CLAIRE BOND POTTER

Paths to Political Citizenship: Gay Rights, Feminism, and the Carter Presidency

In the fall of 1978, President Jimmy Carter stood on a platform in San Francisco, a city where gays, lesbians, feminists, and communities of color anchored California's liberal Democratic vote.[1] Carter was there to support the reelection of Governor Jerry Brown, a politician popular with the city's counterculture who was courting an energized and angry gay constituency. Proposition 6, an amendment to the state constitution sponsored by conservative assemblyman John Briggs that proposed to ban homosexuals from teaching, would be on the ballot in November. It was one of several local initiatives around the nation in which conservatives and evangelicals hoped to roll back hard-won gay civil rights achievements that they viewed as a sign of cultural and political decline.[2]

But Brown needed this crowd of activists. In a few weeks, Harvey Milk would be elected as the city's first openly gay supervisor. George Moscone had been elected mayor of the city in 1975, surviving a recall election the following year in part because of precinct-level work by the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club, by Milk's Castro Valley Association (CVA), and by the CVA's political allies in the Asian American and organized-labor communities. Under Milk's leadership, gays and lesbians were pushing for human rights reforms that had resulted in an antidiscrimination ordinance in March 1978, even as other communities around the country repealed similar ordinances.[3]

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Those in the audience who subscribed to the newsletter of the National Gay Task Force (NGTF) would have been aware that the Carter administration was in the midst of extensive meetings with this new human rights organization, founded in 1973. The talks, initiated by Carter aide Midge Costanza and her Office of Public Liaison (OPL), sought to end antigay discrimination that had shaped critical federal policies since the turn of the twentieth century through civil service regulations established during the Eisenhower administration.[4] Beginning in February, a six-man and six-woman NGTF negotiating team had been meeting with agencies like the FCC to persuade them that they could intervene against forms of discrimination, inside and outside the state, that restricted gay and lesbian economic citizenship. The negotiators took a radically different approach than either feminists, who were seeking legislative action, or local gay rights organizations, which asked voters to enact antidiscrimination policies. Instead, they took the position that the Carter administration could open the door to equality by enforcing existing nondiscrimination policies that spoke to human rights principles already endorsed by the president.[5] Although the group publicly suggested that an executive order establishing gay civil rights would be desirable, throughout Carter's single term they pressed gently on this issue, accepting the president's desire to distance himself from them as a constituency.

Nothing illustrates the difference between local and national gay rights strategies better, however, than the moment at the Brown rally when Carter moved to leave the stage without acknowledging the threat to gay and lesbian civil rights that the Briggs Amendment represented. The governor pulled him aside. According to journalist Randy Shilts, "A television microphone picked up Brown telling Carter, 'Proposition 6. You'll get your loudest applause. Ford and Reagan have both come out against it. So I think it's perfectly safe.'" Carter returned to the stage and leaned into the microphone, asking voters already inclined to check No on 6 to do so. The crowd roared its approval.[6]

Did feminists in the crowd cheer as loudly? By 1978, although they had paid their dues in the Carter campaign, women's groups were unhappy. This distress came to a crisis point that year when the president fired Bella Abzug as co-chair of the National Advisory Committee on Women. Although Carter had made good on his promise to appoint a record number of women to high-level jobs in the administration, including the first Latina cabinet member in Secretary of Commerce Juanita Kreps, feminist organizations perceived a lack of support for their core policy issues: abortion, economic inequality, and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). Carter had angered

them by appointing the pro-life Joseph Califano as Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, by refusing in 1977 to fund abortions for women in poverty, and by insisting that conservative women be included in the International Women's Year Conference in Houston. The administration had moved forward on feminist antiviolence initiatives, continued to endorse ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, and had launched a women's business initiative through Kreps. But Carter's failure to perceive universal access to abortion as a woman's human right caused many feminists to regard him with hostility and suspicion. Distrust of Carter would lead many of them to support Senator Edward Kennedy's challenge for the Democratic nomination in 1980.[7]

