

## INTRODUCTION

### *San Francisco Was a Wide-Open Town*

I think it's important to realize that San Francisco did not happen after New York or after Stonewall. . . . This was something that developed in San Francisco and evolved because there were a large number of Gay people who just did the traditional American thing of organizing—organizing around people's interests.

*Larry Littlejohn, interview, 1990*

San Francisco is a seductive city. Perched on the edge of a continent, its beautiful vistas, eccentric characters, and liberal politics reflect both the unruly nature of its frontier-town beginnings and the sophisticated desires of an urban metropolis. Sociologists Howard Becker and Irving Horowitz call San Francisco a culture of civility, noting that “deviance, like difference, is a civic resource, enjoyed by tourist and resident alike.”<sup>1</sup> But while the strength of the city's queer communities is world renowned, there are few texts devoted to San Francisco's gay and lesbian history.<sup>2</sup> What follows, as a result, charts new ground. It asks the question “Why San Francisco?” Why do so many people associate San Francisco with homosexuals and homosexuality? In my research—and casual conversations—many answers have emerged. There are the same-sex dances of the Gold Rush era, the city's location as an international seaport, the homosocial entertainments of the city's Barbary Coast, the artistic revivals of the turn of the twentieth century, the tradition of vigilante law and order, the persistence of civic graft, the strength and diversity of the city's immigrant communities, the staunch resistance to anti-sex and anti-alcohol ordinances, the military presence of two world wars, and the bohemian, Beat, and hippie cultures that flourished in the postwar generations.<sup>3</sup> But, by and large, when asked “Why San Fran-

cisco?” most people refer to San Francisco’s history of sexual permissiveness and its function as a wide-open town—a town where anything goes. These powerful (and sexual) metaphors frame the chapters that follow. What does it mean for San Francisco to be wide open? What impact did this have on the growth and development of the city’s queer cultures and communities? Why does San Francisco remain so enigmatically attached to a sexually permissive and queer sensibility?

San Francisco is a queer town not simply because it hosts disproportionately large gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities but because a queerness is sewn into the city’s social fabric. From its earliest days, sex and lawlessness have been fundamental to San Francisco’s character. The Gold Rush of 1849, for instance, transformed San Francisco into a vibrant and opulent city with a reputation for licentious entertainment and vigilante government. Prior to that time, San Francisco had been a frontier town on the far reaches of overlapping empires. Still, its early history of shifting colonial rule and international commerce reveals a web of alliance and exploitation that would be its legacy. In 1776, when Spanish settlers constructed a mission and presidio—the twin pillars of Spanish-American colonization—near the territories of the Coast Miwoks, Wintuns, Yokuts, and Costanoans, they did so with Indian labor, luring Indian settlers into a colonial township at the northern edge of a tenaciously expanding Spanish empire. With Mexican independence from Spain in 1821, however, Yerba Buena village (as San Francisco was then called) became part of Mexico’s northern territory and barely governable as the port secularized and became increasingly active for ships seeking commerce with traders and trappers. By the mid-1840s, as Mexico braced for war with the United States, Yerba Buena’s population grew as foreign-born (Anglo-American) merchants moved into town and married the daughters of Mexican landowners and civic leaders, using sexual and familial connections to create wealth, social standing, and political alliances. Thus, in 1848, when the United States acquired California through the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo and Yerba Buena was renamed San Francisco, the city’s population of Indians, *Californios* (Mexican ranchers), Anglo-American settlers, and their children—a total of just over eight hundred—reflected San Francisco’s colonial history as well as its frontier-town ethics.<sup>4</sup>

The discovery of gold in the California foothills coincided with California’s transfer from Mexican to U.S. authority, and these events dramatically altered San Francisco’s economic development: almost overnight, San Francisco became a booming commercial center.<sup>5</sup> In 1848,

San Francisco had the best port in California, and the cargo ships that served the west coast docked there. As a result, San Francisco became a home base for the thousands of fortune seekers who passed through the town on their way to the gold fields. Miners who needed tools and provisions purchased these goods from San Francisco's growing class of merchants and shopkeepers. Later, as vast fortunes in gold and silver moved back through the city for trade or investment, San Francisco became a banking and financial stronghold. By 1868, ten insurance companies managed almost \$6 million in capital, and by 1887, twenty-six banks controlled almost \$150 million in assets.<sup>6</sup> In addition to its function as a financial center, San Francisco became a conduit for international trade. As agriculture and manufacturing developed through the 1860s to meet the needs of California's booming population, surplus goods traveled through the port of San Francisco, and investors secured lucrative global markets. For instance, along with Spanish-colonial trade routes to South America (particularly Chile and Peru), the Caribbean, and the eastern ports of North America, San Franciscan investors developed trade relationships with Japan and China and secured a virtual monopoly with the Hawai'ian Islands and the Philippines.<sup>7</sup> By 1890, the city's merchants handled an astonishing 99 percent of the coast's imports and 83 percent of its exports.<sup>8</sup> By the turn of the century, San Francisco had become the economic capital of the Pacific coast.

