

# The Pink Triangle and Political Consciousness: Gays, Lesbians, and the Memory of Nazi Persecution

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WHEN, IN THE WINTER OF 1993, the gay magazine *10 Percent* criticized the use of the pink triangle as an emblem of gay identity, it touched a nerve.<sup>1</sup> “As a symbol of shared victimization, it is indefensible,” wrote Sara Hart, a senior editor of the magazine. “To equate the discrimination and harassment of the present with the savagery inflicted upon the lesbians and gay men of the Holocaust trivializes their suffering.”<sup>2</sup> Readers disagreed, however, and the letters in the following two issues underscored the relevance of the pink triangle to the gay and lesbian community. One reader stated, “You editorialize about how the wearing of this symbol ‘trivializes’ the suffering of concentration camp victims. . . . Are the deaths of tens of thousands of people (as a result of the Reagan administration’s inaction on AIDS) trivial?”<sup>3</sup> Another argued that the pink triangle raised the political consciousness of gays and lesbians and “compels us to take action against homophobic trends, such as current attempts to pass antigay initiatives throughout the country.”<sup>4</sup> A third reader, even though she deplored the

<sup>1</sup>Here, I use “gay” to designate both gay and lesbian, as I do throughout this essay for stylistic reasons. When I refer to gay men only, I state so specifically. When I refer primarily, but not exclusively, to gay men, it should be clear from the context.

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<sup>2</sup>Sara Hart, “A Dark Past Brought to Light,” *10 Percent* (winter 1993): 74.

<sup>3</sup>Michael Lehman, *10 Percent* (January–February 1994): 8.

<sup>4</sup>Sharon Matthies, *10 Percent* (March–April 1994): 6.

commercialization of the pink triangle, still supported its display “on somber occasions, such as in remembrance of victims of queer-bashings.”<sup>5</sup>

Each of these reactions illustrates the continued resonance of the pink triangle, the insignia that identified homosexual inmates in the Nazi concentration camps. The readers attributed their political consciousness as gay men and women, at least in part, to a particular collective memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. This historical memory, refracted in the symbol of the pink triangle, has mobilized vigilance against contemporary oppression, from queer bashings to antigay initiatives. The letters also show that gays and lesbians perceived this oppression as part of a long historical pattern that extended from the Nazi era to the present. Sara Hart concluded her article with the admonition, “Before we can wear the button or carry the banner that reads ‘Never Again,’ we must first remember.”<sup>6</sup> The letters to the magazine indicate, though, that the gay and lesbian community already has remembered the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, albeit in very particular political, social, and national contexts and quite often independently of historical research on the subject.

In the following essay I shall trace the evolution over the past thirty years of collective memories in both the American and German gay communities in order to show what these communities have remembered and why.<sup>7</sup> I acknowledge from the outset the problems associated with speaking of a single gay and lesbian community, even within a national border; and I recognize that a single gay memory of Nazi persecution does not exist. In fact, this essay shows how cleavages in the communities have fostered alternate memories and how the American and German memories reflect different national experiences. Furthermore, many gays and lesbians remain altogether unaware of the historical significance of the pink triangle. Nevertheless, a larger memory has emerged that, despite differences, does contain shared symbols, narratives, and referents and has significantly influenced the consciousness of the broader gay and lesbian community.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Miriam Imblum, *10 Percent* (January–February 1994): 8.

<sup>6</sup>Hart, 74.

<sup>7</sup>A huge body of scholarship on the concept of collective memory now exists. For one of the seminal texts, see Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, ed. and trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago, 1992). For a useful and concise introduction to the distinction between history and memory, see Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*,” in *Representations* 26 (spring 1989): 7–25. See also John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, 1994), 3–24.

<sup>8</sup>Steven Epstein has noted the relative homogeneity of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement in the United States (primarily white and middle class), which contrasts with the diverse gay and lesbian population that it purports to represent. See Steven Epstein, “Gay and Lesbian Movements in the United States: Dilemmas of Identity, Diversity, and Political Strategy,” in *The Global Emergence of Gay and Lesbian Politics: National Imprints of a Worldwide Movement*, ed. Barry D. Adam, Jan Willem Duyvendak, and André Krouwel (Philadelphia, 1999), 43.

Collective memory, which Iwona Irwin-Zarecka has defined as “a set of ideas, images, feelings about the past,” often eludes attempts to locate its sites and delineate its contours. Irwin-Zarecka has argued that one should look for it “not in the minds of individuals, but in the resources they share.”<sup>9</sup> For the memory of the Nazi persecution of gays the shared resources include the gay press, which has discussed issues important to gay identity and gay rights over the last three decades; literary works and films; protest demonstrations and memorial actions conducted by gay and lesbian organizations; and, finally, the appropriation of the pink triangle.

A shared memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals emerged in the 1970s in the politicized context of gay liberation. It first appeared several decades after the defeat of the Nazi regime, rather than immediately thereafter, for a number of reasons. First of all, immediately after the war, neither an unrestricted gay and lesbian press nor a large, organized gay and lesbian community that might memorialize its persecution existed in either West Germany or the United States. The homophile groups that did exist were too small and too hidden from the public to foster a collective memory.<sup>10</sup> Not until the late 1960s, in the wake of civil rights protests, antiwar demonstrations, and the second wave of feminism, did gays and lesbians begin to organize on a broad basis and push for radical changes in their legal and social status.

A second reason is the absence of testimony, of personal memories, from the victims themselves. Almost all of the survivors lived in either East or West Germany or in Austria; and in all three countries the penal codes continued to criminalize homosexual acts after the war, and police regularly harassed and arrested gay men throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Because the legal and social stigma attached to homosexuality remained, homosexual survivors were understandably wary of telling their stories of persecution, let alone demanding public acknowledgment. The mayor of the village of Dachau, Hans Zauner, typified the hostile climate that these survivors faced when he, with apparent disgust, told an interviewer in 1960: “You must remember that many criminals and homosexuals were in Dachau. Do you want a memorial for such people?”<sup>11</sup>

A third reason for the relatively late emergence of the collective memory, as Burkhardt Riechers points out, is that many gay men and women in immediate postwar Germany wished to forget the Nazi period altogether.

<sup>9</sup>Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory* (New Brunswick, 1994), 4.

<sup>10</sup>Burkhardt Riechers, for example, has argued that homosexuals in West Germany in the 1950s formed at best “a fictional community” (“Freundschaft und Anständigkeit: Leitbilder im Selbstverständnis männlicher Homosexueller in der frühen Bundesrepublik,” *Invertito—Jahrbuch für die Geschichte der Homosexualitäten* 1 [1999]: 44).

<sup>11</sup>Hans Zauner, interview by Llew Gardner, *Sunday Express*, 1960, quoted in Albert Knoll, “Totgeschlagen—totgeschwiegen: Die homosexuellen Häftlinge im KZ Dachau,” *Dachauer Hefte* 14 (November 1998): 101.

After struggling through the lean years of the 1940s, most gay men and women sought sanctuary in the economic boom of the 1950s; along with other West Germans, they avoided reminders of a painful past during which some had sympathized with the regime, even as others had faced persecution.<sup>12</sup> Elmar Drost, a West German gay activist, recalled only one time prior to the 1970s when an older acquaintance of his referred obliquely to the Nazi persecution; otherwise, as Drost flatly stated, “I never heard of it.”<sup>13</sup> Not until the student protest movements of the late 1960s, which also helped to usher in West Germany’s gay liberation, did that society begin to examine its Nazi past in earnest and did gays begin to focus, in particular, on the fate of homosexuals under National Socialism.

This focus on the Nazi past formed part of a larger search for the existence of homosexuals throughout history and an examination of the ways in which societies treated them. Gay activists sought to reclaim the “erased histories and historical invisibility” that Wendy Brown has described as “integral elements of the pain inscribed in most subjugated identities.”<sup>14</sup> Drost, for example, remembered the 1950s and 1960s as “dark years, years without history,” because the absence of a known past had denied homosexual men and women knowledge of earlier emancipation movements and strategies.<sup>15</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, gays and lesbians in both West Germany and the United States established archives, research projects, and oral history collections. The titles of many of the resulting books, such as *Becoming Visible* and *Hidden from History*, suggest the sense of both liberation and permanence that came from having a past.<sup>16</sup> In addition, this newfound history provided historic analogies to contemporary injustices as well as examples of past strategies for homosexual emancipation. It also helped to unite a potentially disparate gay and lesbian community around a shared history and to galvanize this nascent community into political action.

Gays and lesbians not only met silence in the postwar period regarding the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, but they also faced the pernicious myth that homosexuals themselves had formed the backbone of the Nazi movement. As early as the 1930s, Socialists and Communists had linked

<sup>12</sup>Riechers, 42.

<sup>13</sup>Elmar Drost, “Mit dem Schwanz gedacht: Meine Geschichte fängt da an, wo schwule Geschichte aufgehört hat,” in *Schwule Regungen—Schwule Bewegungen*, ed. Willi Frieling (Berlin, 1985), 13.

<sup>14</sup>Wendy Brown, “Wounded Attachments: Late Modern Oppositional Political Formations,” in *The Identity in Question*, ed. John Rajchman (New York, 1995), 220.

<sup>15</sup>See Drost, 10.

<sup>16</sup>Kevin Jennings, ed., *Becoming Visible: A Reader in Gay and Lesbian History for High School and College Students* (Boston, 1994); Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus, and George Chauncey Jr., eds., *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York, 1989). Not coincidentally, the titles of gay and lesbian histories have occasionally mirrored those of earlier histories of women. See, for example, Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz, eds., *Becoming Visible: Women in European History* (Boston, 1977).

homosexuality to fascism in order to exploit this purported linkage for political gain.<sup>17</sup> After the war, Samuel Igra seized upon this trope by explicitly connecting homosexuality to the atrocities committed by the Germans during the Second World War, and William Shirer reinforced it by highlighting a handful of gay Nazis in his best-selling book, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.<sup>18</sup> Although serious scholarship on Nazism has long since dispelled this myth, it persists to this day.<sup>19</sup> Gays and lesbians adopted the pink triangle in the 1970s in part, as the historian Jonathan Ned Katz has noted, to refute “the vicious, influential myth created by antifascists that Nazis were themselves, in some basic way, homosexual.”<sup>20</sup>

A very few individuals had written in the immediate postwar period about the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, but their work had little impact on the consciousness of homosexuals or of the wider public.<sup>21</sup> In 1946 the pioneering East German homosexual-rights advocate Rudolf Klimmer petitioned the Organization of Those Persecuted by the Nazi Regime (Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes) to recognize homosexual victims, and he later sought compensation for these victims from the East German government.

<sup>17</sup>For a contemporary’s criticism of this tendency, see Klaus Mann, *Homosexualität und Faschismus* (1934; reprint, Kiel, 1990). For a more recent analysis of this phenomenon, see Harry Oosterhuis, “The ‘Jews’ of the Antifascist Left: Homosexuality and Socialist Resistance to Nazism,” in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, ed. Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James Steakley (New York, 1995), 227–57.

<sup>18</sup>Samuel Igra, *Germany’s National Vice* (London, 1945); William Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (New York, 1960). Similarly, a series of Italian films, including Luchino Visconti’s *The Damned* (1969), Bernardo Bertolucci’s *The Conformist* (1971), and Pier Paolo Pasolini’s *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975), portrayed National Socialism as rooted in same-sex attraction.