As feminists fighting these battles rightly understood, the Carter administration had begun to steer the party away from New Deal liberalism. The consequences of this shift for feminism, federal policy, and the rights of sexual minorities deserve more attention than they have received. Here I argue for the importance of these two constituencies, independent of each other, and, more important, together, for the development of human rights tactics that would shape the policy-making strategies of each group for the next three decades. Feminists and gay rights activists each sought reforms on the basis of inclusion in the president's agenda, but they did so at an electoral moment that required increased attention to the consolidation of conservative politics and in the face of a White House staff that had little experience with managing grassroots movements. Identity groups that sought rights through appeals to the state in the Carter years confronted an altered set of understandings held by the president and by conservatives about the appropriate role of government, ideas that were becoming consensus in southern states turning to the Republican Party. Activists therefore needed to be responsive to the president's avowed reluctance to set an ideological agenda that moved his administration to the right or to the left. Religious groups were becoming increasingly politicized over Carter's unwillingness to restrain rights claims made on the basis of race, gender, and sexuality. The president's own apparently erratic application of personal morality to the public sphere complicated the increasingly charged political terrain. Carter's conviction that the regulatory power of government was too great, and his commitment to an economic market that sought to expand deregulation and reverse the welfare system, also represented a sharp setback to Democratic Party commitments that feminists and other civil rights groups had helped to shape.[8]

Moving rights-based claims forward in this context required attention to a changing political environment that would eventually be named "neoliberalism." However, as I shall argue here, it also required strategic attention to the Carter

administration's lack of skill in managing conflict within its own ranks, as well as the administration's inexperience in striking pragmatic bargains that could bridge the claims of competing constituencies. Administration memoirs, as well as scholarly accounts, reveal continual frustration at the naïveté and missed communications that appeared to dog Carter's domestic policy staff. These problems were compounded by infighting: a West Wing staff that did not know how, or wish to, play the Washington "game" (something that is, ironically, perceived as a virtue almost forty years later), and a press corps that seemed to delight in reporting every dysfunctional policy episode. Not surprisingly, accounts of domestic civil rights initiatives during the Carter years are sparse.[9]

A comparison of feminist and gay rights initiatives suggests how we might rescue this history of domestic human rights by paying sharp attention to who was included in the policy process, what they did when they were there, what kinds of conflict had to be navigated to move initiatives forward, and what the outcomes were. The NGTF and feminist groups had many ideological similarities by 1976: a view that their struggle was a continuation of the struggle for black civil rights; a belief in racial inclusion that was not fully matched by an understanding of what the implications of that were for their own identity claims; demands to be included in the benefits of the liberal state; and a desire to be free from legal discrimination. But their tactics differed sharply. Feminists, who had fought their way to insider status in the party, chose to deploy confrontational outsider tactics to pursue their claims. NGTF organizers, many of whom were also feminists, were outsiders who chose to articulate themselves as insiders, both in their style and in a policy strategy that sought to expand existing claims to recognize their citizenship. If feminists brought conflict to the table, the weaker NGTF brought proposals to the administration that demonstrated the possibility for resolving conflict. In this process, we can also see how gays, rather than being confined to a social-movement literature that ignores their presence at the policy table in the 1970s, belong to the political history of the Carter years.

FEMINISM, THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION, AND ABORTION RIGHTS

Margaret "Midge" Costanza, a former city councilwoman and vice mayor of Rochester, New York, had worked hard to win her state for Carter in 1976. The campaign was highly focused on connecting the candidate to female voters and to the state's urban, ethnic, and racial communities.[10] In New York State,

connecting to women voters also meant becoming a liaison to powerful feminist networks such as the National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC), the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Women's Equity Action League (WEAL), and the National Abortion Rights Action League (NARAL). All of these groups but WEAL, a network of civil servants initially known as "The Nameless Sisterhood," originated with New York feminists and/or were based in New York City. In less than a decade, feminist organizations that had not existed before 1965 had helped to legalize abortion; had linked female elected officials in both parties to feminists in the federal civil service; and, led by Representative Patsy Mink (R-Hawaii), passed Title IX, which mandated equal access to education and would reshape the world of women's sports.[11]

Because many of them had came out of the old Left or had belonged to the New Left, and saw themselves as acting on behalf of a race- and class-integrated mass movement, feminists who entered politics as part of a liberal Democratic coalition often viewed themselves as a radical goad to liberalism. As Bella Abzug mused in the spring of 1971, when she took her seat as the first Jewish woman elected to Congress, "This moment in history requires women to lead the movement for radical change, first because we have the potential of becoming the largest individual movement; second, because our major interests are in common with the other oppressed groups; and third, because we have never had a chance to make mistakes in government and so we have no mistakes to defend. Men have made the world the way it is." In 1972, Abzug, Shirley Chisholm, and delegates from the NWPC that included Costanza (who was attending her first national convention) succeeded in getting the first women's rights plank passed at the national convention.[12]