The consolidation of U.S. national authority and the growth of San Francisco's economy stimulated a vast in-migration of miners, merchants, and adventurers. By 1850, just a year after the Gold Rush officially started, San Francisco counted 35,000 residents. The city's exponential growth continued through the end of the century, its population jumping from 57,000 to 149,000 between 1860 and 1870, and by the turn of the century, San Francisco was the eighth largest city in the United States, with a population of almost 343,000.<sup>9</sup> Contrary to the traditional story of "the west," San Francisco's swelling population and vast economic growth were not due to the migration of Anglo-Americans who traveled the overland trails or braved the long sea passage around the Cape of Good Hope—though there were many who traveled these paths. In the years between 1850 and 1860, the majority of San Franciscans were foreign born (the average in other U.S. cities at the time was 10 percent).<sup>10</sup> The first wave of gold miners came from Valparaiso, Chile, and Lima, Peru—two South American port cities with a history of gold mining and long-established trade relations with San Francisco.<sup>11</sup> Chilean gold miners brought tools and technology,

notably the *arrastra*, a large circular drag mill that extracted gold from crushed rocks.<sup>12</sup> An abundance of gold seekers also came from South China's Guangdong province—they came initially as temporary workers sent to augment their families' household income, but many stayed, carving out a new life for themselves in Gam Saan or Gold Mountain, the Cantonese term for California.<sup>13</sup> And while many African Americans traveled to California with "gold fever," many migrated west to escape southern slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.<sup>14</sup>

San Francisco's overlap of cultures and communities, foreign and native born, contributed to a live-and-let-live sensibility, but it was the city's early history of lawlessness, boss politics, and administrative graft that solidified its reputation as a wide-open town. Prostitution and gambling quickly became big business in San Francisco, and for the right price the possibilities for sex and gaming seemed endless. In fact, at the start of the Gold Rush, a colony of Mexican and South American prostitutes settled on the southeastern slopes of Telegraph Hill, forming the nucleus of what would become the city's North Beach district.<sup>15</sup> A decade later, the Barbary Coast emerged in the degenerated storefronts on what was San Francisco's most important commercial thoroughfare. This was Pacific Street, or Terrific Street, as it was called in the 1890s, between the waterfront and Kearny Street. The Barbary Coast came to be known as San Francisco's roughest vice district, "the haunt of the low and the vile of every kind," an indignant historian reported in 1876. "The petty thief, the house burglar, the tramp, the whoremonger, lewd women, cut-throats, murderers, all are found here."<sup>16</sup> To sustain its reputation, the Barbary Coast hosted a battery of cheap amusements: grogeries with sawdust-covered floors, wine and beer dens (also known as "deadfalls"), melodeons (liquor dens with mechanical music boxes), dance halls, and concert saloons.

Through the second half of the nineteenth century, however, periods of flamboyant economic growth coincided with anti-vice campaigns that displayed the tension between San Francisco's reputation for vice and the reality of periodic purges. The most famous manifestation of these campaigns were the Vigilance Committees of 1851 and 1856, which followed on the heels of Gold Rush prosperity, price inflation, and exponential population growth.<sup>17</sup> Arguing that city police could not protect citizens' "security to life and property" and promising that "no thief, burglar, incendiary or assassin, shall escape punishment," the Vigilance Committee of 1851 executed three men during its ten-day tenure.<sup>18</sup> It also demanded heightened regulation of the in-migration of "undesir-

ables,” linking law and order with border control. The revival of the vigilantes in 1856 stemmed more directly from an association of sex with lawlessness. The 1856 Vigilance Committee took shape, initially, to insure the speedy trial and execution of two men accused of killing James King, the owner of an anti-vice daily, *The Evening Bulletin*. Before his death, King had crusaded against police corruption in his daily editorials, but he aimed his most caustic attacks at gambling and prostitution. Although formal vigilante action diminished after the 1850s, San Francisco’s history repeats a pattern of anti-vice crusades, particularly during election time, that called for the protection of property (through the regulation of borders) and the control of sexual capital (through the regulation of brothels). Ironically, periods of anti-vice activism—the 1850s, 1870s, 1910s, and 1950s—produced a wealth of print material that advertised and drew international attention to San Francisco’s vice districts, particularly its infamous Barbary Coast and, later, its North Beach and Tenderloin districts.<sup>19</sup> San Francisco’s reputation for vice thus became its calling card. Despite periodic anti-vice crusades, a wide range of adventure-seekers, homosexuals among them, made their way through the Golden Gate.

