographers have steadily argued that human experience is profoundly affected by its placement in particular spatial contexts, that "the social, the historical and the spatial" are all intertwined. Indeed, according to Edward

Soja, the places where people live and how they live in those places distinctly affect how they understand themselves and their world. Edendale certainly seems to have enacted that power. Because of its rural-like isolation, it became what Soja deemed a "thirdspace"—a space at the margins of society that can be adopted as a site for contesting power, a place where new identities, actions, and opportunities can be constructed.[19]

In other contexts, thirdspaces have often earned the label "bohemias." Typically, historians of bohemias have underscored their counterhegemonic qualities. Jerrold Seigel's seminal study of nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century bohemian Paris, for instance, deemed bohemia the "reverse image and underside" of the rising bourgeoisie. It was the place within the bourgeois social structure from which that new order could be critiqued. "Bohemia was not a realm outside bourgeois life," he explained, "but the expression of a conflict that arose at its very heart . . . it was the appropriation of marginal life-styles by young and not so young bourgeois, for the dramatization of ambivalence toward their own social identities and destinies." More recently, Ross Wetzsteon wrote of Greenwich Village that it "existed in an almost symbiotic relationship with the middle class," much like "an adolescent rebellion against the adults."[20] Edendale was Los Angeles' bohemia in the decades following the First World War—a site that, while within the city, was also a space of marginality and possibility, a space from which the city's social and political structure could be critiqued and challenged.

Historians of bohemias—and certainly of artistic movements—have not always given serious weight to the politics of their participants. Usually they are viewed through their creative impulses and judged for their resistance to larger societal mores. Yet linking the artists of Edendale with local activists offers the possibility of understanding how, within the distinctive confines of the neighborhood, one bohemian world was engaged in a broad counterhegemonic social and political movement. Sidney Tarrow, in his classic analysis of political movements, examined how movements "build organizations, elaborate ideologies, . . . socialize and mobilize constituencies, and . . . engage in self-development and the construction of collective identities." In many ways, Edendale, from the 1910s to the 1950s, was the site of such a movement wherein a new ideology of identity was constructed and elaborated around organized and mobilized constituencies. It took years before the constituency, in the form of Mattachine, formally entered the political arena, but the cultural construction of an ideology and identity that was this movement's foundation was already well

under way.[21] Mattachine, as representative of a new kind of identity politics, was very much a product of that place.

This book, though, is not just about Edendale and its communities. Identities have rarely been the exclusive product of like-minded individuals. While each of the major identities in this project—artist, Communist, and homosexual—were negotiated in part by groups of individuals who engaged in similar activities and sought to adopt a shared self-definition based on those activities, identity construction was also the product of oppositional relationships between those individuals and the larger society or state. The philosopher Louis Althusser suggested that people received an identity definition as soon as society called out to them, "Hey, you there!" and the people turned to respond, accepting, in a sense, society's label.[22] Although Edendale operated as an engine of change, the ideas generated and sustained there sparked powerful reactions from the city at large. As Edendale locals imagined new notions of self-expression, politics, and community, Los Angeles officials responded with their own ideas about the political significance of identity. Those responses, often in the form of crackdowns, shaped the emergence of identity politics just as much as the progressives and bohemians of Edendale did. City and neighborhood carried on a dialogue, a call-and-response, about what identities meant, and this book echoes that exchange.

There are, of course, many ways to tell this tale, many ways to traverse that Edendale hillside from Eltinge to Hay. But because of that back-and-forth, this book casts both a wide and a narrow net, sometimes looking at the city as a whole, sometimes just Edendale. It begins with a prologue, a brief account capturing Julian Eltinge as a vaudeville star at the height of his success—just prior to his move to Los Angeles. The chapter presents the mystery and excitement of gender play as Eltinge performed it. It explores the audiences' interest in Eltinge and the messages about gender and identity that he seemed to be sending them.

The opening chapter presents Los Angeles in the 1910s, on the eve of Eltinge's arrival. The city is seen from the perspective of homosexual activity, not just its occurrence, but also the ways it was understood. When Eltinge arrived in Edendale in 1918, Los Angeles was similar to New York, and gender remained the dominant personal identity code for understanding sexual activity.[23] Indeed, as the first chapter reveals, even when Angeleno men were arrested for engaging in same-sex activity, their behavior was not perceived as indicating a fixed core identity. At least in

terms of sexual activity, the city behaved like Eltinge: happily sexual, but untouched by and resistant to a conception of a sexual identity.

Eltinge settled in Edendale. It was, for a few years, the playground of the new film industry. But when the industry left, Edendale continued to sustain a creative life, though one populated by painters and sculptors and writers. These creative individuals eagerly plumbed the soul of identity. Indeed, the artists of Edendale during the 1920s and 1930s devoted themselves to the task of finding their inner emotional lives and portraying them through art. The second chapter documents how, during these decades, a cohort of artists and their supporters settled into Edendale's hills. They quite self-consciously constructed a community for themselves, establishing various clubs and organizations. Within those structures, they began to construct and debate a definition of artists as individuals who gave loud public expression to their inner emotional lives. Whereas Eltinge had reveled in gender as a play of costume and make-up—of surfaces—these artists set out to explore their psychic depths and attach public meaning to what they found.

The Depression wrought a powerful change to both these worlds as the shared public life of political action and significance began to impinge on creative and sexual activity. Among the artists of Edendale, the Depression and international politics forged a second debate about the need for artists to engage with the social and political situation that surrounded them. For some, the government, through the Public Works of Art Project and the Federal Art Project, intervened quite directly to sustain their careers. But many artists attempted both to articulate their inner lives and to engage in political action.

