

Let us find some moments in these next few days together to dream of a world propelled by that same heady sense of freedom, a world running in the wind, gathering momentum and moving gracefully and purposefully forward. And let us engage in serious discussions, full of the recognition that we have something particularly unique to add to the human rights debate.

Then, let us go back to our homes, our universities, our fieldwork, and our laboratories with a renewed spirit and a determination to carry on the traditions of those

noble activist anthropologists who not only studied the human condition but *did their part to improve it*.

My sister and brother anthropologists: In the spirit of Martin Luther King, Jr., Atlanta's great champion of human rights for all, let us continue the struggle for a world that is filled with peace *and* justice.

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## Strange Craft, Strange History, Strange Folks: Cultural Amnesia and the Case for Lesbian and Gay Studies

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IN *BENITO CERENO*, Herman Melville tells the story of a Yankee ship captain named Amasa Delano who encounters a stranded Spanish vessel off the coast of Chile. Everything about the vessel and its occupants strikes Delano as odd. In fact, a slave revolt has occurred aboard the ship. Most of the whites have been slain, and the leader of the revolt, a diminutive African named Babo, is holding a knife to the back of the ship's captain, Benito Cereno, while posing as his personal servant.

But Delano, a kind of American everyman, is completely oblivious to this reversal of roles, admitting to himself only that "this is a strange craft; a strange history, too, and strange folks on board. But—nothing more" (Melville 1987:78). He is, as Melville describes him, an "honest seaman," a man of "singular guilelessness," a "charitable man," a man whose good nature is like a mild sun, and above all whose "conscience is clean" (1987:46–117 *passim*). When the possibility of a plot involving the Africans crosses his mind, he quickly dismisses it as "an incredible inference"—they couldn't possibly be part of a conspiracy, he tells himself, "they were too stupid" (1987:75). In other words, this sunny American's irrational stereotypes about race, his refusal to see evil in slavery, and his inability to imagine slaves would even *want* to change their condition blinds him to the reality on board the *San Dominick*—and he nearly pays with his life as a result. Melville brilliantly exposes how racism envelops the racist in a fantasy world, inuring him to the violence and hatred underlying his relations with the Others he defines as inferior.

I remembered *Benito Cereno* as I was thinking about the stories I wanted to tell here, because these too are stories of not seeing and forgetting. In these stories, it is

homosexuality and the prejudice against it that are not seen, while the place of Amasa Delano is taken by the modern academy and the disciplines of history and anthropology. The two cases I want to relate here underscore, I believe, why universities and colleges need to incorporate both the content and the theory of lesbian and gay studies.

### Homoabstentia

I came across both of the texts I'm going to describe in the course of my research on the North American *berdache*, or two-spirit, tradition, a third-gender role once present in most Native American societies.<sup>1</sup> When I became interested in these traditions, I decided to focus on the Zuni Indians of New Mexico because relatively more information about their two-spirit role had been recorded. Just as intriguing to me, Zuni myths included accounts of the origin of the third-gender role and a supernatural two-spirit called Ko'lhamana. This offered the possibility of using psychological and literary theory to explore otherwise inaccessible dimensions of this role.

I soon discovered that one of the anthropologists who had preceded me in the study of Zuni myths was Claude Lévi-Strauss. Indeed, he had actually developed structural analysis using the same Zuni texts I was studying. The results were reported in his famous article "The Structural Study of Myth," published in English in 1955.

What surprised me most as I read this essay was the almost complete absence of reference to the role of the two-spirit deity. In fact, Ko'lhamana appears in two key episodes of the Zuni origin narrative, the outcomes of which establish the cultural distinctions of male and female, and agriculture and hunting—elementary categories in Zuni thought and culture. One of these episodes was commemorated in a solemn and elaborate ceremonial in which Ko'lhamana was portrayed by an actual

two-spirit. Of all this, Lévi-Strauss says nothing. Ko'hamana is referred to by a single entry—the phrase “bisexual being,” which appears in a diagram that lists the various mediating figures in the Zuni myth (Lévi-Strauss 1965[1955]:102). Nowhere does Lévi-Strauss explain this entry, even though he discusses the other figures in the diagram at length. Using the same myths, I wrote an entire chapter on the mythical and ceremonial role of Ko'hamana in *The Zuni Man-Woman*.

Fifteen years earlier, Alfred Kroeber had called for a synthesis of data concerning berdaches in North American societies (1940). Had Lévi-Strauss paid more attention to Ko'hamana, he might have launched such an investigation in 1955 (the year I was born). He would have discovered that the berdache role was one of the most widespread mediating institutions in North America. Instead, three decades would pass before such a synthesis was finally produced. To understand Lévi-Strauss's oversight, we need to begin with his theory as presented in his essay.