Though a legacy of sex and lawlessness frames San Francisco’s early history, San Francisco’s queer history—its history of publicly visible queer cultures and communities—blossomed in 1933 with the repeal of Prohibition and the emergence of queer entertainments in the city’s tourist-district nightclubs, bars, and taverns. Through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, tourist-based queer cultures mutated and exploded, shooting off in multiple directions. Queer communities took up residence in waterfront bars, in the theater district, along Market Street, among labor activists and communists, in Chinatown, along the old Barbary Coast, among the city’s Beat artists and poets, in bohemian bars and taverns, and as part of a fledgling civil rights movement called the homophile movement.<sup>20</sup> With little more than same-sex attraction and/or gender-transgressive behavior to bind them together, the queer communities that existed in San Francisco during these years did not form a cohesive whole. They did not recognize each other, in the words of Benedict Anderson, as part of a “deep horizontal comradeship.”<sup>21</sup> Instead, there were multiple cultures and communities that overlapped and, at times, commingled in the intimate spaces of bars and baths, dances and house parties. Sometimes the differences between queer communities overwhelmed the possibility of forging a larger collectivity, but at other

times—during a bar raid, perhaps—a larger sense of community seemed on the brink of articulation. Because there is no way to contain the many histories of San Francisco’s queer cultures and communities to a single narrative, this book offers a partial and subjective look at the evolution, from the 1930s through the 1960s, of two competing social worlds: bar-based cultures and, later, homophile communities. The period studied ends in 1965 with the New Year’s Day raid on a costume ball sponsored by the Council on Religion and the Homosexual in San Francisco’s California Hall. The raid and its aftermath can be seen as the last of a series of events that fundamentally altered the relationship between queer communities and the police. These events demonstrated, first, the growing political strength of what was increasingly known as the city’s “gay community” and, second, the growing coordination of lesbian, gay, queer, and homophile organizations.<sup>22</sup> In other words, by 1965, the queer communities that had evolved through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s had acquired both the ability to negotiate directly with police, civic leaders, and lawmakers *and* the ability to work together as a coherent social and political constituency.

In the pages that follow, I use the term “queer” alongside the terms “lesbian,” “gay,” and “homosexual” to describe individuals who engaged in same-sex sexual behaviors and activities. Unlike “lesbian,” “gay,” and “homosexual,” however, the term “queer” was not a common mode of self-identification in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. More often, it was a derogatory term used to stigmatize and humiliate sexual outsiders. Nevertheless, in the spirit of reclamation, I use “queer” to signify behaviors or cultures that were marked by a combination of sexual, gender, and, at times, racial transgression.<sup>23</sup> In effect, I use the term to describe the quality of one’s sexual being that was unique, different, or stood in contrast to an accepted norm (such as the vigilant intraracial heterosexuality of the post–World War II era). However, because many people in the early to mid–twentieth century identified their sexuality in different ways (using terms such as “butch,” “dyke,” “fairy,” or “queen”)—or not at all—I use “queer” to include individuals who did not identify themselves as gay or lesbian but whose behaviors, activities, and/or attitudes reflected a resistance to what Michael Warner calls “heteronormativity,” the persistence of heterosexual dominance and privilege.<sup>24</sup> Queer thus functions as an umbrella category, a wider category of social identification than lesbian, gay, or homosexual, and, in the tradition of queer theory, it functions as shorthand to identify multiple meanings, associations, and identifications.<sup>25</sup> Along the same lines,

I use the term “gender-transgressive” alongside “transgender” to describe queer behavior or activities (such as cross-gender entertainments) that involved non-normative gendered expression, performance, or display. At the midcentury, however, the term “transgender” took on a new meaning with the articulation of transsexual identities and communities. As a result, while I use the terms “gender-transgressive” and “transgender” to describe a range of queer behaviors and activities, they also flag the roots of an emergent transsexual and transgender community in San Francisco that has its own history, one linked to, but, in important ways, unique from the history of lesbians and gay men.

In this book I also use a number of different terms to characterize social groups and associations. I take for granted that queer communities existed in opposition to mainstream society—though, as this book will reveal, to varying degrees. For this reason, I use the terms “culture,” “subculture,” “community,” and “social world” somewhat interchangeably to describe San Francisco’s many queer social groups. While the term “community” has functioned in much sociological discourse as distinct from “culture” in its dependence on kinship and family, in this study “community” loses its association to kinship and becomes very similar to “culture.”<sup>26</sup> Also, when modified by the oppositional term “queer,” the distinction between “culture” and “subculture” tends to fade, so I use the simpler term “culture” to signify social groups and practices that “deviated from the normative ideals of adult [heterosexual] communities.”<sup>27</sup> However, I do use the term “culture” in the traditional sense of “subculture” to signify the character of certain social groups, typically urban youth, who expressed their opposition to mainstream social structures in their use of public space and in their desire to “appropriate parts of the city for their street (rather than domestic) culture.”<sup>28</sup> As a result, at times, I differentiate between culture and community, attaching a greater degree of oppositional character to cultures than communities (as in the phrase “queer cultures and homophile communities”).