At the same time, the political touched on the world of lusts and affections. Homosexual activity increasingly came to be viewed as constituting an identity. That notion was both state imposed and individually and communally conceived. Thus, while same-sex behavior became more visible throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s, the city administration now intervened aggressively. Los Angeles police initiated a series of crackdowns on the gathering and performance sites of lesser Eltinges. Bars were closed; impersonators were arrested. The city began to identify gender play as a sign of sexual deviancy and a disturbed inner essence. Additionally, the government deemed sexual deviants as politically dangerous. The implications of the policing drive and its process of labeling became clear during a contemporaneous campaign to unseat the mayor. By the end of the 1930s, as the third chapter explains, Eltinge and his kind were seen as ene-

mies of the state: they had a political identity, even if not one of their choosing.

During the years of these crackdowns, the artists of Edendale were joined in increasing numbers by Communist Party members and their progressive colleagues. The fourth chapter returns to Edendale and documents the network of organizations the Left established there. Much like the artists, Communists of the 1930s and '40s were forging a powerful relationship between their interior lives and political action. In part, they lived out their political identity in the most intimate corners of their lives. The Party functioned on a powerful emotional base of ardent connection among its members. That connection was enacted at one level in the housewarming parties, anniversary parties, even Halloween parties that were as much a staple of Party life as the planning meetings and demonstrations. At a more intimate level, love and passionate friendship were the glue of Party life well beyond principle. Marriages were made and unmade by the Party. One woman told me that if someone was married outside of the Party, either the spouse joined the Party or eventually the marriage collapsed.[24] The people you agreed with, and picketed with, and got arrested with—these were the people you loved and fell in love with. Much more than the artists, the Communists wedded their political identities and their personal lives.

Additionally, Party activists became intently focused on the political significance of racial identities and fought quite aggressively against racial discrimination. For instance, the defense of a group of young Mexican Americans convicted on a spurious murder charge—the notorious Sleepy Lagoon case—was organized by the Edendale left. The left leadership there also coordinated a successful recall of the area city councilman in 1946 for his support of Gerald L. K. Smith and the Ku Klux Klan. They argued vehemently for the political integrity of racial minorities.

Those arguments carried greater and greater significance in Los Angeles as violent conflicts over racial identities began to dominate the city's political landscape during and after the Second World War. While gay historians like Allan Bérubé and John D'Emilio have argued that the war spawned an explosion of gay urban communities because of the concentrations of homosexually active men and women it produced, in Los Angeles the most dramatic changes the war wrought were racial.[25] As the fifth chapter demonstrates, race relations were one of the central dilemmas that weighed on Los Angeles as war spread from Europe and Asia and finally engaged the United States. In fact, the specter that haunted Los Angeles throughout the war years and well into the Cold War was that interna-

tional warfare abroad would come home to roost as race warfare in the city's streets. The fluctuating deportation, importation, and riots against Mexicans and Mexican Americans; the mass evacuation of local Japanese and Japanese Americans; and the anxious negotiations for African American housing following the war—all combined to place categories of racial identity and their concomitant danger at the forefront of Los Angeles political and social culture.

Out of those public battles emerged a conception of city politics as international politics in microcosm, with racial groups standing in for nations. Maintaining harmony in the City of Angels required recognizing racial minorities, albeit grudgingly, as political participants. If the United Nations would maintain peace among the world's nations, city politicians needed to accept minorities as equally independent political constituencies. Race relations were not simply a political problem. Racial identities became significant political identities.

Mattachine embraced the construction of these new political identities. As the final chapter argues, its members took equally seriously the implications of the artists, the crackdowns, and the Communists. The group's founders saw their inner lives as vital and as carrying a political valence. Reversing the Communists' equation, they lived their personal identities in the most public corners of their lives. They constructed a political identity and organization around them. The shape of those identities they borrowed from both their leftist neighbors and the city as a whole: they conceived of sexual political identity as comparable to racial identity. To be homosexually active in Los Angeles in the 1950s, they argued, was equivalent to belonging to a racial minority group. It conferred the same kind of identity, resulted in the same kind of oppression, and demanded the same kind of political action. The "homosexual" identity that they conceived was, at its core, a political identity.

The Mattachine founders' notion of "homosexual" or "gay" identity undergirds much of today's gay American community. Nevertheless, the founders' view was not easily accepted by the wider membership. Their notion of a "homosexual" was hardly seen as natural or predetermined. Instead, it was the focus of heated internal debates that both echoed many of the earlier debates in Edendale and foreshadowed many of the battles that continue to swirl around the politics of identity, most recently as "queer" activists have challenged the utility of notions of "gay" and "lesbian." Indeed, the birth of Mattachine represented the birth of a politics that can be defined specifically by such battles over who counts as a minority in

American life and what such a minority status ensures. Those battles certainly rage on.

That is the arc of this project. It follows, as closely as possible, the politicization of sexual identity, but does so within a larger framework of changing notions and practices of selfhood. Fundamentally, it argues for the complexity of that process, tracing both the intellectual developments and the application of those ideas in how people built individual lives and communities.

In each of the cases at hand, identity construction emerged from a complex interaction between individual volition, like-minded concurrence, and state imposition. The emergence of homosexual politics, and identity politics in general, was not merely the creative product of several homosexually active individuals. It was shaped as well by a neighborhood that, in a variety of ways, was reimagining the relationship between politics and emotions. Equally, Los Angeles itself, captivated by the ties between vice, race, and politics, participated in that transformation. Along the way, one cultural world was destroyed and another—a political one—was born.