“Mythical thought,” he argues, “always works from the awareness of oppositions towards their progressive mediation.” “Some myths,” like the Zunis', “seem to devote themselves to the task of exhausting all the possible solutions to the problem of bridging the gap between two and one” (Lévi-Strauss 1965[1955]:99, 102). He goes on to explain that a given “mediating device” is constantly being replaced by another in a series of permutations, which occur, as far as one can tell from Lévi-Strauss's account, strictly on an intellectual level. What disappears in this infinite regression is what I would call “the materiality of the third”—the actual social roles, identities, and lifestyles related to these mediating devices, especially those of the two-spirit tradition.

I am not the first to point out the essentialism of the binary in structuralist theory. For Lévi-Strauss, binaries and dialectics are the motor that drives cultural production—and foremost of these binaries is that of male and female. In such a system, however, the androgyne is never really third, but merely an unstable, temporary admixture of male and female that cannot provide the ontological basis for a distinct identity. And yet this is exactly what the two-spirit role represents—an identity distinct from male and female—a combination of the two *plus* everything excluded by them. But Lévi-Strauss remains grounded in a dualism unable to question its own assumptions—that binaries are natural—and that nature (and the culture grounded in the binaries it gives) can never include such unnatural, nonbinary phenomena as homosexual desire and third-gender identity.

This is revealed in a passage of his memoir, *Tristes Tropiques*. As he relates his arrival at the Brazilian village of Porto Esperança, Lévi-Strauss suddenly interjects a comparison—the gay resort Fire Island in New York. Fire Island, he muses, rivals the jungle outpost “as the oddest site to be found anywhere on the globe.” “It amuses me to

place the two side by side,” he continues. “Geographically and humanly speaking an identical absurdity finds outlet in them: comic in the one case, sinister in the other.” The comic is, presumably, Fire Island, whose geographic and natural features Lévi-Strauss finds preposterous—a Venice “front-to-back.” “The picture is completed by the fact that *Cherry Grove is mainly inhabited by homosexual couples*—doubtless drawn to the area by its wholesale inversion of the normal conditions of life” (Lévi-Strauss 1971[1955]:143). Clearly, for Lévi-Strauss homosexuality remains in a realm beyond nature and binary thought—as such, it cannot be the basis of cultural production—it is adialectical, paradoxical, or as Judith Butler might put it, phantasmagoric.

And what was missed at this juncture in the history of anthropological thought? Had Lévi-Strauss been able to acknowledge the materiality of the third, he might have recognized that his theory of cultural mediation predicts the occurrence of gender-mediating roles—not only in the Americas but worldwide. Only in the past few years have scholars come forward willing to do this research, and as a result, we now know that alternative gender roles exist or existed in Oceania and many parts of Asia, from Siberia to the Southeast, and in the broad historical region called by the Greeks the Oikoumene, the Old World from the Mediterranean to South Asia. Indeed, alternative-gender statuses are well documented in the oldest records of human civilization, the cuneiform tablets of Sumer.<sup>2</sup>

## Homoamnesia

The second example I wish to cite comes from the field of history. Here I feel confident saying there is no personal bias at play, because the scholar I will refer to, Hayden White, has gone out of his way to help me and other gay students in the History of Consciousness program at Santa Cruz. Long before this, however, in 1976, White published an intriguing essay in the two-volume collection edited by Fredi Chiappelli, *First Images of America*, a major retrospective on the European discovery of the Americas. White's essay, “The Noble Savage Theme as Fetish,” foreshadowed much of the work in cultural studies that followed in the 1980s.

Citing Marx on the commodity as fetish and employing Freudian notions of sublimation and the return of the repressed, White reads back from European representations of natives as “noble” to the contents of the European imaginary—revealing the anxieties of a society in which the concepts of nobility and humanity are in question. White dwells on a key moment in European intellectual history—the debates of 1550 at Valladolid between Bartolomeo de Las Casas and Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda over the question of “just conquest”—focusing on the particular evidence cited by Sepúlveda to justify his

claim that the Indians were subhuman. First, and most important, White concludes, were the sins of cannibalism and incest (1976:126).

When I read this essay recently in the course of completing an extensive survey of the European contact literature concerning sexual and gender diversity in the Americas, it initially struck me as a fair summary of the issues debated at Valladolid. But as I delved more deeply into the narratives in which Europeans described natives and their life, I found that cannibalism and incest were not the foremost crimes attributed to them. That honor belonged to the charge of sodomy (see also Goldberg 1993). In the Spanish language alone, I have identified some 20 works published between 1500 and 1700 that refer to gender variance and/or homosexuality in the New World, including texts by the most influential Spanish authors of the times.<sup>3</sup>

White's failure to comment on the prominence of sodomy in European discourse on the New World is no less glaring than Lévi-Strauss's silence on the two-spirit in Zuni mythology. It would take openly gay scholars like John Boswell, Jeffrey Weeks, John Winkler, and others to finally interject the subject of homosexuality into the field of history (and Gil Herdt, Esther Newton, Clark Taylor, and others to do so in anthropology).