<sup>19</sup>On November 24, 1987, for instance, the Left-oriented German newspaper, *die tageszeitung*, published an article that attributed much of the Nazi movement’s early formation to the “dynamic of male-bonding homosexuality.” Quoted in Hans-Georg Stümke, *Homosexuelle in Deutschland: Eine politische Geschichte* (Munich, 1989), 100. On the political Right, the 1995 book, *The Pink Swastika*, made a concerted effort to resurrect this myth in the aftermath of an Oregon measure to repeal gay rights. See Scott Lively and Kevin Abrams, *The Pink Swastika: Homosexuality in the Nazi Party* (Keizer, 1995). Some postwar academics have also interpreted the writings of Theodor Adorno as suggesting a connection between totalitarianism and homosexuality. See Randall Halle, “Between Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Antifascism and Antihomosexuality in the Frankfurt School,” in Hekma, Oosterhuis, and Steakley, eds., 295–317. On this point, see also Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford, 1996).

<sup>20</sup>Jonathan Ned Katz, “Signs of the Times: The Making of Liberation Logos,” *Advocate*, October 10, 1989, 49.

<sup>21</sup>L. D. Classen von Neudegg, for example, published a serialized account in the West German homophile journal *Humanitas* in the mid-1950s. See “Schicksale,” *Humanitas* (February 1954, March 1954, May 1954, July 1954, December 1954, February 1955). Another homophile journal, *die runde*, published an account of a concentration camp survivor in the fall of 1958. See Karl-Heinz Steinle, *Die Geschichte der Kameradschaft die runde 1950 bis 1969*, Heft 1 der Reihe, Hefte des Schwulen Museums (Berlin, 1998), 12–13. Eugen Kogon discussed the persecution of homosexuals in his 1947 book, *Der SS-Staat* (Stockholm, 1947), translated as *The Theory and Practice of Hell: The German Concentration Camps and the*

Both initiatives failed.<sup>22</sup> Not until the late 1960s did works appear that focused exclusively on the nature and extent of the persecution.<sup>23</sup> In May 1969 the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* called wide attention to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals as part of its cover story on the reform of Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, a legislative measure that decriminalized homosexual acts for men over the age of twenty-one.<sup>24</sup> With this partial decriminalization, gay magazines began to appear on newsstands, and a few gay student groups were formed, notably, those at Bochum and Münster.

The 1971 release of Rosa von Praunheim's film *Nicht der Homosexuelle ist pervers, sondern die Situation, in der er lebt* (The homosexual isn't perverse but, rather, the situation in which he lives), with its concluding slogan ("Out of the closets, into the streets!"), signaled the complete emergence of a vocal and activist gay liberation movement in West Germany.<sup>25</sup> The film's July premiere in West Berlin inspired a number of men to found the radical gay liberation organization Homosexuelle Aktion Westberlin (HAW) the following month, initiating a larger trend across West Germany. Members of the older generation of homophiles, who had advanced politically moderate demands, now felt overtaken by a new generation of leftist gay activists who had emerged from the radical movements of the late 1960s and sought a complete transformation of society.

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*System Behind Them*, trans. Heinz Norden (New York, 1950). Other texts and documents, including the testimony of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss at his postwar trial, also referred to the persecution of homosexuals.

<sup>22</sup>See Karl-Heinz Steinle, "Homophiles Deutschland—West und Ost," in *Goodbye to Berlin? 100 Jahre Schwulenbewegung*, Eine Ausstellung des Schwulen Museums und der Akademie der Künste (Berlin, 1997), 200. See also Rainer Herrn, *100 Years of the Gay Rights Movement in Germany*, exhibition catalog (New York, 1997), 28–33. In 1953, to give a West German example, the Hamburg homophile organization, Gesellschaft für Menschenrechte, pushed unsuccessfully for the official recognition of homosexual concentration camp inmates (*ibid.*, 33).

<sup>23</sup>Wolfgang Harthäuser published an early foray into this field with his article, "Der Massenmord an Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich," in *Das große Tabu: Zeugnisse und Dokumente zum Problem der Homosexualität*, ed. Willhart Schlegel (Munich, 1967), 7–37. Harry Wilde followed this up two years later with his full-length book, *Das Schicksal der Verfeimten: Die Verfolgung der Homosexuellen im 'Dritten Reich' und ihre Stellung in der heutigen Gesellschaft* (Tübingen, 1969).

<sup>24</sup>"Paragraph 175: Das Gesetz fällt—Bleibt die Ächtung?" *Der Spiegel*, May 12, 1969, 55–76. The reform also repealed those changes to Paragraph 175 that the Nazi regime had imposed in 1935, changes that enabled the escalated persecution of homosexuals. East Germany had already repealed these changes to Paragraph 175 in the 1950s, but because of its authoritarian government, this did not lead to an open and active homophile movement. See *Die Geschichte des §175: Strafrecht gegen Homosexuelle*, ed. Freunde eines Schwulen Museums, e.V. (Berlin, 1990).

<sup>25</sup>The German phrase "raus aus den Toiletten, rein in die Straßen" literally means "out of the men's rooms, into the streets." In the context of the film, it conveyed the dual message of coming out of the closet and also of leaving behind the furtive cruising areas of the past and becoming both more visible and more politically engaged.

Initially, these activists paid scant attention to the history of Nazi persecution. Not only did very little information exist on the subject, but, as Michael Holy has argued, gay liberationists regarded the older generation as stiflingly conservative, perhaps even cryptofascist, and felt that its history and experiences had little to teach them.<sup>26</sup> This attitude began to change in 1972, when Heinz Heger published *Die Männer mit dem rosa Winkel* (*The Men with the Pink Triangle*), the memoir of a gay concentration camp survivor. This was the first and is still one of very few firsthand accounts of the persecution of homosexuals under the Nazi regime.<sup>27</sup> This individual memory provided the framework for a larger collective memory. The following spring brought another important change, when the West German Parliament reformed Paragraph 175 a second time by lowering the age of consent for homosexuals to eighteen. Holy argues that the ensuing explosion of bars, clubs, and bathhouses prompted many to spurn the gay liberation movement and immerse themselves in the burgeoning subculture: “Essentially, the gay movement had no answer to the question of many gays in the scene: ‘What do you want now? We’re already free!’”<sup>28</sup>

The HAW responded in the fall of 1973 with its “Feministenpapier,” which debated the fundamental question of whether the gay liberation movement should focus on overturning patriarchy or on collaborating with the Socialist revolution. In addition, though, the “Feministenpapier” urged gays for the first time to wear the pink triangle and declared that, by doing so, “everyone would, as a gay man, be recognized, discovered, discriminated against, and oppressed!”<sup>29</sup> Only then would these liberated gays truly realize the homophobia that surrounded them. Andreas, an HAW activist, recalled in 1975 how often he had easily avoided difficult situations by remaining in the closet. He then compared wearing the pink triangle in public to wearing drag, something that would force him to “stand up for myself and not deny who I am.”<sup>30</sup>

Holy interprets this as the search for an *Opferidentität* (victim identity), a strategy to raise awareness within the community of oppression,

<sup>26</sup>See Michael Holy, “Der entliehene rosa Winkel,” in *Der Frankfurter Engel, Mahnmahl Homosexuellenverfolgung: Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Initiative Mahnmahl Homosexuellenverfolgung (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 74–87. Ulf Preuß-Lausitz saw the leftist movement as crucial to his own coming out and to the foundation of a radical gay rights movement, since gays necessarily lived contrary to the “ruling norm” and were thus inherently revolutionary. See “Der Linke und der schwule Mann,” *Ästhetik und Kommunikation* 11, nos. 40–41 (September 1980): 30.

<sup>27</sup>Heinz Heger, *Die Männer mit dem Rosa Winkel* (Hamburg, 1972), translated as *The Men with the Pink Triangle*, trans. David Fernbach (Boston, 1980), republished in 1994 with an introduction by Klaus Müller.

<sup>28</sup>Holy, 82.

<sup>29</sup>Quoted in *ibid.*, 83.

<sup>30</sup>Andreas, “Meine persönliche H.A.W. Geschichte,” in *Schwule sich emanzipieren lernen*, material for the exhibition *Da will ich hin, da muss ich sein*, ed. Peter Hedenström (West Berlin, 1976), 43.

and even to provoke it, in order to goad that community to political action.<sup>31</sup> Whereas Holy sees victim identity as aimed primarily inward, at the gay community itself, Wendy Brown sees it as a strategy aimed outward. She focuses on how communities have publicized their own victimization in order to gain sympathy and support from those outside it.<sup>32</sup> Holy's emphasis on the internal importance of a victim identity is a useful corrective to Brown's exclusive focus on outward motivations. However, he overlooks the fact that the HAW promoted the pink triangle partly to establish its credibility vis-à-vis other radical, antifascist political movements of the time by presenting gays as fellow victims of Nazi persecution.<sup>33</sup> Holy also downplays the fact that many gay and lesbian activists in West Germany experienced discrimination in their own lives, discrimination that had already prompted them to organize without having to look to the Nazi past. Lesbians, for instance, faced particularly virulent hostility in 1973 and 1974, when the boulevard press maliciously targeted them during a sensational murder trial involving a lesbian couple. Martina Weiland, an early activist, saw the ensuing protest marches and public information campaigns by lesbian activists as key moments in the politicization of the nascent West German lesbian movement.<sup>34</sup>

The pink triangle also symbolized a continuum of legal persecution from the Nazi era to the postreform 1970s, a comparison of the Nazi and postwar governments that Holy rightly portrays as strained. Nevertheless, it reminded activists to be wary of governmental power, and it reaffirmed their determined opposition to the capitalist state. The so-called Radikalenerlass of 1972, which ratified the dismissal of civil servants who had joined radical political organizations, simply confirmed suspicions of the fascist nature of the Bonn government, which already had the power to dismiss openly gay people from the military and civil service. Activists, therefore, turned increasingly to the pink triangle as an historical analogy and a dire warning.

In March 1975 *Emanzipation* and *H.A.W.-Info*, two West German gay magazines, published cover articles on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. The article in *H.A.W.-Info* encouraged gays to make themselves visible by wearing the pink triangle, which it promoted as a symbol of ongoing as well as past persecution. It declared at its conclusion, "SHOW WHAT HAPPENED TO GAYS UNDER FASCISM! DISCRIMINATION IS

<sup>31</sup>Holy, 82. Holy also refers to the pink triangle as an "ersatz stigma" (81).

<sup>32</sup>Brown, 216.

<sup>33</sup>This information on the strategy and politics of HAW comes from James Steakley, an activist in HAW in the early 1970s (personal conversation with the author, July 14, 2001).

<sup>34</sup>See Martina Weiland, "'Und wir nehmen uns unser Recht!' Kurzgefaßte Lesbienbewegungsgeschichte(n) der 70er, 80er, 90er Jahre in West-Berlin, nicht nur für Berlinerinnen," in *Lesbenjhrbuch 1: Rücksichten auf 20 Jahre Lesbenbewegung*, ed. Anke Schäfer and Kathrin Lahusen (Wiesbaden, 1995), 33–35.