Research for the book began with forty-five oral history interviews, some of which I quote from at length in the pages that follow. The oral histories were collected by what ethnographers call the snowball method, in which interviewees were asked to identify others who, like themselves, had been living in San Francisco and participating in some aspect of the city’s queer social or political life prior to 1965. I made an effort to balance the number of interviewees by several factors. I tried to find participants who were living in San Francisco in the 1940s (roughly

one-third fall into this category). Also, because the stories of homophile activists had, at the time that I was doing my research, become more familiar to readers of lesbian and gay history than the story of bar-based communities, I gave priority to interviewees who had spent a lot of time in bars during the 1940s and 1950s. In the end, the number of interviewees with a high level of participation in gay bars roughly equaled those who had been active in homophile organizations—though of course there was a great deal of overlap between bar life and homophile activism. The final collection of interviews is also gender balanced and diverse by class, race, and ethnicity (approximately one-third of the interviewees are Latino, Asian American, Native American, or African American, and a significant number identified themselves as working class).

Many of the interviews have been transcribed, and they are available for consultation at the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender (GLBT) Historical Society in San Francisco. Other research sites include the manuscript and periodical collections at the GLBT Historical Society and the Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City. The collections in the San Francisco history room at the San Francisco Public Library were also useful, particularly the clippings files on neighborhoods and the extensive collection of tourist guides. I also spent time at the University of California's Bancroft Library looking through tourist magazines, and I spent several weeks leafing through the records of California's Alcoholic Beverage Control Board in the California State Archives in Sacramento. There are many other sources that have been vital to the story I am about to tell, but the voices that most influenced me were those of the individuals I had the honor of interviewing. It is these voices that I hope are most vividly reflected in the pages that follow.

Of the scholarly books that address San Francisco's gay and lesbian history, most have focused on the impact of World War II or the influence of the city's homophile organizations on gay and lesbian social movements. Allan Bérubé's pioneering study of the social world of lesbians and gay men during World War II, *Coming Out under Fire*, addresses a wider terrain than San Francisco, but it has much to say about the impact of the war's military presence on the development of San Francisco's queer and gender-transgressive nightlife. Bérubé argues that World War II had an unprecedented influence on the function of San Francisco's gay and lesbian communities. Bars proliferated in order to serve the vast influx of gay and lesbian military personnel, social networks ex-



panded, and policing took on a whole new quality. For better or worse, World War II seemed to fundamentally change the quality of queer life in San Francisco.<sup>29</sup> John D’Emilio’s work on San Francisco extends this argument to suggest that World War II was a turning point in the city’s gay and lesbian history. In a foundational article on San Francisco’s gay and lesbian history, he argues that the war—particularly its demographic changes—set the stage for the emergence of gay and lesbian social and political movements in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>30</sup> While *Wide-Open Town* is indebted to the work of scholars who set World War II at the center of their analysis, it takes as its point of departure a rethinking of this fundamental concern. Was World War II a turning point in San Francisco’s gay and lesbian history? What kind of queer social worlds preceded the war, and how much continuity was there between pre-World War II cultures and the social movements that followed in their wake? This project pushes the scope of San Francisco’s queer history beyond World War II to look at the more fundamental impact of tourism and nightclub entertainment on the growth and development of the city’s gay and lesbian communities. Clearly, World War II had a tremendous impact on the city’s queer entertainments and the state’s methods of policing. But, as the following chapters will illustrate, World War II functioned to elaborate and extend the tourist-based cultures that emerged in the post-Prohibition era, rather than to fundamentally alter them.

A second framing paradigm in U.S. lesbian and gay history that this project addresses is the impact of homophile movements on mid-twentieth-century social and political activism. The most important studies in this field are John D’Emilio’s *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940–1970* and Marc Stein’s *City of Sisterly and Brotherly Loves: Lesbian and Gay Philadelphia, 1945–1972*.<sup>31</sup> Published in 1983, D’Emilio’s scrupulously researched text takes as its starting point the seeming invisibility of pre-Stonewall homosexual communities and the puzzling eruption of gay liberation movements in the months following New York City’s 1969 Stonewall Riots. “Isolated men and women do not create, almost overnight, a mass movement premised upon a shared group identity,” he argues.<sup>32</sup> In a search for the roots of the gay liberation movement, D’Emilio discusses the handful of homophile organizations that emerged in the postwar era and fought for civil rights in the decades preceding Stonewall. Despite his emphasis on national organizing, D’Emilio has much to say about San Francisco’s queer history. Many of his oral history interviewees are San Franciscans, and the focus on homo-

phile organizing often places San Francisco at the center of his analysis. Although he is mindful of the impact of bar-based subcultures, D'Emilio argues that homophile organizations, namely the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis, set the stage—both organizationally and ideologically—for the mass movements that emerged in the 1970s. Central to this argument are two crucial elements: the importance of Stonewall as a turning point in gay and lesbian history and the linear progression of homophile-to-liberation-movement activism.