The moral of these two cases—or at least one moral—is that homophobia, like Amasa Delano's racism, can blinker the best thinkers and scholars at their most brilliant moments. Nothing within the social and intellectual worlds of Lévi-Strauss or White gave them reason to think twice about passing over evidence concerning homosexuality. The corrective to cultural amnesia does not come from within, as Melville's story shows, but from without, by the inclusion of the voices of the Other, which, otherwise, are prone to arrive unannounced in a violent return of the repressed.

And why were Europeans obsessed with sodomy in the New World? We need look no further than the opening pages of Bernal Díaz's chronicle of the conquest of Mexico, in which he described the results of a preliminary expedition to the Mexican mainland in 1517. What he and his compatriots reported to their superiors proved to be the essential prerequisites of Spanish conquest. In the temples of the heathens, he wrote, the Spaniards found idols depicting sodomitical acts . . . and gold (Díaz 1982[1632]:8). Sodomy and gold—the two were fatefully linked in the Spanish colonial enterprise. One motivated it, the other justified it.

Acting on reports such as these, King Charles condemned the entire tribe of Carib Indians to slavery in 1525 for being sodomites (Guerra 1971:52). For Sepúlveda, sodomy constituted definitive evidence of Indian irrationality—banishing “nefarious intercourse” was second of his four justifications for conquest (1941[1892]:348–349). No wonder Las Casas so vehemently and bitterly denied

the charges (1965[1542]:691; see also Guerra 1971:67–68). They had to be refuted to win recognition of the natives' basic humanity and their right to protection from conquest and enslavement.

And here we come upon what I believe to be part of the deep structure of the Western political tradition. In this debate, membership in the human race and the basic rights that follow from that status are made to hinge upon a certain mode of sexuality, a mode considered so essential to the concept of humanity that any deviation from it constitutes definitive proof of irrationality and justifies denial of both rights and liberty. Las Casas never questioned this view of correct sexuality; he merely denied that the sexuality of the natives fell outside it.

In short, in the European imaginary, conquest was thoroughly sexualized. If, as White argues, charges of incest and cannibalism were sublimated fantasies of unrestricted consumption, oral and genital, then the even more common allegations of sodomy were sublimated anal fantasies whose objects were the male inhabitants of the New World. Of course, Christian morality, while flirting with cannibalism in its rites and occasionally fudging its tenets on incest, was uncompromising when it came to homosexuality. Libidinal impulses of this sort had to be repressed at all costs; they were projected instead onto the natives themselves.

The figures of the “wild man” and the “noble savage” that emerged, as White points out, constitute two poles in the European representation of Native Americans. Both were variations of the idea of the “natural man,” a figure, I would argue, that remains central to the construction of Western masculinity to this day. That is, within the modern, civilized man, coiled like a snake, lies a natural man, a savage, an id within a superego. Simply put, the white man needs a red man *and* a black man inside him to be complete—the former to represent his soul, the latter to embody his instinct. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the American ritual of football, in which white men idolize the athletic skill of black men while dressed up as the Native American totems of their teams.

The imagery with which the white man imagines these parts of his personality uniting, civilized and savage, is invariably homoerotic, as Leslie Fiedler pointed out 25 years ago in his provocative study, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968). As Fiedler argues, the theme of the man who abandons civilization and family life to find a true red brother on the untamed frontier is one of the basic myths of American literature, and he cites works by Irving, Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, Keats, and others.

Melville's Delano is a good example of a white man who desires union with a dark-skinned Other. “Like most men of a good, blithe heart Captain Delano took to negroes, not philanthropically, but genially, just as other men to Newfoundland dogs” (Melville 1987:84). At the

sight of Babo tenderly shaving his master—or so it seems to the guileless Delano—“all his old weakness for negroes” returns (1987:84). Watching master and slave, he is struck by “the beauty of that relationship which could present such a spectacle of fidelity on the one hand and confidence on the other,” and he offers to purchase Babo for himself (1987:57, 70). Is this, perhaps, the secret meaning of the name Melville gave Delano’s ship—*Bachelor’s Delight*?

This is the other side of the European obsession with sodomy—the ineluctable appeal of the Other and the fantasy of a homosocial Arcadia, a liminal space at the edge of Western civilization and history where masculine wholeness, the civilized superego and savage id, can be attained. This is what Hayden White missed in 1976, the role of sodomy in the conquest of the New World—what we might call the erotics of racism—and the deep historical and psychic connections between racism and homophobia.