STILL GOING ON! WEAR THE PINK TRIANGLE!”<sup>35</sup> Similarly, the 1976 film *Rosa Winkel? Das ist doch schon lange vorbei . . .* (Pink triangle? That was such a long time ago . . .) traced a direct line from the Nazi concentration camps through the repression of the Adenauer era to the situation of gays in West Germany in the 1970s and argued that the same societal prejudices that had allowed the earlier Nazi persecution to take place still existed.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, a 1977 report in *Emanzipation* sought to commemorate homosexual victims of National Socialism and to encourage readers to “reflect on the causes of gay oppression and on the earlier strategies for emancipation that failed.”<sup>37</sup>

Though the legislative reforms of 1969 and 1973 granted greater freedom to West German gays, the subsequent incidents of governmental repression triggered concern about a backward slide that might parallel the Nazis’ destruction of the German homosexual emancipation movement in the 1930s. During the so-called hot autumn of 1977, the Bonn government’s heavy-handed crackdown on terrorism conjured images of a renascent fascist state; fears intensified, for example, when the police stepped up their monitoring of left-wing organizations, including gay and lesbian ones.<sup>38</sup> In describing this situation, one HAW activist hoped that the knowledge of past persecution would jostle gay men out of their complacency: “Most gay people think homosexuality has nothing to do with politics. This is a ridiculous attitude. Paragraph 175, for example, has always been used as an instrument to discipline political opponents. Gay people must be aware of this.”<sup>39</sup>

Gay activists sought to heighten community vigilance by underscoring the parallels between the Nazi past and contemporary forms of state repression. In February 1980 the gay journal *Rosa Flieder* announced: “The pink triangle . . . is not only a remembrance of the past extermination of gays. There is oppression of and discrimination against gays even in this day and age. It must be precisely established whether this gay oppression is once again marching in the direction of a general police state.”<sup>40</sup> The article raised the specter of a Gestapo-like apparatus emerging from the government’s increasing infringements of individual liberties. The very

<sup>35</sup>Ina and Funny, “Die Männer mit dem Rosa Winkel,” *H.A.W.-Info*, no. 18 (March 1975): 8.

<sup>36</sup>The film was written and directed by Peter Recht, Detlef Stoffel, and Christiane Schmerl. For an analysis of the film, see “Rosa Winkel? Das ist doch schon lange vorbei . . .,” *Emanzipation* (January–February 1977): 11–13.

<sup>37</sup>“Rosa Winkel . . .,” *Emanzipation* (March–April 1977): 25.

<sup>38</sup>Martina Weiland mentioned the “criminalization of the entire Left and with it the women’s and lesbian centers, too” (37).

<sup>39</sup>Hans, “In Neo-Nazi Germany,” interview by Barry Mehler, *Christopher Street* 3, no. 11 (June 1979): 65.

<sup>40</sup>Announcement for the Antifaschistischer Bundeskongreß (held April 4–6, 1980, in Frankfurt am Main), *Rosa Flieder*, no. 14 (February 1980): 55.

fact that Paragraph 175 still remained on the books, despite the second liberalization in 1973, heightened concern over the exercise of state power. The Nazi regime, after all, had extended the scope of the law, which originally dated to nineteenth-century Prussia, and used it to justify the regime's internment of homosexual men. The campaign in the 1970s and 1980s to repeal the paragraph altogether emphasized this association with National Socialism. On Gay Action Day in 1981, for instance, a Nuremberg gay organization set up a street display that presented the contemporary legal status of West German gays as a direct legacy of the Nazi regime.<sup>41</sup> The discovery that police in various parts of the country had long compiled lists of gay men understandably prompted further comparisons to the Nazi era. A 1982 protest statement in *Rosa Flieder* concluded, "Under fascism, such lists became the basis by which 50,000 homosexuals were murdered in the concentration camps."<sup>42</sup>

The American gay press in the 1970s also fostered a memory of Nazi persecution that served as a locus for gay identity and political mobilization. As early as 1973 the San Francisco journal *Gay Sunshine* reported that homosexuals had died in the Nazi concentration camps, and the author advocated displaying the pink triangle as a sign of remembrance.<sup>43</sup> In February 1974 the *Body Politic*, a gay journal based in Toronto, gave the subject much greater exposure by featuring a full-sized pink triangle on its cover. James Steakley wrote the accompanying article, in which he summarized the most recent West German accounts of the victimization of homosexuals under National Socialism, including that of Heinz Heger.<sup>44</sup> In August of that same year, activists in New York wore the pink triangle during a demonstration against the city's Orthodox Jewish groups, which had opposed a gay rights bill before the city council. As David Thorstad, a protest organizer, recalled, "Picketers wore pink triangle armbands in an effort to demonstrate that homosexual men had been fellow victims with Jews (and others) in the Nazi concentration camps."<sup>45</sup>

In September 1975 Ira Glasser, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, published an editorial in the *New York Times* on the eve of a city council vote to ban discrimination against homosexuals in employment, housing, and public accommodations. He emphasized the

<sup>41</sup>"Kampagne gegen Paragraph 175," *Rosa Flieder*, no. 24 (January 1982): 32.

<sup>42</sup>"Protesterklärung: An den Innensenator und den Polizeipräsidenten in Berlin," *Rosa Flieder*, no. 26 (May 1982): 41. Regarding the compilation of such lists, see Hans-Georg Stümke and Rudi Finkler, *Rosa Winkel, Rosa Listen: Homosexuelle und 'Gesundes Volksempfinden' von Auschwitz bis heute* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1981), 373–74.

<sup>43</sup>This article came from the British gay journal *Come Together* and relied entirely on Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell* for its information ("Gays and Nazi Oppression," *Gay Sunshine*, no. 18 [June–July 1973]: 11).

<sup>44</sup>James Steakley, "Homosexuals and the Third Reich," *Body Politic* (February 1974): 1.

<sup>45</sup>E-mail message posted to AOL Gay and Lesbian Community Forum on March 13, 1996, by David Thorstad, president of the Gay Activists Alliance, 1975–76.

persecution of gays under the Nazi regime and argued that broader awareness of this fact would lead to greater social tolerance: "Many know about the yellow star, but the pink triangle still lies buried as a virtual historical secret. As a result, there is tolerance among good people of discrimination against homosexuals."<sup>46</sup> Glasser then encouraged all readers to wear the pink triangle as a sign of support for the ordinance, lest gays and lesbians in New York City suffer a fate similar to those in Nazi Germany. As these particular examples show, activists in the United States, more so than in West Germany, tended to direct the memory of Nazi persecution outward in order to secure the support of the broader society. Whereas a certain segment of West German gays enjoyed the relative tolerance of the post-1973 liberalization and may have needed a reminder of past victimhood, American gays, in general, never doubted the omnipresent hostility of the society in which they lived.

As the American gay rights movement faced growing signs of conservative backlash in the mid-1970s, it drew ever more direct analogies to Nazi persecution as a means of galvanizing political support inside the community and outside of it. In February 1977 the gay journal *Christopher Street* published a feature story on the persecution of gay men in Nazi Germany. The accompanying cover photo, in which a disembodied arm sheathed in a Nazi swastika violently grabs the collar of a young man, suggested a menacing parallel to the back-alley fag bashings in 1970s New York.<sup>47</sup> During the 1977 campaign to repeal a gay rights ordinance in Dade County, Florida, gay organizations placed advertisements in the *Miami Herald* that featured the text of an antihomosexual decree by Heinrich Himmler.<sup>48</sup> The *Body Politic* reinforced this parallel when it entitled its review of a book by Anita Bryant, the leader of the repeal campaign, "Taking Another Crack at the Final Solution."<sup>49</sup> On June 26, 1977, two weeks after Dade County voters repealed the ordinance, marchers in San Francisco's annual Gay Freedom Day parade carried protest signs with pictures of both Bryant and Adolf Hitler.<sup>50</sup> As the *San Francisco Sentinel* warned that same year, "We must all be ever aware that mass murders similar to Nazi Germany's could occur in this country."<sup>51</sup>

Harvey Milk, an openly gay San Francisco politician, similarly invoked the memory of Nazi persecution during the 1978 campaign in California against the Briggs Initiative, which would have prevented gays and lesbians

<sup>46</sup>Ira Glasser, "The Yellow Star and the Pink Triangle," *New York Times*, September 10, 1975, 45.

<sup>47</sup>Richard Plant, "The Men with the Pink Triangle," *Christopher Street* 1, no. 8 (February 1977): 4-10.

<sup>48</sup>Reprinted in *Christopher Street* 2, no. 2 (August 1977): 26.

<sup>49</sup>Michael Riordan, "Taking Another Crack at the Final Solution," review of *At Any Cost* by Anita Bryant, *Body Politic*, no. 53 (June 1979): 30.

<sup>50</sup>For a photograph of the parade, see *Christopher Street* 2, no. 2 (August 1977): 18-19.

<sup>51</sup>*San Francisco Sentinel*, February 24, 1977, 5.

from teaching in the state's public schools. In a speech on Gay Freedom Day that year, Milk declared, "We are not going to sit back in silence as 300,000 of our gay brothers and sisters did in Nazi Germany. We are not going to allow our rights to be taken away and then march with bowed heads into the gas chambers."<sup>52</sup> Milk employed this Holocaust metaphor to illustrate the high political stakes involved in the proposed referendum, and in so doing he conflated the Nazi persecution of Jews, which involved the systematic gassing of human beings, with that of homosexuals during the same period.<sup>53</sup> Milk thus gave voice to a growing trend in the American gay community of using the Jewish Holocaust as a model for conveying an understanding of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals.

Martin Sherman's play *Bent*, which opened on Broadway in January 1980 and received its German debut four months later, made similarly overwrought comparisons between the Nazi persecution of Jews and that of homosexuals. The play focuses on the experiences of Max and Horst, two homosexual inmates in a German concentration camp. In the most controversial scene of the play, Max exchanges his pink triangle for a yellow star, the insignia of Jewish inmates, in order to avoid the worst treatment. The *Village Voice's* Richard Goldstein criticized this scene in particular for its historical inaccuracy, and *Spectator* chided it for coming "dangerously close to enlisting the unspeakable horrors of Dachau in the propaganda services of Gay Lib."<sup>54</sup> The gay press, however, praised *Bent* and highlighted the play's message that gays had suffered the worst fate of any of the persecuted groups.<sup>55</sup> *Bent* reminded one reviewer of a police raid on a Toronto bathhouse three months earlier: "Viewers will inevitably draw comparisons between the play's general subject—the Nazi persecution of homosexual men starting in 1934—and the degenerate treatment of homosexuals by the Metro Toronto Police."<sup>56</sup> Sherman himself compared the contemporary gay community's political apathy to that of his play's characters: "What I see happening in New York did happen in

<sup>52</sup>Harvey Milk, speech on June 25, 1978, quoted in Randy Shilts, *The Mayor of Castro Street: The Life and Times of Harvey Milk* (New York, 1982), 364.