Unlike the NGTF, which declared its intention to "expand the gay movement" by attracting "*both* militant activists and more conservative movement members," feminist politicos were abandoning the nonpartisan stance that NOW had adopted in 1966 when it had vowed to "win for women the final right to be fully free and equal human beings."[13] Many feminists cultivated combative, radical styles within the Democratic Party that explicitly renounced conventional feminine forms of persuasion.[14] The influence of radical feminism in policy-making organizations like NWPC and NOW also brought internal social-movement dynamics into conflict with a conventional policy-making process. Feminists explored the differential effects of each issue through the lens of race and class privilege, often struggling with the very concepts of leadership and compromise that could be essential to political brokering. Skilled politicians like Abzug and Chisholm linked feminists to

the state in the 1970s, often to the discomfort of women committed to grassroots politics, revolution, or cooperative reform of the gender system. For example, Betty Friedan, one of the founders of the NWPC, almost immediately renounced the group because of unsisterly and unnamed female politicians who had outmaneuvered and outshone her. NWPC, she wrote, had become "too easily controlled and manipulated by a few ambitious women."[15]

Midge Costanza may have recalled the chaos of NWPC's smoky back room in 1972 as she worked to mediate the confrontational feminist movement styles that baffled and offended President Carter and his aides as they took office in 1977. As historian Susan Hartmann has argued, "Any explanation of the breach between Carter and prominent feminists must begin with the recognition that social movements, by their very nature, are pitted against officials in power, setting goals far beyond the inclination or command of mainstream politicians to fulfill."[16] Demanding to be included in the president's human rights agenda, they did so in a messy political style that articulated the concept of "female citizenship" as an unresolved contradiction in terms. Increasing resistance to the Equal Rights Amendment orchestrated by conservative women, whom Carter had insisted were to be among the delegates to the 1977 International Women's Year convention, reinforced feminist skepticism that the president understood the difference between female activists. Carter's apparent unwillingness to sacrifice other policy priorities to the ERA ratification campaign also reinforced feminists' core belief that, no matter how well women were represented at the policy table, in the absence of this constitutional guarantee they would always be outsiders to the political process. The controversy over Carter's intention to sign the Hyde Amendment in July 1977, which proposed to end Medicaid funding for abortion, offers a graphic example of how feminists' insistence on not compromising abortion rights for the poor led to a breakdown of relations with the White House.

Carter made only two campaign promises to feminists, and he kept both of them: that he would appoint an unprecedented number of women and minorities to government jobs, and that he would approve a drastic reduction in Medicaid funding for abortion.[17] Following a brief honeymoon period in which movement feminists constantly trooped in and out of the White House (sometimes showing up with sleeping bags to crash on Costanza's office floor, a few steps away from Carter's, before or after a demonstration), abortion became a source of tension. On July 12, Carter announced that he did not support the allocation of federal Medicaid funds for abortions and would sign the Hyde Amendment, having indicated to Congress that he would be

willing to consider more drastic restrictions on the medical procedure.[18] Feminists rightly viewed Medicaid ineligibility as a partial retraction of *Roe v. Wade* (1973), since it would restrict access for poor women to safe termination of unwanted pregnancies. Practically speaking, restricting Medicaid would de-fund $600,000 worth of procedures in New York State alone. In a memo to Carter, Karen Mulhauser, executive director of NARAL, accused him of believing that his religious and moral values were superior to those of "millions of Americans who support the right to choose." Furthermore, since abortion was legal, Mulhauser argued, for a president who had pledged himself to supporting human rights around the globe to withdraw equal medical access for poor women in the United States was hypocrisy.[19]