Stein's more recent work complicates D'Emilio's argument by focusing on the relationships between gay men and lesbians in pre- and post-Stonewall Philadelphia. Stein casts a somewhat more critical gaze on homophile organizing—he, too, analyzes the impact of bar-based cultures—but his narrative maintains both the centrality of Stonewall and the function of homophile activists as the primary agents of social change. Were homophile organizations a necessary pre-condition for liberation movement activism? Were there other influences in the social organization of gay and lesbian resistance? What impact did bar-based cultures have on the development of lesbian and gay social and political movements? This book asserts that while homophile organizations were important to the emergence of social and political movements, they were only part of the story of queer mobilization and emancipation. In San Francisco, the roots of queer activism are more fundamentally found in the less organized (but numerically stronger) pockets of queer association and camaraderie that existed in bars and taverns. Queer social movements in San Francisco, as a result, functioned more broadly than formal, membership-driven organizations. They sprang from a variety of influences. Moreover, while Stonewall remains a crucial part of east coast gay and lesbian history—it operates as a key turning point—it did not function as a mobilizing factor in San Francisco's queer social history. In fact, many of the demands articulated through the Stonewall Riots had already been addressed in San Francisco by 1965.<sup>33</sup>

This project is a community study and, as such, it raises the issue of social geography. It examines the function of cultural resistance and the evolution of social movement activism by looking closely at one site or spatially defined environment: San Francisco. This book does not attempt to compare San Francisco to other large cities in any depth. Rather, its close analysis and detailed attention to the function of municipal government and micro-level policing allow for a deeper appreciation of the wide variety of queer urban experiences. For instance, San Francisco's history evidences a unique response to post-Prohibition

liquor control. While other studies, like George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*, argue that the repeal of Prohibition and the development of new methods of policing shut down gay and lesbian public entertainments, in San Francisco repeal seemed to stimulate the development of queer and gender-transgressive entertainments.<sup>34</sup> In post-Prohibition California, the state's liquor control administration was placed within the state's tax board (the State Board of Equalization), so there was less emphasis, at the state level, on vice control than on the financial management of liquor production and distribution. This, combined with San Francisco's traditionally hostile approach to liquor control, allowed the city's post-Prohibition tourist and entertainment districts to develop in ways that were physically impossible in locations that had experienced widespread social and political support for Prohibition. San Francisco, as a result, stands out as a uniquely queer environment in the post-Prohibition era.

Community studies also allow for a closer look at the process of identity formation. They trace the impact of environment or social geography on the development of group identity and political consciousness. How, for instance, did same-sex behaviors translate into coherent or intelligible public identities? What was the relationship between identity formation, community articulation, and political mobilization? In their 1993 study of Buffalo, New York's lesbian history, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community*, Elizabeth Kennedy and Madeline Davis explore the relationship between culture and politics—or lesbian cultural visibility, social identity, and political power. They explore this relationship by identifying the “prepolitical” consciousness of working-class lesbians in post-World War II Buffalo. While Kennedy and Davis borrow the term “prepolitical” from Eric Hobsbawm to distinguish between political actions that “are part of distinctly defined political institutions” and “social acts of resistance that haven't yet crystallized into political institutions,” the term functions within lesbian and gay historiography to highlight the impact of culture, particularly bar culture, on social and political movements.<sup>35</sup>

The term “prepolitical” destabilizes formal, membership-based political movements as the central focus of lesbian and gay history and identifies instead the possibilities of bar-based cultural resistance. For instance, the puzzle of Stonewall lies in the myth that “post-Stonewall” gay liberation movements erupted out of nowhere. D'Emilio explains this contradiction by highlighting the heretofore uncelebrated work of

homophile organizations.<sup>36</sup> Yet, in a location that sustained little to no homophile activism, Buffalo, Kennedy and Davis explain the prepolitical impact of bar culture on post-Stonewall liberation movements as a function of social self-awareness: “Without the support and strategy of a political movement, late-1950s rough and tough butches were not able to immediately achieve their goal of creating a better world for lesbians and gays. They did, however, succeed in forging the consciousness that was to become, a decade later, central to gay liberation. . . . This consciousness in the larger lesbian and gay subcultures throughout the country provided an environment for the rapid spread of gay liberation and in many cases actually provided some of the impetus for the movement.”<sup>37</sup> In this way, the identities forged outside of formal social movements such as homophile organizations were, perhaps, essential to the *kind of resistance* that sustained gay liberation movements. Identity formation, as such, becomes less central to the emergence of political movements than social consciousness—and a culture of resistance.