<sup>53</sup>In some cases the SS did systematically murder homosexual inmates in the concentration camps, as, for example, in Sachsenhausen during July and August 1942, when they killed eighty-nine pink triangle prisoners. See Andreas Sternweiler, "Chronologischer Versuch zur Situation der Homosexuellen im KZ Sachsenhausen," in *Homosexuelle Männer im KZ Sachsenhausen*, ed. Joachim Müller and Andreas Sternweiler (Berlin, 2000), 46. In general, however, homosexuals died in the concentration camps of starvation, disease, forced labor, and physical torture, not in the gas chambers.

<sup>54</sup>Richard Goldstein, "Whose Holocaust?" review of *Bent* by Martin Sherman, *Village Voice*, December 10, 1979, 46; Peter Jenkins, "Profane Propaganda," review of *Bent* by Martin Sherman, *Spectator*, May 12, 1979, 25.

<sup>55</sup>See, for example, Charles Ortleb, "Sharing the Holocaust," *Christopher Street* 4, no. 5 (January 1980): 10–13; "Bent: Rosa Winkel," *Homosexuelle Emanzipation* (July–August 1980): 34–37. Both articles reprinted scenes directly from the play.

<sup>56</sup>Michael Lynch, "Bent under Hitler, Bent under Ackroyd," *Body Politic* (April 1981): 28.

pre-holocaust Germany. . . . Everyone in Europe is always talking about how liberated gays in America are . . . but that [political mobilization] didn't happen when they were trying to pass the bill in the City Council year after year."<sup>57</sup>

The notion that gays had suffered most among the victims of the Nazis fit well with the political strategy that had emerged in the United States by the late 1970s. A 1984 prescription for securing gay rights expressed this bluntly: "In any campaign to win over the public, gays must be cast as victims in need of protection so that straights will be inclined by reflex to assume the role of protector."<sup>58</sup> *Bent's* message continued to shape the American gay community's collective memory of past suffering well beyond the 1980s. Sara Hart's 1993 article in *10 Percent* quoted dialog from *Bent*, including Horst's statement, "Pink's the lowest," even as it criticized contemporary use of the pink triangle as inappropriate.<sup>59</sup> Even the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) tapped into this memory in a 1996 fundraising letter aimed at gay and lesbian donors: "[Homosexual inmates] wore pink triangles on their pockets . . . and in the cruel hierarchy of the concentration camps, they were the lowest of the low."<sup>60</sup>

In 1981, a year after *Bent* opened on Broadway, the first reports of AIDS began to circulate. As the number of AIDS-related deaths among North American and European gay men skyrocketed, writers and activists increasingly turned to the Holocaust as a metaphor for the contemporary epidemic and to the pink triangle as the most appropriate symbol of current suffering. Larry Kramer entitled his AIDS memoir *Reports from the Holocaust*, and Tony Kushner compared the U.S. government's response to the AIDS crisis to Nazism.<sup>61</sup> The AIDS organization ACT-UP reappropriated the pink triangle as its identifying symbol. ACT-UP members, however, wore the concentration camp insignia defiantly turned upside-down to signal their determination to survive.<sup>62</sup> The suggestion by some religious conservatives that the U.S. government incarcerate those who

<sup>57</sup>Martin Sherman, interview by Charles Ortleb, *Christopher Street* 4, no. 5 (January 1980): 11.

<sup>58</sup>Marshall Kirk and Erastes Pill, "Waging Peace," *Christopher Street* 8, no. 11 (December 1984): 38.

<sup>59</sup>Hart, 36–37.

<sup>60</sup>Letter from Roberta Bennett, chairperson of the Gay and Lesbian Campaign of the USHMM, on USHMM letterhead stationery (n.d., 1996).

<sup>61</sup>Larry Kramer, *Reports from the Holocaust: The Making of an AIDS Activist* (New York, 1989); Patrick Pacheco, "Tony Kushner speaks out on AIDS, Angels, Activism and Sex in the Nineties," *Body Positive*, an online magazine (September 1993) <<http://gopher.hivnet.org:70/0/magazines/pos/posi002.txt>>.

<sup>62</sup>Stuart Marshall astutely observes that ACT-UP's use of the pink triangle over the slogan "SILENCE = DEATH" would have been reversed for gays and lesbians in Nazi Germany to read "SILENCE = SURVIVAL." Stuart Marshall, "The Contemporary Political Use of Gay History: The Third Reich," in *How Do I Look? Queer Film and Video*, ed. Bad Object-Choices (Seattle, 1991), 69–70.

tested HIV-positive understandably heightened anxiety within the gay community of the return of Nazi-style persecution.

Some German gays also suspected an approaching internment in latter-day Dachaus after Peter Gauweiler, Bavaria's State Secretary for the Interior, advocated in 1987 the detention of HIV-positive people accused of spreading the virus.<sup>63</sup> Dieter Schiefelbein has noted that many West German AIDS activists recognized the political utility of comparing AIDS to Nazi persecution in order to thwart proposals such as Gauweiler's: "in this situation, reminders of the other catastrophe of homosexuals in twentieth-century Germany—their persecution in the 'Third Reich'—could be politically astute and morally useful in order to check the zealots who, 'under the sign of AIDS,' cry out for the registration, tagging, quarantine, and internment of those infected."<sup>64</sup>

Schiefelbein's reference to the AIDS epidemic and the Nazi persecution as the central catastrophes to befall gay men in the twentieth century reflected the viewpoint of most gays in both West Germany and the United States. José Arroyo, an American activist, underscored this linkage when he wrote that the pink triangle put gays "in touch with the present situation of AIDS as another kind of risk." He also noted that "the risk of wearing it, the terror of wearing it in a non-gay place, also had a powerful effect."<sup>65</sup> Arroyo's remark echoed earlier claims that the pink triangle would remind gays of social intolerance, but it also suggested that this intolerance now stemmed not just from homophobia but also from the fear and prejudice that surround AIDS.

Despite the growing AIDS epidemic and the relatively hostile policies of the Reagan administration, other activists in the United States also felt the need to remind gay men of past persecution and of the intersection between politics and private life. A 1986 article in the *Advocate* emphasized that pre-Nazi Germany had a large, well-organized gay scene and warned: "Those of us who say that a developed, public gay scene cannot be crushed should look again."<sup>66</sup> In a 1987 book review, Michael Denny also pointed to the lesson of Nazi Germany: "Although paying lip service to the concept of gay oppression, many gay people do not experience it in the day-to-day reality of their lives. . . . In these circumstances it is useful to turn to history, to what has happened, for once anything has been actualized we know it is a real possibility."<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup>Rosa Flieder, no. 52 (April–May 1987): 11.

<sup>64</sup>Dieter Schiefelbein, "Auftakt," in Initiative Mahnmal Homosexuellenverfolgung, ed., 12. Schiefelbein apparently took the phrase "im Zeichen von Aids" [under the sign of AIDS] from Martin Dannecker's book, *Der homosexuelle Mann im Zeichen von Aids* (Hamburg, 1991).

<sup>65</sup>José Arroyo, quoted in Marshall, 97.

<sup>66</sup>Peter Cummings, "Gays and Nazi Death Camps: After 40 Years, Still a Sad, Sordid Chapter in the History Books," *Advocate*, January 21, 1986, 37.

<sup>67</sup>Michael Denny, "Paragraph 175," review of *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* by Richard Plant, *Christopher Street* 9, no. 11 (January 1987): 54.

For most gays, however, the memory of Nazi persecution only helped to frame the intolerance that they experienced in their own lives in the 1980s and 1990s. The upsurge in neo-Nazi violence in Germany that followed reunification in 1990, for instance, evoked images of earlier attacks against marginalized groups in the Nazi period. In the aftermath of a xenophobic attack on a hostel for asylum seekers in Rostock in August 1992, one gay publication printed a placard with a large pink triangle and the words: "Yesterday Dachau, Today Rostock, Tomorrow?"<sup>68</sup> In the United States, a 1992 cover of the *Advocate* compared the Nazi persecution of gays to the pending antigay referenda in Oregon and Colorado. It featured a giant swastika and an article entitled "The Rise of Fascism in America." Similarly, Oregon governor Barbara Roberts described the 1992 ballot measure as "literally, almost like Nazi Germany."<sup>69</sup>

As gay men increasingly invoked the pink triangle in the face of the AIDS epidemic, some lesbians began to seek their own memory of Nazi oppression. During much of the 1970s, lesbians shared the pink triangle and its memory of persecution with gay men, and lesbian activists played a role in promoting it. Increasingly, however, lesbians felt overlooked or consciously ignored by gay men in the movement. "Lesbians are constantly assigned to the gay men—when not simply as their 'wives,' then at least as little sisters," wrote Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, the first openly lesbian member of the German parliament.<sup>70</sup> The women's movement contributed to this consciousness, as feminists pointed to patriarchy in all aspects of society, including gay politics and the writing of history. When feminist historians created the field of women's history, some began researching the lesbian past. In many ways, the lesbian community's search for a distinctive memory of its experience under Nazi rule mirrored the earlier search by the predominantly male gay community for its memory in the early 1970s. Just as gay men had to counter the stereotype of the homosexual Nazi, lesbians confronted the pervasive image of the butch, sadistic, female concentration camp guard.<sup>71</sup>

The lesbian community, even more than the gay male community, faced a dearth of information about the fate of lesbians under National Socialism. Consequently, throughout the 1980s lesbian journals issued pleas for further research into the subject.<sup>72</sup> A 1982 article in the West German

<sup>68</sup>*Rosige Zeiten: Magazin aus Oldenburg für Lesben und Schwule*, no. 23 (December 1992–January 1993): 12.

<sup>69</sup>*Advocate*, November 3, 1992, 36–43. "Roberts Ties Measure 9 to Persecution by Nazis," *Oregonian*, August 26, 1992, A1.

<sup>70</sup>Jutta Oesterle-Schwerin, "Lesben sind keine Homos," in Schäfer and Lahusen, eds., 79.

<sup>71</sup>See Sabine Schrader, "Formen der Erinnerung an lesbische Frauen im Nationalsozialismus," in "Das sind Volksfeinde!": *Die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen an Rhein und Ruhr 1933–1945*, ed. Centrum Schwule Geschichte (Cologne, 1998), 33–43.