Carter was offended by the tone of this and other communications from movement women that challenged the policy by attacking his moral integrity. He became unhappier some days later when he discovered that pro-choice networks in government had mobilized around the issue; he believed that the role of his aides and their staffs was to implement his policies, not to make them. As Carter discovered, dismayed feminists employed in the executive branch, and a few pro-choice men, had pleaded with Costanza to broker a conversation between them and the president on the abortion issue. As a first step, on July 16 Costanza facilitated an impromptu meeting of forty subcabinet-level women to formulate a response to the Hyde Amendment. "I have received an overwhelming number of phone calls from public interest groups, individuals *and* White House staff," a weary Costanza wrote in a memo to Carter prior to the meeting, "expressing concern and even anger over your remarks at yesterday's news conference concerning the controversial issue of Federal funding for abortions." Some callers had proposed that Carter could moderate his position to support "medically necessary" procedures, a common dodge to procure a legal abortion prior to *Roe*. Others warned that federal restrictions on a legal medical procedure would encourage those opposed to abortion at the state legislatures to restrict access to choice for poor women through similar measures. In response to the first point, Carter penciled "no" in the margins; to the second, he noted flippantly, "If I had this much influence on state legislation, ERA would have passed." At the end of the memo, in response to Costanza's assertion that "Discussion is healthy," and that the Medicare issue should be debated openly at a meeting of the White House staff, Carter closed the door. He wrote, "My opinion was well-defined to [the] U.S. during [the] campaign. My statement is actually more liberal than I feel personally. J."[20]

The president became angry when he discovered over the next several days that Costanza had not just hosted a meeting: she—or someone else—had leaked it to the media in an effort to pressure him. Vigorous and unrelenting lobbying was typical of the state-level feminist campaigns to pass ERA, but Carter had little patience for these politics, particularly as news reports about the issue began to describe his administration as divided, unfocused, and dysfunctional, a problem that would dog him all four years. Yet the politics of confrontation was what feminist activists knew how to do. A Costanza memorandum from July 13 shows that she met with representatives of virtually every grassroots feminist organization, including NOW, New York City Planned Parenthood, the Population Crisis Commission, and Planned Parenthood of D.C. Through her, one feminist conveyed to the president that his decision to sign the Hyde Amendment was "racist, sexist and classist." Another suggested that Carter participate in a consciousness-raising session. A third challenged the president's stated view that adoption was a reasonable alternative to abortion "Are we setting poor women up to be breeders for the rich?" she asked. A list of people who were to be contacted by Costanza to pressure Carter included members of every constituency that had helped him win the presidency, such as unions and the Congressional Black Caucus, his minister, and First Lady Roslyn Carter.[21]

As feminists brought tried-and-true movement tactics into the White House, Carter furiously redrew, and made impermeable, the boundaries around the policy-making process. On July 18, conservative Washington columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak reported, he interrupted a cabinet meeting to express his anger and "his amazement that his own appointees had used the Executive Office Building to pressure him on the abortion issue." The message, Evans and Novak wrote, "was clear: After I have made a decision, don't pressure me to change it."[22] Indeed, confrontations and rebukes like this one had, by the following summer, pushed Costanza out of her suite next to the Oval office and into a dank basement room with no portfolio and then out of government entirely.

Not recognizing that the president believed he had compromised and unhappy with the outcome, feminists sought to pressure the president on abortion by energizing an activist constituency outside government that threatened his tenuous hold on an already unraveling liberal coalition. More important, they deployed movement tactics within the state, including the attempt to enlist Roslyn Carter (perhaps the president's closest adviser) as a public ally, much as Betty Ford had become a sharp feminist counterpoint to her husband's conservative views on women's rights. By doing so,

feminists sought to challenge the structure of political conflict, by which "activism" and "policymaking" were articulated as distinct realms that could be easily assigned to "insiders" and "outsiders." Students of feminism will see this as a familiar story in many ways, but it is also worth examining because, in contrast to the success of behind-the-scenes NGTF lobbying, it failed. In the summer of 1977, when President Carter signed the Hyde Amendment, he initiated a multidecade process that shrunk the influence of one of organized feminism's cherished achievements, *Roe v. Wade* (1973). As significantly, in the context of the abortion debate, Carter launched a process of constricting benefits to the poor that was accelerated in the 1980s under Ronald Reagan and relabeled "welfare reform" in the Clinton administration.