While Kennedy and Davis make a case for the impact of bar-based cultural resistance on the eventual successes of the gay and lesbian liberation movements, their book stresses other forms of resistance as well. Kennedy and Davis introduce the butch-fem culture of Buffalo bar life, a style of self-representation and social organization that relied on a loosely mimetic but innovative form of masculine and feminine (butch and fem) lesbian gender roles. Through butch-fem culture, Kennedy and Davis argue, working-class lesbians in postwar Buffalo resisted male and heterosexual dominance. They expanded the opportunities for female sexual autonomy. And they augmented the function of queer visibility. As a result, Kennedy and Davis suggest that Buffalo’s working-class lesbians existed as “strong and forceful participants in the growth of gay and lesbian consciousness and pride.”<sup>38</sup> The cultural expressions upon which butch-fem communities emerged carved out social spaces that allowed new, and I would argue “political,” sensibilities to emerge. Bar life, as a result, remains “prepolitical” only in the sense that it laid a foundation for homophile movements to develop, but bar life can also be seen as “political” in that it opened up the possibility for new modes of social resistance. For instance, as lesbian cultures emerged in San Francisco’s North Beach district, they had a political function beyond their foundation for future political movements.<sup>39</sup> San Francisco’s lesbian bar life can be seen as part of a larger queer public culture that interacted with homophile organizations such as the Daughters of Bilitis, but its mode of expression and social integrity remained distinct from

those of the formal political organizations that emerged in the postwar era. The experiences and activities of women who engaged in same-sex sexual relations and interacted with or participated in any number of public environments, including bars and taverns, framed a cultural politic—a politic of lesbian visibility and queer social resistance in San Francisco that stressed their differences from members of mainstream heterosexual society, rather than their similarities to them.

The function of social and cultural resistance is made more explicit in the work of George Chauncey. Chauncey locates the heroes of his community study, *Gay New York*, within New York City cafes, speak-easies, and drag balls.<sup>40</sup> Chauncey's attention to the social geography of working-class culture enables him to construct a new historical paradigm—one that refigures the relationship between sexual behavior, identity, and community in light of the urban environments gay men traversed:

[The] project of the book, then, is to reconstruct the topography of gay meeting places, from streets to saloons to bathhouses to elegant restaurants, and to explore the significance of that topography for the social organization of the gay world and homosexual relations generally. It analyzes the cultural conditions that made it possible for some gay meeting places to become well known to outsiders and still survive, but it pays more attention to the tactics by which gay men appropriated public spaces not identified as gay—how they, in effect, reterritorialized the city in order to construct a gay city in the midst of (and often invisible to) the normative city.<sup>41</sup>

Through an analysis of New York City's turn-of-the-twentieth-century sexual topography, Chauncey suggests that there are significant differences in the meaning and social organization of homosexual behaviors, and that those differences are a product of gender and class. For instance, he distinguishes between "fairies," effeminate homosexual men, and "queers," gender-normative men who practiced same-sex sexuality. Arguing that the sexual difference most salient to early-twentieth-century working-class urban environments depended more on gender than sexual practice, Chauncey explains that the sexual topography fairies traversed (the "lost gay world") functioned to clarify "the boundaries that distinguished the men of that world from other men in a culture in which many more men engaged in homosexual practices than identified themselves as queer."<sup>42</sup> In other words, the sexual topography or urban spaces fairies occupied (or reterritorialized) facilitated the development of identities that did not function within a homo/hetero binary, the sexual regime now hegemonic in American culture. As a result,

the constituents of “gay New York” did not express the same *kinds of identities* that, later, defined the world inhabited by homophile activists.

*Wide-Open Town* builds on the insights of D’Emilio, Stein, Kennedy, Davis, and Chauncey to address the social geography of San Francisco’s queer communities. It challenges the linear relationship between behavior, identity, community, and activism in that the social worlds—the pockets of cultural resistance—that evidenced the greatest amount of community interaction and mounted the heaviest challenge to mainstream law and order were not factions that clearly articulated same-sex sexual identities or aligned themselves with overtly political organizations. Instead, they were queer and gender-transgressive groups that occupied the social world of bars and taverns. These groups expressed multiple and overlapping social identities based on class, race, and gender. They fought to secure public space for themselves, and they worked to protect that space from hostile outsiders. In the 1950s, however, as homophile activists began to articulate new social identities (i.e., as sex variants, homophiles, homosexuals, and lesbians), they distanced themselves from the working-class and transgender culture of queer bars and taverns. With monthly publications, they promoted gender-normative identities and worked to connect homophile communities to a practice of political integration and social assimilation. While this book in no way seeks to minimize the importance of homophile movements, it attempts to complicate the story of social movement activism by tracing the urban landscapes queer San Franciscans traversed as well as those they claimed for themselves. It argues that the act of traversing landscapes and claiming space had a political momentum of its own, outside the paradigm of identity politics, and the culture of queer bars and taverns was not important simply as a stepping-stone for the more important project of homophile activism. Instead, this study argues that the communities forged inside bars and taverns functioned politically and, ultimately, offered practical and ideological responses to policing that were distinct from those of San Francisco’s homophile (or lesbian and gay civil rights) organizations.