<sup>72</sup>The sociologist Ilse Kokula produced some initial research in the 1980s, including interviews with older lesbians. See Ilse Kokula, *Jahre des Glücks, Jahre des Leids: Gespräche*

lesbian journal *Unsere kleine Zeitung* (*UkZ*) stated, “We are beginning to reflect upon what was done to lesbians in the concentration camps. We are searching for the few bits of evidence.”<sup>73</sup> Seven years later, the information gap had scarcely narrowed, and *UkZ* reissued its plea: “Since so little about the persecution of lesbians under National Socialism is known and documented, it seems to us especially important to conduct investigations so that this injustice is not forgotten.”<sup>74</sup> Given the lack of information, some lesbians adopted the model of the Nazi persecution of homosexual men, just as gay men had earlier appropriated the model of the Nazi persecution of Jews. In a 1985 article Gerda Bierwagen criticized the gay community’s exclusive focus on men. Her description of the Nazi persecution of lesbians, however, mirrored that of gay men: “As lesbians, they (like homosexual men) were marked with the pink triangle and held under arrest and often sent to the concentration camps without prior judicial process.”<sup>75</sup>

While Bierwagen claimed the pink triangle for lesbians, other activists argued that the Nazis had marked lesbians with a black triangle, the concentration camp insignia that designated “asocials,” and they promoted this as the symbol of a specifically lesbian memory of Nazi persecution. In a 1987 speech at Dachau, a lesbian organization declared that the Nazis had marked homosexual women with a black triangle and that, just like male homosexuals, these women belonged at “the bottom of the scale” in the concentration camps. The speech continued: “To the silenced victims of that era, just as today, belong lesbian women, even when, or precisely because, lesbian women were made so invisible that they weren’t included as a [separate] prisoner category, even though they were systematically persecuted.”<sup>76</sup> The reference to the “silenced victims” referred both to lesbians living under the Nazi regime and to contemporary lesbian activists who felt silenced by the post-1971 gay movement in West Germany, especially with regard to commemorating Nazism’s victims. A 1999 letter

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*mit älteren lesbischen Frauen: Dokumente* (Kiel, 1986). Claudia Schoppmann has written the only dissertation on lesbians under National Socialism, published as *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität* (Pfaffenweiler, 1991). She has since written several other important books on the subject, including *Zeit der Maskierung: Lebensgeschichten lesbischer Frauen im “Dritten Reich”* (Berlin, 1993), translated as *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York, 1996), and *Verbotene Verhältnisse: Frauenliebe 1938–1945* (Berlin, 1999).

<sup>73</sup>*UkZ* (November 1982): 26. I have relied heavily on *UkZ* for my reconstruction of lesbian memory in West Germany and postunification Germany both because it has covered the issue extensively over the last two decades and because I had access to an almost complete run of the magazine at my research library. Other lesbian journals in pre- and postunification Germany also covered the issue.

<sup>74</sup>“Verfolgung lesbischer Frauen im Nationalsozialismus,” *UkZ* (January 1989): 3.

<sup>75</sup>Gerda Bierwagen, “Lesben im Nationalsozialismus,” *UkZ* (May 1985): 10.

<sup>76</sup>“Eine Rede des Lesbenrings zur Gedenk- und Protestveranstaltung für vergessene KZ-Opfergruppen am 11.01.87 in Dachau,” *UkZ* (February 1987): 44.



to the feminist magazine *Emma* expressed concern that even other women were ignoring the persecution of lesbians. An outraged reader criticized the editors for overlooking lesbian victims in an earlier article on the Nazi period and asked, "Where are the lesbians who were murdered in the concentration camps of the German fascists?"<sup>77</sup>

A number of American activists took their cue from these earlier West German initiatives and began promoting a memory of the black triangle in the United States.<sup>78</sup> In a 1990 *Washington Blade* article, Professor Magda Mueller criticized historians for overlooking the persecution of lesbians: "The writers of these reports [on women in concentration camps] do not question *what* the asociality of the women who had to carry the black triangle was. They never asked, 'why were they labeled asocials?'"<sup>79</sup> The following year, in the lesbian journal *Off Our Backs*, Terri Couch recalled her first gay pride march in Minneapolis in 1973 and what an impression the symbol of the pink triangle had made on her at the time. She then described her subsequent conviction that lesbians wore the black triangle and concluded with a call to reclaim this as a symbol of lesbian identity and a marker of Nazi persecution: "Black triangles could be sold for donations in bookstores and places where women gather. The truth about Lesbian Herstory could be spread."<sup>80</sup> In a 1996 article R. Amy Elman not only argued that the pink triangle rendered lesbian victims invisible but also suggested that the color black better represented lesbian identity anyway: "It is unseemly that girls and women long taunted by forced pink, feminine identifiers are now, as lesbians, to believe that a pink triangle signifies gendered rebellion."<sup>81</sup>

The black triangle, though, never established itself to the same degree as the pink triangle, and many lesbians continued to wear the latter throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This stemmed partly from the fact that gay women had attached so many different meanings to the black triangle that it no longer served as a conduit for the memory of Nazi persecution. In 1991, the same year that Terri Couch promoted the black triangle as a specific memory catalyst, the *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter* published an article that explored the myriad ways in which lesbians already

<sup>77</sup>Monika Golla, *Emma*, no. 2 (March–April 1999): 110.

<sup>78</sup>The documentary film *Desire* contributed to the memory of lesbian persecution in English-speaking countries. See *Desire*, directed by Stuart Marshall (Water Bearer Films, Inc., for Channel 4 Television, Great Britain, 1989), videocassette.

<sup>79</sup>Quoted in Naina Ayya, "Scholars Disagree Who Were Marked by Black Triangles," *Washington Blade*, March 9, 1990, 7.

<sup>80</sup>Terri Couch, "An American in West Germany or . . . Did Lesbians Wear Pink Triangles?" *Off Our Backs* (March 1991): 23. The fact that Couch remembers seeing the pink triangle in the United States as early as 1973 points again to the fact that we do not know exactly when the gay movement first appropriated it as a symbol of gay identity.

<sup>81</sup>R. Amy Elman, "Triangles and Tribulations: The Politics of Nazi Symbols," *Journal of Homosexuality* 30, no. 3 (1996): 2.

interpreted the symbol and proposed that the Nazis probably never persecuted lesbians specifically on account of their homosexuality.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, the black triangle has maintained some currency. The web site BLKTrianGurl, a link for lesbians of color, for example, currently uses the black triangle and explains its symbolic significance.<sup>83</sup>

In addition to the emergence of an independent lesbian memory, the 1980s also witnessed a growing memorial culture within the American and West German gay communities that represented a response both to the trauma of the AIDS epidemic and to the larger trend toward Holocaust memorialization in both countries.<sup>84</sup> As early as the 1970s, gay and lesbian associations in West Germany, and later in East Germany, organized guerrilla wreath-laying ceremonies at various concentration camps.<sup>85</sup> These ceremonies often coincided with gay pride celebrations in June, illustrating the role that this collective memory played in the German gay community. President Richard von Weizsäcker signaled an era of official commemoration in West Germany when, in an address to the Bundestag in May 1985, he acknowledged the persecution of homosexuals. Prior to this, the only official recognition had come from the former concentration camp Mauthausen, in Austria, which allowed a gay organization to place a plaque specifically memorializing the homosexual victims of Nazism—a pink triangle with the inscription “Totgeschlagen—Totgeschwiegen” [Beaten to death—Silenced to death]. In the years following Weizsäcker’s speech, several former camps on West German soil unveiled memorials to the homosexual victims, and the Sachsenhausen concentration camp dedicated its official 1999 remembrance to its former homosexual inmates.<sup>86</sup>

Several cities erected memorials to the homosexual victims of Nazism, and these, in particular, have served a political as well as a commemorative function. The sculpture of an angel with a partially severed head, unveiled in a gay district of Frankfurt am Main in 1994, for example, faced in the

<sup>82</sup>Lucinda Zoe, “The Black Triangle,” *Lesbian Herstory Archives Newsletter*, no. 12 (June 1991): 7.

<sup>83</sup><[www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/7200/mission.htm](http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Park/7200/mission.htm)>.

<sup>84</sup>For a good discussion of Holocaust memorialization, see James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meanings* (New Haven, 1993).

<sup>85</sup>Beginning in 1975, Munich’s Verein für sexuelle Gleichberechtigung laid a wreath for the homosexual victims of Nazi persecution at the Dachau concentration camp, and beginning in 1983, representatives of gay organizations in East Germany laid a wreath at the Buchenwald concentration camp (Herrn, 46, 51). The first reported commemoration by a lesbian group in East Germany took place on April 20, 1985, when eleven women attempted to lay a wreath on the fortieth anniversary of Ravensbrück’s liberation. The police prevented that action from taking place. Denis M. Sweet, “The Church, the Stasi, and Socialist Integration: Three Stages of Lesbian and Gay Emancipation in the Former German Democratic Republic,” in Hekma, Oosterhuis, and Steakley, eds., 356–58.

<sup>86</sup>The following former concentration camps in Germany have placed a memorial marker to the homosexual victims of the Nazi regime: Neuengamme (1985), Dachau (1987), and Sachsenhausen (1992). The Dachau memorial, in particular, provoked ongoing opposition

direction of the nearby courthouse in order to underscore the terrible consequences of judicial decisions rendered against homosexuals in the postwar years as well as during the Nazi period itself.<sup>87</sup> The inscription reinforced the memorial's concern with the present as much as the past by reminding viewers that "men who love men and women who love women can always be persecuted again."<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, the decision to locate the memorial in Frankfurt's gay center suggested that its initiators wished to direct the memorial's message inward, toward the gay community itself, in order to remind this urban enclave of the perils of political apathy.

The debate over the location of a proposed memorial in Berlin, on the other hand, indicates an outward focus aimed at eliciting political support from beyond the gay community. Because of the memorial's "special function," some have advocated its placement in the Tiergarten, near the federal parliament, where "it should become, in its proximity to the government district, the irrepressible marker and visible remembrance of gay men in German society."<sup>89</sup> Frank Wagner, a member of the memorial initiative, has argued that the memorial should not be oriented to gays, most of whom know of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, but, rather, to the larger public "as a measure of its [society's] democracy and liberalness."<sup>90</sup>

Both the completed memorial in Frankfurt and the proposed one in Berlin reveal the latent tensions in the gay and lesbian community over whom to commemorate, whom the Nazis persecuted. In the case of the

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from the administration of the camp site. See Thomas Rahe, "Formen des Gedenkens an die Verfolgung Homosexueller in den deutschen KZ-Gedenkstätten," in *Homosexuelle in Konzentrationslagern*, ed. Olaf Mußmann (Bad Münstereifel, 2000), 151. For a critique of the various memorials to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, see Frank Wagner, "Der Engel unterm Rosa Winkel: Kritische Würdigung bestehender Denkmäler und Denkmalsentwürfe zur NS-Verfolgung von Schwulen und Lesben," in Initiative Schwulendenkmal, *Der homosexuellen NS-Opfer gedenken: Denkschrift* (Berlin, 1995), 69–85.

<sup>87</sup>For a detailed discussion of the planning and design of the Frankfurt memorial, see Initiative Mahmal Homosexuellenverfolgung, ed. Among the postwar injustices against homosexuals that the Frankfurt Angel commemorates, the trials of 1950–51 rank at the top of the list. After a male prostitute, Otto Blankenstein, divulged the identities of his clients to police, they arrested one hundred people. Several served prison sentences; seven of those arrested later killed themselves; many emigrated; and even more lost their jobs because of the revelations. See Dieter Schiefelbein, "Wiederbeginn der historischen Verfolgung homosexueller Männer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Die Homosexuellen-Prozesse in Frankfurt am Main 1950/51," *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 5, no. 1 (1992): 59–73.

<sup>88</sup>Schiefelbein, "Auftakt," 33. Dieter Schiefelbein, who played an important role in establishing the memorial, also noted, however, that the organizing committee had mixed feelings about memorializing both past and present injustices and that some committee members argued vehemently against it (31–32).

<sup>89</sup>Initiative Schwulendenkmal, 15.

<sup>90</sup>Wagner, 73. The effort to secure a memorial to homosexual victims received a big boost on May 3, 2001, when the initiators presented a public appeal signed by, among others, Paul Spiegel, the leader of Germany's Jewish community, and Lea Rosh, the initiator of the recently approved central memorial to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime.