"YOU GIVE THEM THE IMPRESSION THAT THEY CAN'T POSSIBLY DISAGREE WITH YOU": THE NGTF GOES TO WASHINGTON

In contrast to feminists, who were not afraid to embarrass or confront Carter and his aides when they failed to press equality agendas, gay and lesbian activists cultivated the arts of persuasion and incremental reform as they undertook the arduous trek toward national citizenship in 1977. In the tradition of the earlier homophile movement, they viewed small commitments, access itself, and symbolic gestures of inclusion as a form of policymaking.[23] The NGTF delegation that arrived at the White House in February 1977 for an initial meeting with Costanza was explicitly *nonconfrontational*, a striking fact given the background that several activists had in radical direct-action politics.[24] Not just a tactic for reshaping the state to their needs, moderation was part of the NGTF's overall internal strategy to recruit, and raise money among, gay men and lesbians in business and professional communities who were turned off by movement cadres and their working-class, gender-bending, and Black Power protest styles. As Bruce Voeller (who with Jean O'Leary was the first co-executive director of the organization) noted, the "blue denim elitism" of gay liberation alienated a professional class that would be crucial to funding a more influential movement.[25]

One important group of allies were closeted federal employees who were visible to each other but not to politicians. Like feminists who had organized as Federally Employed Women (FEW) and the Department of Labor's Feminist Connection, these gay and lesbian bureaucrats were capable of wielding influence over policy decisions, alerting organizers to heterosexual allies and providing the information needed to create change.[26] Unlike feminist

coworkers, they were unable to meet and debate issues openly. They required organizers from outside government to activate their potential for relieving state homophobia, a process that had been under way through litigation since the mid-1960s.[27]

As NGTF cofounder Howard Brown knew from personal experience, secrecy was no bar to effective networking. In 1966, New York City mayor John V. Lindsay had appointed Brown, a closeted physician and community public health reformer who had served in the Johnson administration, as chief of the city's health services. After the swearing in, gay friends introduced the new commissioner to other "homosexuals in high positions in the Lindsay administration." These officials, in turn, gave him entrée to a gay and lesbian network of blue- and white-collar city employees bound together by "the need to hide." Brown recalled that another "gay commissioner" periodically sent around a gay municipal telephone technician to check Brown's office phone for bugs.[28]

Such networks, invisible to many straight policymakers (and as yet only semi-visible to policy historians), were a critical support system for NGTF political operatives who sought to put the state to work for gay and lesbian rights during the Carter administration. The NGTF also brought a different organizing philosophy to the White House than the one employed by community activists. The organization was entirely unconflicted about naming and empowering leaders, although power was always shared between men and women and, like feminists, they worked hard—although not always successfully—to recruit activists from communities of color.[29] That negotiators had the power to make and keep deals allowed members of the Carter administration to move issues forward in ways familiar to them and with confidence that their efforts would not later be "trashed" in a press conference, as was sometimes the case following the administration's negotiations with feminist groups.

Even as they forged a set of pathbreaking agreements with cabinet-level departments and commissions in 1977 and 1978, NGTF organizers did so not as *politicians* or even as the activists many of them were, but, borrowing from the tactics of the homophile movement, as political brokers. Although they would not have been permitted in the policy room at all without connections cultivated quietly over the years in the civil service, business, law, the church, and the medical establishment, NGTF organizers also assumed a consistent position throughout the Carter administration as detached clients to powerful Democratic appointees within government who were uniquely positioned to eliminate official homophobia and create channels to grieve

rights violations. Unlike feminists, however, they did so through nonconfrontational insider negotiation tactics that pointedly excluded the counter-culture styles and tactics of community mobilization that were typical in places like San Francisco, tactics that would not be directed at the federal government until the AIDS mobilization of the 1980s.[30]

Retaining the support of NGTF funders, who made up the national board of a youthful and frail organization, was a challenge. NGTF needed to be able to report successes that would inspire a more radical membership largely animated by civic struggles at the local level, but to do so required a different mode of operation. In 1979, national co-chair nominee Charles Brydon underlined the importance of cultivating the grassroots as well as "checkbook members." Still, while he respected the grassroots, he did not intend to be pushed into unwinnable battles by its more radical impulses. "The board is the policy-making arm of the NGTF," Brydon emphasized, and its mission was to exploit openings for success. This discipline wedded NGTF and OPL interests but did not tie the organization to any one benefactor like Costanza or Abzug, whose departures in 1978 were a slap in the face to the feminist establishment that was never repaired. "In political terms, the White House project is the most important NGTF undertaking in terms of practical results benefitting lesbians and gay men," Brydon wrote, a full year after Costanza's demotion and resignation when the organization was primarily dealing with White House special assistant Ann Wexler.[31]