The chapters that follow are organized both chronologically and thematically, and as such, they use different modes of investigation and analysis. Each chapter is introduced by an oral history interview that grounds the historical narrative that follows in a first-person account of some of the events that chapter describes. The first two chapters provide a cultural analysis of San Francisco’s early queer history—they empha-

size the impact of arts and entertainment on the emergence of publicly visible gay and lesbian communities. The first chapter, “Transgender and Gay Male Cultures from the 1890s through the 1960s,” describes the evolution of female impersonation in the burlesque and vaudeville traditions of the American stage. It documents the overlap between female impersonation, queer style, and a culture of prostitution that often circulated in and around urban theater districts. It then traces the impact of early-twentieth-century anti-prostitution and anti-alcohol movements on San Francisco’s entertainment districts, explaining why San Francisco was a fertile ground for the emergence of queer and gender-transgressive entertainments in the post-Prohibition era. In San Francisco, queer entertainments emerged in the intimate space of nightclubs, where, because of the dark and protected atmosphere, female impersonation made a revival in the 1930s. Finally, this chapter traces the career of two popular nightclubs, Finocchio’s and the Black Cat, that used the theatrical quality of female impersonation to sustain a queer and bohemian clientele through the 1930s and 1940s. In the 1950s, as theater-based queer clubs gave way to a proliferation of gay bars, nightclubs like the Black Cat continued to frame the notion of queer community in the context of sex transgression and gender transgression. In this way, the gay bar became a public institution—a legitimized public space—without forfeiting its history of difference and defiance.

The second chapter, “Lesbian Space, Lesbian Territory: San Francisco’s North Beach District, 1933–1954,” mirrors the first chapter in its emphasis on queer theater and performance. It describes the nightclubs lesbians frequented in San Francisco’s post-Prohibition era, particularly Mona’s, and it traces the careers of a cohort of male impersonators who entertained at several North Beach nightspots through the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Chapter 2 then describes the overlap of sex tourism and race tourism in San Francisco’s North Beach district, drawing a parallel between the development of sex-tourist venues like Mona’s and the transformation of Chinatown into a tourist destination in the late 1930s. Sex tourism and race tourism generated a new kind of tourist economy for the city; they showcased difference and, in doing so, generated a permissive quality of same-sex and cross-race sexual display. As sexualized entertainments became part of San Francisco’s allure, tourist industry dollars cast a thin veneer of protection around the city’s queer entertainments. Meanwhile, the lesbians who frequented North Beach bars and taverns often shared these spaces with prostitutes and sex workers. Like prostitutes, the lesbians who left their homes at night to

frequent bars and taverns in the post-Prohibition era were often treated as outlaws. They were harassed, policed, and prosecuted on the same terms as prostitutes, and they learned from prostitutes how to traverse the extralegal world of nighttime entertainments. As a result, a publicly visible lesbian culture emerged in San Francisco's North Beach district at the conjunction of tourist industry protections and a sex-based street culture that often left lesbians at the mercy of the police. The chapter concludes with the 1954 police raid on Tommy's Place, a butch-fem bar that became the focus of a citywide scandal and, later, a U.S. Senate subcommittee investigation on juvenile delinquency. Like the butch bartenders arrested at Tommy's Place, publicly visible lesbians remained vulnerable to the whims of politics and police even as they learned to translate their cultural capital (tourist appeal) into a legitimate business enterprise (gay- and lesbian-owned bars).

The third chapter, "Policing Queers in the 1940s and 1950s: Harassment, Prosecution, and the Legal Defense of Gay Bars," steps away from the history of gay and lesbian bar life to investigate the social history of policing in San Francisco. It starts with the impact of World War II on San Francisco's queer social worlds and argues that the militarization of San Francisco enabled municipal, state, and federal policing agencies to coordinate their efforts in new ways. As federal agencies, specifically the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board, targeted gay bars over other areas of what they called "disease and disorder" (such as prostitution zones), they drew local police and the state's alcohol control agencies with them. In the period between 1942 and 1951, the State Board of Equalization, California's tax and alcohol control agency, became more vigilant in policing bars and taverns. Even though tourism remained important to San Francisco's queer and transgender nightlife, the gay bar became increasingly vulnerable to surveillance and regulation. But as owners of gay bars were increasingly cited with infractions, forced to attend hearings, and threatened with the revocation of their liquor licenses, they developed legal strategies to defend themselves. Several bar owners hired lawyers to argue their cases, and in 1951, Sol Stouman, the owner of the Black Cat bar, won a state supreme court case against the State Board of Equalization that affirmed the right to serve alcohol to homosexuals. Explicit in this decision was the right to public association, a conclusion that overturned the most effective tool of local policing agencies: the presumed illegality of gay bars and taverns. In the years following the Black Cat decision, policing agencies found themselves