Frankfurt angel, the initiative originally sought a memorial to homosexual men; however, in 1990 it decided to commemorate the suffering of both men and women, albeit under the guidance of a steering committee that had shrunk to just six men. Although the inscription on the memorial expressed inclusiveness by remembering homosexual men and women, the dedication ceremony mentioned only men. In response, two women wrote an inflamed letter to the newspaper *Frankfurter Rundschau*: "We are sad and extremely outraged that the speeches did not remember the situation of homosexual women and the specific form of their persecution under National Socialism with a single word. The event is scandalous."<sup>91</sup>

The proposed Berlin memorial has exposed similar internal tensions. In 1996 the planning group decided to include lesbians in the memorial along with homosexual men, and it changed its name from "Initiative Schwulendenkmal" (Initiative for a memorial to gay men) to "Initiative HomoMonument." Shortly thereafter, Joachim Müller, an early proponent of the initiative, quit the organization. He protested in a letter that "under the banner of apparent political correctness the ideologically grounded myth of a National Socialist persecution of lesbians is to be written in stone."<sup>92</sup> The initiators have struggled for a balance between appeasing the demands of the contemporary gay and lesbian community for inclusiveness, on the one hand, and demands for historical accuracy, on the other, by presenting "a differentiated consideration of the victim groups."<sup>93</sup>

The gay community in the United States has placed less emphasis on memorializing than has the German community and, when it has acted, it has usually done so as part of a larger commemoration of Holocaust victims. As early as 1975, a gay organization in West Hartford, Connecticut, lobbied for the inclusion of homosexual victims in the city's Holocaust memorial.<sup>94</sup> In a much more prominent example, gays lobbied early on for the inclusion of homosexual victims in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, viewing the outcome of this lobbying effort as a barometer of the acceptance of gays and lesbians in the United States. When a 1979 report on the proposed museum failed to mention homosexual victims, the *Gay Community News* protested this exclusion by asking, "If we are refused acknowledgement of our darkest hour, how can we possibly feel safe and secure in our contemporary, emerging-into-sunshine exhilaration?"<sup>95</sup> In January 1980 the Gay and Lesbian Alliance urged President

<sup>91</sup>Gabriele Dietrich and Eva Heldmann, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 30, 1994, reprinted in *Die Schwule Presseschau* 14, no. 1 (January 1995): 9.

<sup>92</sup>Joachim Müller, open letter to the Initiative HomoMonument, October 19, 1996, reprinted in Initiative Schwulendenkmal, 119.

<sup>93</sup>Initiative HomoMonument, "HomoMonument: Eine Replik auf eine selbstgestellte Frage," in Initiative Schwulendenkmal, 13.

<sup>94</sup>The city finally rejected the proposal three years later. Tony Domenick, "Memorial to Holocaust Will 'Ignore' Gays," *Gay Community News*, July 15, 1978, 1.

<sup>95</sup>John Mehring, "Gays and the Holocaust," *Gay Community News*, November 24, 1979, 5.

Carter to include lesbians and gays on the museum's advisory panel and to ensure that part of the museum's educational mission include "anti-gay genocide."<sup>96</sup>

In response to these efforts by the gay community, the museum ultimately dedicated part of its permanent exhibition to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. Auspiciously, the museum's dedication in April 1993 coincided with a nationwide gay pride march in Washington, D.C. At a memorial ceremony held at the museum, one gay leader pointed to the political implications of this coincidence and emphasized that gays need to consider the past as they demand a better future.<sup>97</sup> Other grass-roots initiatives have sprung up in the last decade. Rick Landman, for instance, spearheads an effort to unveil a granite memorial marker for homosexual victims in the Sheepshead Bay Holocaust Memorial Park in Brooklyn, New York, an effort that the borough president has repeatedly thwarted.<sup>98</sup>

As the preceding examination of the gay community's collective memory of Nazi persecution has shown, over the last three decades the initiatives of activists, researchers, and writers in West Germany and the United States have mutually influenced one another. Films, plays, historical studies, and commemorative strategies produced in one country have often found a receptive audience in the other. This sharing has both reflected and contributed to the transnational quality of the gay and lesbian community's collective memory, one in which the national setting of an historical event assumed secondary importance to the central fact that it involved gay men and women. In West Germany gays and lesbians in many major cities have long celebrated the annual Christopher Street Day in recognition of a specifically American historical event, the 1969 Stonewall Riots in New York City. German gays have borrowed a prominent aspect of their memory from American history, just as American gays have adopted their memory of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals from German history.

Despite similarities and mutual influence, however, the collective memories in the German and American gay communities differ in significant ways. The gay community in the United States has made more direct references to the Holocaust and more overt comparisons between the situations of gays and Jews than has the German community. This stems primarily from the fact that most Americans, to the extent that they knew of Nazi persecution at all, knew of the persecution of Jews rather than that of other groups. Furthermore, many of the promoters of a memory of the

<sup>96</sup>Quoted in Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York, 1995), 305.

<sup>97</sup>Barrett Brick, executive director of the World Federation of Gay and Lesbian Jewish Organizations, quoted in Aras van Hertum, "Ceremony Honors Gay Holocaust Victims," *Washington Blade*, April 30, 1993, 5.

<sup>98</sup>For a discussion of the controversy in Brooklyn, see "Sheepshead Bay Holocaust Memorial Park," <[www.infotruue.com](http://www.infotruue.com)>.

Nazi persecution of homosexuals were themselves Jewish. As American Jews devoted greater energy to researching and commemorating the Holocaust in the 1970s and 1980s, many Jewish gays began to explore the particular experiences of homosexuals under National Socialism through the familiar prism of the Jewish Holocaust.<sup>99</sup>

Martin Sherman, in response to criticism of *Bent's* comparison of Jewish and homosexual suffering in the concentration camps, insisted, "I wrote the play every bit as much as a Jew as a gay." Sherman noted that people ignored the persecution of gays just as they overlooked many aspects of Jewish history, and he credited his sensitivity to this fact as a motivation for writing the play.<sup>100</sup> Rick Landman has also discussed how his Jewish identity heightened his interest in the Nazi persecution of homosexuals: "As a Jewish son of two Holocaust survivors, I grew up with a constant reminder of the Holocaust. I developed a vigilance against right wing politics, and a special sensitivity to those who are being persecuted."<sup>101</sup> Significantly, the Congregation Beth Simchat Torah, a gay synagogue in New York City, houses perhaps the only memorial in the United States to the homosexual victims of Nazi persecution.<sup>102</sup>

Jewish gay writers have regularly emphasized the parallels between the Jewish community and the gay community—stereotypes, ghettoization, persecution. Seymour Kleinberg argued in a 1983 article, "The Homosexual as Jew," that gays and Jews had suffered a common history and that when one group faced persecution, the other group invariably did as well.<sup>103</sup> In the conclusion to his book on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, Richard Plant traced a larger pattern of targeting Jews and homosexuals together, one that the historian George Mosse has also underscored.<sup>104</sup> Similarly, a 1987 article in *Gay Community News* presented anti-Semitism and homophobia as two sides of the same ideological coin, concluding, "Both lead to Auschwitz and the Gulag."<sup>105</sup> This tendency to see parallel histories for Jews and homosexuals convinced many gays and lesbians that the Holocaust of the former necessitated a holocaust of the latter.

<sup>99</sup>For an analysis of the interest of American Jews in the Holocaust, see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York, 1999).

<sup>100</sup>Sherman, interview by Ortleb, 11.

<sup>101</sup>"Homophobia and the Holocaust," under the heading, "Holocaust Articles of Interest," <[www.infotruer.com](http://www.infotruer.com)>.

<sup>102</sup>It is a mural by the artist Noreen Dean Dresser, unveiled on May 6, 1999. See "World-Wide Memorials and Monuments" under the heading "Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld," <[www.infotruer.com](http://www.infotruer.com)>.

<sup>103</sup>Seymour Kleinberg, "The Homosexual as Jew," *Christopher Street* 7, no. 1 (February 1983): 35–41.

<sup>104</sup>Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York, 1986), 185; George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996), especially chap. 4, "The Countertype."

<sup>105</sup>Bill Percy, "Anti-Semitism and Homophobia Linked in Discussion of Holocaust Victims Memorial," *Gay Community News*, March 8, 1987, 8–9.

Lev Raphael, a child of Holocaust survivors, explored the coexistence of gay and Jewish identities and the issue of pink triangle identity in his 1990 short story, "Abominations." It centers on Nat and Brenda, a gay Orthodox Jew and his sister, before and after an arson attack on Nat's dorm room in an antigay hate crime. After the incident, Brenda recalls an earlier argument that she had over the appropriation of the pink triangle as a symbol of gay identity: "Don't you hate that they use something from the camps? You never see Jews wearing yellow stars in a parade!"<sup>106</sup> By the story's conclusion, though, Brenda comes to realize the importance of the gay community's memory of Nazi persecution. In the final scene, she remembers "how the King of Denmark had worn a yellow star when the occupying Nazis started persecuting Danish Jews," and she pins a pink triangle button to her dress.<sup>107</sup> The story not only suggests parallels between the Nazi persecutions of Jews and homosexuals but examines the occasionally tense coexistence of the two collective memories—one Jewish, the other gay—as reflected in Brenda's conflicted feelings about the contemporary appropriation of the pink triangle. Raphael discussed in another essay some Jews' discomfort over the historic linking of the two groups: "To speak of Jews and homosexuals as victims of Nazis . . . does not in any way decrease the significance of the catastrophe for Jews. Yet too many Jews recoil in disgust and horror."<sup>108</sup>

Indeed, the emergence of a memory that has often explicitly appropriated the imagery of the Holocaust has created occasional tension between the gay and Jewish communities in the United States. One of the first appearances of the pink triangle, after all, was at a protest in 1974 against Orthodox Jewish groups that opposed a New York gay rights ordinance. That same year, a Jewish lesbian described her dismay at a Holocaust conference's silence regarding homosexual victims: "Not even now can most heterosexual Jews feel any kinship with gays the Nazis killed in the concentration camps."<sup>109</sup> The decision to include homosexual victims in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has also sparked some opposition during the last two decades, including a threatened boycott of the museum by two groups of Orthodox rabbis in 1997.<sup>110</sup>

Opposition has come not only from Orthodox Jews. A 1979 letter by a Jewish group to *Lesbian Tide* supported gay rights but nonetheless protested the gay community's indiscriminate comparisons to the Holocaust:

<sup>106</sup>Lev Raphael, "Abominations," *Christopher Street* 13, no. 6 (August 1990): 41–42.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>108</sup>Lev Raphael, "Judaism's Moral Strength," in *Journeys and Arrivals: On Being Gay and Jewish* (Boston, 1996), 135.

<sup>109</sup>Janet Cooper, "A Jewish Gay's Reflection on Auschwitz," *Gay Community News*, May 10, 1975, 10.

<sup>110</sup>Debra Nussbaum Cohen and Leslie Katz, "Rabbis Attack Gay Inclusion in Shoah Museum," *Jewish Bulletin of Northern California*, March 14, 1997, <[www.jewishsf.com/bk970314/1rabbi.htm](http://www.jewishsf.com/bk970314/1rabbi.htm)>.