Notably, economic and racial inequalities were not publically advertised themes in discussions intended to normalize gays and lesbians as citizens. Similarly absent from the White House discussions were transgender and transsexual issues significant to a constituency that in San Francisco was historically one of the most politically radical populations.[32] At the same time, NGTF also understood that many radicals brought important skills to the table and that the organization needed their insight and participation. The negotiating team included longtime leftist and antiwar activist Charlotte Bunch, formerly of the Washington, D.C., lesbian separatist collective The Furies and author of radical feminist tracts with memorable titles like "Lesbians in Revolt: Male Supremacy Quakes and Quivers."[33]

Nevertheless, attending White House and cabinet department–level meetings in the strict business dress homophiles had worn to picket the White House in the 1960s, NGTF negotiators solidified links to a radical past rather than a radical present. Business attire also stressed their similarities to the Carter appointees with whom they met. "I think most of us hang out in the [political] Center," Lucia Valeska, a mother and former Albuquerque

housewife, noted in an interview in 1979 about her work on the task force. Winning civil rights and eliminating homophobia were "not radical goals," she stressed. Lobbying federal officials to use tools at their disposal in the service of gay and lesbian human rights required "a certain amount of moderation, compromise and mellowing of goals that automatically takes place when you are in that arena. You dress like them, think like them, you sound reasonable. . . . You give them the impression that they can't possibly disagree with you."[34]

Perhaps this stance was important, given the political pressure to repeal gay rights already achieved. In 1977, local and municipal ordinances that had guaranteed GLBT rights became the object of attack by Christian activists, who were also mobilizing to rescind ratification of the ERA in states where that battle already had been won. Both agendas, these activists argued, were a threat to the family and a threat to the gender differences that privileged women's proper domestic role. As Phyllis Schlafly noted repeatedly in *The Power of the Positive Woman* (1977), supporters of the ERA were not normal women. They were "the unkempt, the lesbians, the radicals."[35] In a highly publicized repeal campaign, "Save Our Children," former beauty queen Anita Bryant campaigned successfully in Dade County, Florida, in 1977 to overturn a gay rights equality ordinance; and organized gays and lesbians in California narrowly averted passage of the Briggs Initiative in 1978.[36] The NGTF distanced itself from these more volatile battles staffed by movement activists, establishing instead a right to federal appeal on specific questions of equal access to employment, media, postal privileges, and commercial activity that crossed state lines.

Rather than deploying the language of class and racial inequality, as feminists did, the NGTF spoke the language of capitalism and the Constitution. In a preview of what would become a neoliberal reform strategy by the 1990s, negotiators appealed to Carter's economic philosophies and his concern about the recession to point out that at their urging numerous corporations had already acted to eliminate discrimination so that they could recruit the best talent available. Stressing these achievements with Fortune 500 companies, they argued that what was good for business was good for federal agencies. The Federal Communications Commission, the United States Civil Rights Commission, and the Department of Justice might build on and imitate these private actions.[37]

The willingness of the business community to honor gay and lesbian civil rights in the absence of local, state, or federal action, the NGTF argued, meant that the state could ratify changes that already represented consensus among

the moderate to conservative opinion makers that Carter would need to push his economic initiatives forward. From February 1977 on, in meetings between the NGTF and government officials facilitated by Costanza and her assistant Marilyn Haft, formerly an attorney with the ACLU's Sexual Privacy project, activists repeatedly emphasized that government was trailing the desire for nondiscrimination that the private sector had acted upon. This argument was particularly compelling for a president who, himself, had taken a stand against racial segregation as a businessman in Plains. Guaranteeing those rights in the federal government did not represent radical change, NGTF activists argued. They simply ratified the kinds of reform that the president had already supported and made them more visible as part of his human rights agenda.[38]

Staying on message also meant marginalizing dissenters who wanted more, wanted something different, and wanted it faster. While the archive is riddled with evidence of unscreened feminist attacks that were offensive to Carter, the NGTF folders in the Carter papers tell a different story. One former NGTF board member fumed in a letter to Marilyn Haft in 1977, "You and Costanza . . . *both* should also realize that many of us out here are witnessing the erosion of our own access to the president" because of the "preferential treatment" given to co-chairs Voeller and O'Leary. "It is absolutely mad to believe that only those two can and will represent all of us."[39] But the NGTF was not interested in achieving internal consensus. Its strategy was to seek agreement with policymakers about existing laws and human rights principles that provided a template for equal sexual citizenship. This focus also allowed NGTF to control its message far better than feminists had.