unable to disrupt the growth and development of San Francisco's gay nightlife, and gay bars enjoyed a brief but vibrant period of reestablishment. In 1955, however, partly in response to *Stouman v. Reilly*, the California State legislature created a new agency, the Alcoholic Beverage Control Board (ABC). Using undercover agents and dubious state regulations, the ABC vigorously attacked gay bars, but the bars fought back with a number of lower-court cases that confirmed the legality of *Stoumen* and the right to public association. In constant negotiation with multiple policing agencies, the communities that formed inside gay and lesbian bars took on a siege mentality. As they fought to defend their territory from police intrusion, they came to understand the power of collective action. Their choice to legally defend themselves with the right to (group) public association rather than (individual) privacy rights inserted new ideas and new language into a nascent movement for lesbian and gay civil rights.

The fourth chapter, "‘A Queer Ladder of Social Mobility’: San Francisco's Homophile Movements, 1953–1960," takes its name from a chapter of Daniel Bell's 1960 publication, *The End of Ideology*. Seeking to explain the insights and failures of Marxism, Bell argues that crime syndicates, like suburban businessmen, often expressed a "hunger for the forbidden fruits of conventional morality."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in an attempt to communicate directly with mainstream society and break through the stereotypes and assumptions that shrouded their humanity, members of homophile organizations sought new modes of social and political representation. The chapter begins with a look at the birth and evolution of two homophile organizations, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. By 1955, both organizations made San Francisco their home, and through monthly publications they pushed new images of homosexual subjectivity into the public sphere. The Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis fought censorship, organized against police harassment, and worked with professionals and scientific experts to increase the visibility of gay men and lesbians in mainstream society. While bar-based communities used the First Amendment right to assembly to protect the queer use of bars and taverns, homophile organizations stressed individual rights based on the Fourteenth Amendment's due process clause to lobby for their own protection. Homophile activists sought to improve conditions for homosexuals by participating legitimately in the realm of mainstream political action, thus distancing themselves from the outlaw behavior of bar-based communities. They

particularly eschewed the gender-transgressive behavior of bar-based societies, aligning themselves instead with a notion of citizenship that projected middle-class and corporate values. Homophile attitudes were easily digested by scholars and researchers eager to translate a sympathetic view of homosexuals to the world around them, and the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis found themselves interviewed and analyzed by a small army of academics. Popular and academic publications often exaggerated homophile attitudes, however, exploiting the seeming pathology of bar-based communities for a sympathetic picture of homophile citizenship and subjectivity. The chapter ends with an examination of the ideological standoff between bar-based cultures and homophile communities. While both sought to improve the condition of urban life for San Francisco's lesbian and gay populations, it seemed that homophile activism, at times, functioned at the expense of bar cultures and communities.

Chapter 5, "Queer Cooperation and Resistance: A Gay and Lesbian Movement Comes Together in the 1960s," documents the transformation, between 1960 and 1965, of a fractured and divisive community into a cooperative enterprise. Picking up where chapter 4 leaves off, it describes a series of public events that brought San Francisco's queer communities into the public eye and forced bar-based and homophile movements to work together. It also documents the birth, between 1961 and 1964, of four new organizations: the League for Civil Education, the San Francisco Tavern Guild, the Society for Individual Rights, and the Council on Religion and the Homosexual. The combination of publicity and organizational development restructured San Francisco's queer communities' relationship to the public sphere and the popular press. As a result, a new discourse of resistance emerged on the border between San Francisco's queer-bar cultures and its homophile communities. Meanwhile, as the African American civil rights movement began to successfully press for rights based on the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause, gay and lesbian activists followed suit. Gay and lesbian activists framed a politic that asserted the notion of homosexuals as an oppressed minority, and a rhetoric of equal protection and minority group rights brought bar-based and homophile activists together. Bar-based and homophile activists rallied against police harassment; they joined forces to raise funds; and, in the spirit of radical cooperation, they began to articulate a "gay" sensibility. Thus, in early 1965, when a police dragnet attempted to shut down a community-sponsored

benefit for San Francisco's Council on Religion and the Homosexual, gay organizations launched a multi-dimensional protest that forever changed the character of San Francisco's queer communities. In 1965, at the height of the civil rights era—and well before New York's Stonewall Riots—what was increasingly called a “gay community” in San Francisco began to look and act like a formidable political constituency.