“As Jews we feel that more caution and sensitivity needs to be used when talking and generalizing about the Holocaust. . . . This means that we cannot go out and . . . use the Holocaust opportunistically.”<sup>111</sup> Lev Raphael has also criticized the overuse of the Holocaust “as a handy club with which to beat your opponent.”<sup>112</sup> Nancy Ordover sought common ground in a 1995 article in which she recounted instances of insensitivity on both sides and pleaded for a collective memory that could bring the gay and Jewish communities closer together.<sup>113</sup> The two communities have, in many respects, already found this common ground, particularly in their cooperation on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

While the American gay community often employed the Jewish Holocaust as a template for understanding the persecution of homosexuals, the German gay community generally avoided this comparison. Instead, as the historian and activist Ralf Dose has pointed out, many gay activists in West Germany saw closer parallels in the Nazis’ persecution of Communists and Socialists.<sup>114</sup> Public comparisons of the persecution of homosexuals to that of the political Left had the added benefit of solidifying the West German gay movement in the 1970s and early 1980s as an equal partner in the larger movement of radical politics at the time. Furthermore, gay activists and the radical Left in West Germany shared a deep distrust of the state and its ability to exercise power judiciously. While activists in the United States invoked the memory of the pink triangle to *solicit* governmental intervention on behalf of gays and lesbians, those in Germany did so to *protest* such intervention—to oppose, for example, the compilation of lists of homosexuals by the police and the continued existence until 1994 of Paragraph 175.

When they reflected on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals, German gays also had to wrestle with their dual and often competing identities as

<sup>111</sup>Jews against Briggs, “Jews Say ‘Gay Holocaust’ Insensitive,” *Lesbian Tide* 8, no. 4 (January–February 1979): 23.

<sup>112</sup>Lev Raphael, “Deciphering the Gay Holocaust,” *Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review* 2, no. 3 (summer 1995): 20. Similarly, gay activists often invoke the epithet “Nazi” to label their opponents. Kevin Ivers, a member of the gay organization Log Cabin Republicans, for instance, has recently remarked, “I get all kinds of e-mails telling me I’m working with the Nazis.” Quoted in “Gays See Bush with Wariness and Optimism,” *New York Times*, January 26, 2001, A1.

<sup>113</sup>Nancy Ordover, “Visibility, Alliance, and the Practice of Memory,” *Socialist Review* 25, no. 1 (1995): 119–34.

<sup>114</sup>Ralf Dose offered this interpretation in an e-mail exchange with the author, February 22 and February 23, 2001. See also *Schwule und Faschismus*, ed. Heinz-Dieter Schilling (West Berlin, 1983). Nonetheless, German gays also drew inspiration for the commemoration of homosexual victims from similar efforts on behalf of the Jewish victims. Frankfurt’s gay community, for example, first lobbied for a memorial after witnessing the Jewish community’s initiative in 1987 to commemorate the persecution of Frankfurt’s Jews. See Schiefelbein, “Auftakt,” 14–15. Similarly, the initiative to establish a central memorial in Berlin to the Nazi persecution of homosexuals reflected a response to the establishment of such a memorial to the persecution of Jews.



both German and gay—as both *Täter* (perpetrator) and *Opfer* (victim). During a 1989 visit to Auschwitz made by several gay men from West Germany, one participant expressed a mixture of indignation and guilt: “I thought, I come here as a member of the victimized group from that period. But I am also German. I also belong to those people who were the former perpetrators. How should I handle this schizophrenia?”<sup>115</sup> In 1992 another German revealed a different but related tension between his national and sexual identities after watching an American production of a play about gay concentration camp inmates. During the postperformance discussion, he bristled at American audience members’ generalizations about the German national character and what he saw as their arrogant refusal to examine their country’s own troubled past. He commented, “I was proud as a German to sit in on this discussion. Would the Americans deal with the problem of the Ku-Klux-Klan in exactly the same way as they command us Germans in our dealings with the Nazis?”<sup>116</sup> In this particular situation, the man clearly, and resentfully, identified first as a German, whose Nazi legacy the Americans apparently painted with a broad brush, rather than as a gay man, with whose victimized legacy the Americans seemed to sympathize.

Gay journals in West Germany began expressing this double identity as early as 1975, when *H.A.W.-Info* cautioned against a one-sided portrayal of homosexuals as victims, arguing that some had certainly supported the National Socialists.<sup>117</sup> By calling for a balanced interpretation of the gay experience under National Socialism, the magazine raised the issue of how gays and lesbians living in contemporary Germany should reconcile two potentially conflicting memories. *Siegessäule* raised it again in 1999, when it declared: “The view of gays and lesbians as victims is also too one-sided. Their history in the ranks of the perpetrators has not yet been fully examined.”<sup>118</sup> Manfred Herzer, for one, seemed to have resolved this conflict for himself when, in 1985, he argued that gays had a responsibility to accept the burden of their German identity first and foremost: “In silence one sidesteps the obvious fact that only an extremely small minority of gays were among the victims of the Nazi regime, held imprisoned in the concentration camps and marked with the pink triangle. Rather, the large majority, due to their extremely effective disguise, among other things, belonged to the willing subjects and beneficiaries of the Nazi state just like other German men and

<sup>115</sup>Quoted in Lutz van Dick and Christoph Kranich, “Zeugnisse des Schreckens: Schwule besuchen die KZ-Gedenkstätte in Auschwitz,” *Magnus*, no. 1 (October 1989): 50.

<sup>116</sup>Holger, “Amerikanische Kultur einmal anders: Homosexuellenverfolgung bei den Nazis,” *Rosige Zeiten: Magazin aus Oldenburg für Lesben und Schwule*, no. 23 (December–January 1992–93): 23.

<sup>117</sup>Ina and Funny, 5–6.

<sup>118</sup>*Siegessäule* (January 1999): 15.

women.”<sup>119</sup> Instead of commemorating the fortieth anniversary of the end of the Nazi regime by laying wreaths at the memorials to victims, Herzer proposed that the gay community should examine more fully its own history of collusion during the Nazi period.

Other historians have also criticized certain omissions and exaggerations in the ways in which gays and lesbians have remembered the Nazi persecution. Over the past three decades, the gay community, especially in the United States, has reported widely varying estimates of the number of homosexuals killed by the Nazis.<sup>120</sup> With regard to overestimates, the historian Klaus Müller has asked, “Who do we remember? Up to 1 million dead gays and lesbians as claimed by some gay groups and researchers? . . . Although big numbers create big emotions, here they only document a disturbing attitude in our community.”<sup>121</sup> The most recent research estimates that no more than 10,000 homosexuals died as a result of Nazi persecution.<sup>122</sup>

The gay press has also perpetuated the notion that homosexual inmates faced the worst treatment of any of the persecuted groups, a trope that originated with Heinz Heger’s memoir and gained broader currency with the production of *Bent*.<sup>123</sup> In 1975, for example, Alfred Heinlein wrote in *Emanzipation* that the pink triangle signified “that its wearer belonged to the lowest stratum in the camp hierarchy.”<sup>124</sup> In 1993 the gay journal *Bay*

<sup>119</sup>Manfred Herzer, “Das dritte Geschlecht und das Dritte Reich,” *Siegessäule* (May 1985): 31.

<sup>120</sup>In 1975, for example, an article in *Gay Sunshine* estimated that the Nazis killed 430,000 gays and lesbians in the death camps. See W. I. Scobie, “Death Camps: Remembering the Victims,” *Gay Sunshine*, no. 25 (summer 1975): 28. In 1985, the *Advocate* estimated the number of gays that the Nazis killed at 250,000 (June 11, 1985, 25). Robert Reinhart’s novelized account of the Holocaust, *Walk the Night*, stated that “tens of thousands of gays” died in the concentration camps (*Walk the Night: A Novel of Gays in the Holocaust* [Boston, 1994], 6). Some of the most egregious exaggerations have come from the *Wisconsin Light*, a Milwaukee-based gay newspaper. In a 1995 article it claimed that the Nazis exterminated between 150,000 and 3 million homosexuals by the end of the war. “Fiftieth Anniversary of the Liberation of the Nazi Camps Is Time to Recall the Horrors,” *Wisconsin Light*, March 16–29, 1995, 16.

<sup>121</sup>Klaus Müller, “The Holocaust Does Not Equal AIDS,” *Advocate*, May 4, 1993, 5.

<sup>122</sup>In 1977 Rüdiger Lautmann produced the first solid research on the number of homosexuals killed during the Nazi persecution, which he estimated at between 5,000 and 15,000 (“Der rosa Winkel in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern,” in *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität* [Frankfurt am Main, 1977], 333). Richard Plant made these figures available to an English-speaking audience in 1986 (185). Subsequent research has begun to revise these numbers slightly downward. Rainer Hoffschildt, for example, has recently estimated that perhaps 7,000 homosexuals died in the Nazi concentration camps (“Projekt zur namentlichen Erfassung verfolgter Homosexueller im Naziregime [Entwurf],” in *Initiative Schwulendenkmal*, 107).

<sup>123</sup>Dieter Schiefelbein points out that Heger had very little information about the persecution of homosexuals to assist him in writing his book and so utilized what he knew of the persecution of Jews as a model (“. . . so wie die Juden . . .”: Versuch ein Mißverständnis zu verstehen,” in “Auftakt,” 35–73).

<sup>124</sup>Alfred Heinlein, “Massenmord an Homos bis heute unaufgeklärt,” *Emanzipation* (March 1975): 2.

*Area Reporter* also claimed, "Gays and lesbians were among the first to be exterminated and had the least chance of survival."<sup>125</sup> By propagating this idea, writers and activists have, at the very least, fueled a crass game of competitive victimhood. More significantly, they have blurred the fact that the Nazis singled out Socialists and Communists as their first targets upon seizing power and that the Nazis' relentless persecution of Jews and Roma and Sinti meant that these latter groups had the least chance of survival.

The gay press has also exaggerated the extent to which the Nazis persecuted lesbians, an exaggeration that stems from the dearth of research on the subject. In the 1970s most activists and writers simply subsumed lesbians within the pink triangle memory of gay men. Some lesbians began to claim a separate memory in the 1980s, but it was one in which the persecution of lesbians paralleled that of homosexual men in both form and intensity. However, in the last decade the pioneering research of Claudia Schoppmann has called into question this memory: she has concluded "that there was no systematic prosecution of lesbian women comparable to that of male homosexuals."<sup>126</sup> The social scientist Christa Schikorra has corroborated this finding. After examining the files of two thousand female black triangle prisoners from the Ravensbrück concentration camp, she found only four that mentioned lesbianism, and then only as a secondary notation.<sup>127</sup> Lesbians certainly faced hardships under the Nazi regime, including economic discrimination, ideological pressure to marry and have children, and the destruction of their institutions and social networks, but they did not experience the direct and systematic persecution implied by the memory of the black triangle.

Historians, however, do not sit as the final arbiters of collective memory. Collective memory has influenced historical debates just as much as the debates have influenced memory. One of the most contentious debates has centered on the comparability of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals to that of Jews. In a 1991 essay, Hans-Georg Stümke criticized one study for downplaying the intensity of Nazi policy toward homosexuals. Stümke, who insisted on the need to view this policy through the lens of Nazism's obsession with racial cleansing, argued that the Nazis viewed homosexuality as a disease, as much a threat to "Aryan racial hygiene" as Jewishness

<sup>125</sup>Jeff Fast, "Holocaust Museum Opens in Washington," *Bay Area Reporter*, April 29, 1993, 21.