What it meant to frame oneself effectively as a rights-bearing subject at a moment when the idea of human rights was being redefined is an important question for understanding how identity groups navigated the consolidation of a neoliberal consensus among Democrats at the end of the twentieth century. Although they were an outsider group, by deploying insider strategies exclusively, and leaving their social-movement identity at the door, the NGTF worked to eliminate the inevitability of conflict that Hartmann describes in her analysis of the feminist break with the Carter administration. By incrementally raising the bar for, but not exceeding the Carter administration's capacity to reimagine, its own human rights agenda, the NGTF laid a foundation for the reframing of "the homosexual" as a political, but not necessarily partisan, citizen. This new rights-bearing subject was not actually new, only liberated to function in an employment and economic marketplace freed from artificial and invidious distinctions. Achievements in

the realm of zoning ordinances, liquor licensing, and police harassment were issues that crafted the contours of daily life for queer people in local communities but, the NGTF recognized, had failed to change state institutions and policies that were becoming rallying points for newly mobilized social movement conservatives.

CONCLUSION

What are the implications of this comparison for future research? Why compare two groups that have similarities but also a variety of important differences that will surely raise questions for the analysis I have presented here?

While feminists, gays, and lesbians were only marginally successful at creating change during the Carter administration, the invention of the Office of Special Liaison marked a permanent structural shift in the permeability of the state for rights-seeking identity groups of all kinds. The increased political viability of social movements, and their desire for a policy-making role (as opposed to simple inclusion, or an end to discrimination) redefined what counted as citizenship rights.

Furthermore, this comparison suggests an important correction to the assumption that, while the momentum for a politics of family values was building at the local level in the 1970s, its influence in the executive branch was not felt until the 1980 election. NGTF negotiations in the Carter years reveal that the strategy for moving gay and lesbian rights forward was consistent with a homophile past, pushing "less normal" but more radical and diverse constituencies, like transpeople and queers of color, to the margins; emphasizing civil rights as having a personal, rather than a public, impact; and achieving incremental goals through a consensus-building process within the state that excited little public attention and required no action by the president.[40]

The NGTF, which became the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) in 1985, continued to emphasize access to the state, fair treatment by state agencies, and citizenship skills as central to full human and civil rights. "There is no greater violation of our human and civil rights than violence or the threat of violence," a 1986 pamphlet on antigay violence advised. "That's what this booklet is about: to inform gay and lesbian people how to empower themselves, and get themselves the help needed if victimized. It also provides information on how agencies that deal with crime victims work and how to make them work for us."[41]

Because of their greater commitment to grassroots mobilization, feminists suffered from their unwillingness to make deals on critical issues. The Carter administration's reluctance to align itself with the left, and Carter's own social conservatism, required that rights-seeking constituencies embrace flexibility, indirection, and a tolerance for negotiating citizenship. This new terrain draws attention to a conundrum: successful state transformation was, in this case, rendered impossible by the same social movement tactics that had brought feminist activists to the policy table in the first place.[42] Feminists, who had played decisive roles at the 1972 and 1976 Democratic conventions, and had achieved insider status prior to January 1977, believed that the strength of the "women's vote" would win them a brokering role in the administration. However, rather than adopt an insider style, movement feminists and politicos who joined the administration chose to deploy movement strategies that, by themselves, failed to advance feminist policy objectives forward.

NGTF activists, whose influence on the national stage was substantially weaker, set moderate goals and settled for much less, seeking to create change by persuading state managers that gays and lesbians could have full citizenship rights without legislative interventions. They sought to establish a claim on the nation-state rather than a voice in the Democratic Party, achieving a place at the policy table that no national queer organization had yet achieved. Success allowed them to evolve, bringing the radical energy of AIDS activism into the policy arena in the next decade. By the end of the Reagan administration, as historian John D'Emilio points out, the NGLTF had learned to "combin[e] outsider and insider stances into an elegantly choreographed—and compellingly innovative—strategy for change."[43]

In contrast to the confrontational tactics that feminists adopted in relation to abortion rights in 1977, which centered class and racial politics, the NGTF emphasized homophile movement styles and links to mainstream organizations.[44] Organizers concentrated on the tactics of brokering, small victories, compromise, accepting promises of action in lieu of action, and making a case for full citizenship in the media while limiting direct criticism of the administration.[45] Although continuing to press the White House to support a gay rights bill or ban discrimination in all departments of government (including the military, the FBI, and the national security apparatus), the NGTF accepted practical and brokered solutions from third parties that did not produce sweeping change but did strengthen their institutional credibility in the gay community and in the executive branch. By doing so, although the NGTF did not cease to challenge the Carter administration when it failed to meet their expectations, the organization insinuated itself in

an ongoing policy-making process from which feminist activists became alienated at a moment when they wanted to capitalize on their influence among the electorate.

A paradox of political historians' focus on the consolidation of the New Right in the late twentieth-century United States is that the identity politics that crystallized as conventionally political in the 1970s tend to be viewed, in contrast to the rising star of conservatism, as the cause of lost consensus within the Democratic Party.[46] Instead, we need to look at how social movements devised new spaces and new strategies for themselves in response to an increasingly centrist party's ambivalence about them. By renaming such groups "special interests," the Carter administration emphasized unique forms of political citizenship that had been created through exclusion, reshaping the executive branch to allow for the possibility of equal access for such citizens. By creating the OPL (perpetuated in some form by each administration, and known in the Obama administration as the Office of Public Engagement), Carter sought to create a viable path for rights-seeking constituencies like the NGTF that were receptive to insider strategies and sensitive to the administration's boundaries.

Costanza's brief tenure in the OPL also suggests the limits of the brokering role in a volatile political environment where the emergence of new, rights-seeking subjects transforms the very idea of what human rights are. Feminists, in claiming abortion as an economic as well as a civil right, were unprepared for the president's insistence that there were moral limits to women's free exercise of citizenship. The NGTF, by insisting that they wanted the president's support but settling for pursuing modest policy achievements through the state apparatus, did not create opportunities for Carter to refuse them or to express any doubts he may have had about the moral limits for gay and lesbian citizenship.

In retrospect, it also appears that Carter was unclear about whether the OPL should be a broker or a buffer. In November 1977, he noted in his diary that after the crises of the summer, he had reaffirmed his confidence in Costanza but "asked her to stay closer to me. I've been concerned about her involvement in the abortion and gay rights business, but she takes a tremendous burden off me from nut groups that would insist on seeing me if they couldn't see her."[47] Although it is not clear whether Carter meant that feminists and gays were "nut groups" themselves, it does seem clear that Carter wanted Costanza to screen him from challenges on his liberal wing.

This comparison of "interest" groups opens up new questions about the Carter presidency as well. Although rarely named, the ghosts of these

Democratic identity groups haunt what became known as Carter's "crisis of confidence," or "malaise," speech, a signature moment in 1979 that followed a ten-day administration retreat. Often interpreted as moral commentary about a consumer society and the president's relationship to the electorate, the speech also speaks to the difficulty of enacting a human rights agenda as the state taught new groups to claim those rights.[48] The term "special interest" seems deliberately intended to obscure the seismic challenge to the sex-gender system that both abortion and gay civil rights represented. Although the president insulated himself from actual feminist and NGTF activists, he also sought to remain connected to them by putting more conventionally political women who were trusted party functionaries like Costanza and feminist attorney Sarah Weddington, subsequently appointed to OPL, in the middle, women who would teach outsiders to speak the language a state could hear.

Feminists resented this tutelage, believing that they were on the cutting edge of a gender revolution, while the NGTF welcomed it. As a result, the Carter White House's relations with feminists were explosive and largely unproductive, throwing feminist demands back on a liberal electorate at a moment when liberalism itself was eroding. By contrast, gay and lesbian activists began a long, devastatingly slow process of putting the executive branch to work for gay civil rights and retreating from electoral initiatives. A comparison of these two groups—feminist insiders who took an aggressive outsider stance to defend abortion rights, and NGTF outsiders who skillfully deployed insider methods and corporate antidiscrimination policies to make it possible for homosexuals to serve openly in government jobs—deepens our understanding of the domestic policy-making atmosphere in the Carter White House. More important, it offers a lens into how activists schooled in social movements imagined themselves as state actors and clients of the Democratic Party at a moment when, for the first time, they could rightly claim a role in having elected a president.

The New School

NOTES

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