<sup>126</sup>Claudia Schoppmann, "The Position of Lesbian Women in the Nazi Period," in *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany, 1933-45*, ed. Günter Grau, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, 1995), 15.

<sup>127</sup>According to Christa Schikorra's research, 25 percent of those prisoners who wore the black triangle were prostitutes or heterosexual women who changed partners often and thus, in the eyes of the regime, spread venereal disease. Among the others were homeless, unemployed, beggars, Africans, Roma and Sinti, immigrants, women who married non-Aryans, and those who didn't fulfill service duties ("Statt nach Hause kam ich ins Lager": Die Verfolgung 'asozialer' Frauen während des Nationalsozialismus," paper presented at Galerie Olga Benario, Berlin, April 19, 1998).

and for which they also sought a “final solution.”<sup>128</sup> Rüdiger Lautmann, on the other hand, has argued that the Nazis’ persecution of homosexuals is more comparable to that of political and religious dissidents—“those groups whom the Nazis deemed inimical but not racially undesirable.”<sup>129</sup> Günter Grau has also emphasized the qualitative differences between the persecution of homosexuals and that of Jews. He argues that the Nazis sought not the physical elimination of all homosexuals but, rather, the elimination of homosexuality through a variety of policies, including brutally hard labor, castration, dangerous and experimental hormone treatments, and “reeducation.”<sup>130</sup>

This debate has both shaped and reflected a larger tension in the gay community over what to remember and how to remember it. As the 1993 debate in the pages of *10 Percent* showed, gay men and women in the United States continued to identify with the pink triangle and the memory of persecution that it signified, an attachment also felt by many German gays. During a 1996 debate over the design of the pending memorial in Berlin to homosexual victims, one man defended proposals to incorporate the pink triangle by asking, “Isn’t the pink triangle the proudest symbol that homosexuals can put forward?”<sup>131</sup> To those invested in the memory of persecution, the pink triangle has served multiple functions: it has united a diverse population of gay men and women, mobilized political action, and provided an interpretive framework for contemporary experiences.

The pink triangle has also served to project the memory outward as well as inward, to nongays as well as gays. Its display has prompted questions from those outside the community, which could have the positive effect of eliciting support and protection from the larger society. Law professor Kenji Yoshino has noted the relevance of Nazi persecution to contemporary legal battles on behalf of gay rights in the United States: “One of the things you consider in equal protection cases is whether there is a history of discrimination. How far can you get into the history of discrimination against gays without encountering the pink triangle, the absolute symbol of that discrimination?”<sup>132</sup> In Germany this question has played a central role in ongoing legal efforts to secure official recognition

<sup>128</sup>Hans-Georg Stümke, “‘Endlösung’ oder ‘Umerziehung,’” review of *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz* by Burkhard Jellonnek, *Die Zeit*, March 29, 1991, 42.

<sup>129</sup>Rüdiger Lautmann, “Gay Prisoners in Concentration Camps as Compared with Jehovah’s Witnesses and Political Prisoners,” in *A Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the Nazis*, ed. Michael Berenbaum (New York, 1990), 201.

<sup>130</sup>Günter Grau, “Persecution, ‘Re-education’ or ‘Eradication’ of Male Homosexuals between 1933 and 1945: Consequences of the Eugenic Concept of Assured Reproduction,” in Grau, ed., 1–7.

<sup>131</sup>Hans Scherer, “Rosa Winkel: Eine Berliner Diskussion über das Homosexuellen-Mahnmal,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, December 12, 1996, reprinted in Initiative Schwulendenkmal, 123.

<sup>132</sup>Kenji Yoshino, quoted in Kristin Eliasberg, “Making a Case for the Right to Be Different,” *New York Times*, June 16, 2001, A17.

from the federal government of pink triangle prisoners as victims of unjust Nazi persecution. This decades-old quest for the legal rehabilitation and compensation of prosecuted homosexuals unfortunately has yet to achieve its goal.

The pink triangle, though, has also had the negative effect of burdening its wearer with a sense of perpetual victimhood. The German activist Werner Hinzpeter recently published a book-length criticism of what he perceived as a fixation on oppression among German gay organizations. "Ultimately," he wrote, "one lives a good life in the role of the victim, in which blame for personal dissatisfaction can simply be shifted to the allegedly terrible society."<sup>133</sup> A younger generation of gay men and women has increasingly begun to question this focus on victimization, a reflection, perhaps, of the emergence of queer identity in the 1990s and a rejection of the historical consciousness associated with an earlier generation. Professor Henry Abelow observed the shift in the 1990s: "What I think they [his students] suspect is that we older historians need the trope of marginalization, project it onto everything, use it obsessively; and that this trope is somehow weak, even when it produces a story of struggle."<sup>134</sup> Instead, Abelow's students favored a history that focused on subversion and resistance rather than victimization. They might very well agree with Sasha, the gay hairdresser in Mel Brooks's 1983 film, *To Be or Not to Be*, who says of the pink triangle, "I hate it. It clashes with everything."

The 1991 book on gay life in Cologne under the Nazi regime, "*Verführte*" *Männer*, has complicated our understanding of the experience of homosexuals in Nazi Germany by including memories of cruising, survival, and the resilience of an underground scene in addition to the horrifying accounts of arrest, imprisonment, torture, and killing. While the bulk of the book centers on the victimization of homosexuals, the concluding testimonials of four men who lived during that period present a more differentiated picture. The men speak of the fear, the police raids, and the disappearance of friends, but they emphasize the ongoing quest for sexual contact, the formation and dissolution of relationships, and the resistance and acquiescence to the new regime that enabled them to make it through alive. In the introduction to these testimonials, the editors wrote, "Everyone had justifiable fear. Nonetheless, no one went without his gay life."<sup>135</sup>

In 2000 the former concentration camp at Sachsenhausen and the Gay Museum in Berlin jointly organized the largest exhibition to date on the Nazi persecution of homosexuals. The final chapter in one of the exhibit's

<sup>133</sup>Werner Hinzpeter, *Schöne schwule Welt: Der Schlußverkauf einer Bewegung* (Berlin, 1997), 18.

<sup>134</sup>Henry Abelow, "The Queering of Lesbian/Gay History," *Radical History Review*, no. 62 (spring 1995): 49.

<sup>135</sup>Nina Oxenius et al., "Lebensbilder: Zeitzeugen berichten," in "*Verführte*" *Männer: Das Leben der Kölner Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich*, ed. Cornelia Limpricht, Jürgen Müller, and Nina Oxenius (Cologne, 1991), 129.

two accompanying books examines the persistence of a homosexual subculture in Berlin throughout the Nazi years and includes lists of bars, swimming pools, and public parks where men met one another. The editors introduced this section with a statement almost identical to that in the Cologne book: “And nonetheless: despite all of the persecution and punishment, gay life in Berlin was possible. There were meeting places to form friendships and begin affairs, places for flirting, tenderness, and sex.”<sup>136</sup> Those who lived through the Nazi period have often recalled moments of surprising freedom. One woman, during a 1985 public forum on lesbians under National Socialism, happily remembered that she had once again been able to wear pants during the war, since the scarcity of cloth eased National Socialist pressure to conform to prescribed gender roles. Ilse Kokula, who moderated the forum, also noted the greater autonomy that women achieved during the war years, which lent the home front the atmosphere of a “clandestine matriarchy.”<sup>137</sup>

These tentative gestures toward a history of homosexual life in Germany between 1933 and 1945, along with resistance from a younger generation to a memory simply of victimization, call into question the future role of collective memory for gays and lesbians.<sup>138</sup> The initiators of the Berlin memorial have asked, “Does the fourth generation of gay men since the concentration camps need this memory in order to work through the suppression of their own, also painful, history of oppression—in order to recognize that not everything is sweetness and light?”<sup>139</sup> They wonder whether the memorial might serve to maintain the victim identity of a gay community that, if one believes Hinzpeter, already has it pretty good.

These discussions about the function of the Berlin memorial show that the collective memory of Nazi persecution must be directed not only inward but also outward to the larger society. Those advocating the memorial see its mission as partly, if not primarily, that of reminding nongays, especially the politicians in the nearby parliament, of the persecution of homosexuals. In a similar initiative in the United States, the Pink Triangle

<sup>136</sup>“Schicksale,” in *Wegen der zu erwartenden hohen Strafe . . . Homosexuellenverfolgung in Berlin 1933–1945*, ed. Andreas Pretzel and Gabriele Roßbach (Berlin, 2000), 186. For the chapter on the persistence of a gay scene in Berlin during the Nazi period, see Carola Gerlach, “Außerdem habe ich dort mit meinem Freund getanzt,” 305–32.

<sup>137</sup>Ilse Kokula, “Lesbische Frauen in der NS-Zeit,” report on a public forum held in Berlin on October 31, 1985, *UkZ* (March 1986): 6–8.

<sup>138</sup>The exploration of the everyday experiences of homosexual men and women in the Nazi period poses special challenges since the sources consist primarily of either criminal records, which provide discussions of gay life only as they relate to the proceedings at hand, or oral testimonies, which many older men and women are reluctant to give. Regarding the use of criminal records, see Gerlach, 310.

<sup>139</sup>Initiative HomoMonument, 18.

Coalition recently received a grant of over \$500,000 from the federal government to promote awareness and remembrance of the Nazi persecution of homosexuals in both the gay community and the general public.<sup>140</sup>

The answer to the question of whether the gay community still needs a memory of Nazi persecution is clear: it does. However, gays and lesbians must temper the memory of persecution with an awareness of the resistance, subversion, survival, and even complicity of homosexual men and women under National Socialism. This suggests, perhaps, the need for a bifurcated memory, with one strand oriented toward the gay community that challenges the tropes and exaggerations that have circulated during the past thirty years, and another strand oriented toward nongays that reminds the public of the historical consequences of intolerance toward sexual minorities.

The documentary film *Paragraph 175*, which premiered in January 2000, suggests how such a bifurcated memory might coexist within the same project. To the gay community, the film offered a necessary corrective to some of the exaggerations about the Nazis' persecution of homosexuals, and especially to the spurious comparisons to the persecution of Jews. As the codirector Jeffrey Friedman stated in explaining his motives for making the film, "There was no gay Holocaust. There was persecution of gay people. But there was no systematic annihilation."<sup>141</sup> To those outside the gay community, however, the film's relatively broad distribution communicated the important fact that the Nazis harassed, incarcerated, and killed thousands of homosexuals; that they destroyed the most developed homosexual emancipation movement the world had yet seen; and that discrimination against gay men and women continues to this day.

<sup>140</sup>See Will O'Bryan, "U.S. Funds Gay Holocaust Survivor Projects," *Washington Blade*, June 8, 2001, 22.

<sup>141</sup>Jeffrey Friedman, "When Life Was No 'Cabaret,'" interview by Michael Sragow, *Salon*, September 7, 2000, <www.salon.com>. The film was codirected by Rob Epstein.