Of course, there is nothing new about men charging other men with the practice of sexual pleasures they deny to themselves. The Orientals, the citizens of Sodom, the Gauls, the pagans, and many others have all been the object of such charges. This rhetoric of sodomy also has a history as an internal policing mechanism as well—used by Greek against Greek and Roman against Roman. In Athens, it was not the generic charge of homosexuality that got one into trouble, since relations between youths and adult men were institutionalized. As the well-known case of Timarchos illustrates, however, a citizen jeopardized his political rights if he behaved like a male prostitute or continued to play a receptive sexual role beyond the years of his youth (Aeschines, *Against Timarchos*).

As Jack Winkler put it, borrowing a term from Aristophanes, Greek men practiced anus-surveillance (1990:54; the term, *πρωκτόστηρέω*, appears in *The Knights*, li. 878). They measured each other’s masculinity according to a strict phallic standard that limited adult male sexual response to penetrating others, while instilling a horror of being penetrated oneself. Thus patriarchal sexuality is inherently nonreciprocal; how can a man be concerned with the sexual pleasure of his partner (of whatever gender) when imagining that pleasure, the pleasure of being penetrated, is utterly forbidden to him? This goes to the core of masculine identity—fear of penetration is the necessary complement of castration anxiety.

Through the Romans and the Catholic church, anus-surveillance became part of the political and cultural heritage of the West. When Europeans entered the New World it was central to the cant of conquest that arose in their wake. Indeed, I would argue that anus-surveillance—as the necessary counterpart of homophobia—is intrinsic to the processes of democracy (and, if so, its eradication will not be easy even as it becomes increasingly necessary).

Norman O. Brown hinted at this some years ago in his retelling of Freud’s origin myths of the primordial human family. “Fraternity,” he wrote in *Love’s Body*, “comes into being after the sons are expelled from the family; when they form their own club, in the wilderness, away from home, away from women. The brotherhood is a substitute family, a substitute woman—alma mater” (Brown 1966:32). At the same time, he adds, “Brotherhood is always a quarrel over the paternal inheritance. . . . Justice is the solution and the perpetuation of the quarrel; as Heraclitus said, justice is the strife. Equals are rivals; and the dear love of comrades is made out of mutual jealousy and hate” (1966:17). The sublimation of internal antagonism is crucial for coordinated action among the brothers, but in the process of sublimation aggression is transformed. Brown quoted Freud: “The rivals of the earlier period became the first homosexual love objects.”

The alternation of aggression and rivalry with love and dependence creates an intolerable emotional and political state that is neatly resolved by the institution of anus-surveillance, which ensures that the aggressive-erotic impulses of brother-citizens do not take other brother-citizens as their object. Control from the center (or above) is always patriarchal. Anus-surveillance, on the other hand, is ideally suited to the fraternity. If each brother-citizen shares equal responsibility for policing his fellow, strict social control can be maintained while preserving the principle of equality. However, no matter how high the ideal of equality within the fraternity, the mechanism of producing it creates noncitizens and barbarians who are alternately, sometimes simultaneously, objects of hatred and desire. The secret of democracy is that it must always have an outside.

It should not be surprising, therefore, to find the same suppositions underlying Aeschines’ prosecution of Timarchos expressed by the character of Roy Cohn, the McCarthyite lawyer and gay antihero of Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*:

Homosexuals are not men who sleep with other men. Homosexuals are men who in fifteen years of trying cannot get a pissant antidiscrimination bill through City Council. Homosexuals are men who know nobody and who nobody knows. Who have zero clout. Does this sound like me? . . . Roy Cohn is not a homosexual. Roy Cohn is a heterosexual man . . . who fucks around with guys (1992:45–46).

This is essentially the position Aeschines adopts when, after relentlessly slandering Timarchos’ sexual proclivities, he suddenly admits that he himself is an avid *ἔραστής*, a lover of young men. Unlike Timarchos, however, he has never “furnished” pleasures to other men for money—presumably he has only “taken” them (pp. 135–137). The integrity of the phallic male body has been preserved.

Today the rhetoric of sodomy has migrated to the heart of political discourse in America. Almost every commentator's account of the failure of the Clinton presidency begins with the phrase "gays in the military." This is what Newt Gingrich has in mind when he accuses the Clintons of being "the enemies of normal Americans." Anus-surveillance is nullified if men who allow themselves to be penetrated can openly join the ranks of the premiere masculinist fraternity of our society—the military. The theory of anus-surveillance presupposes that such men, no less than women, are not capable of participating in such a fraternity.

Underlying this is a certain construction of the male body as phallus-centered, anal-retentive, closed—the very image Gingrich evokes when he refers to America as a "muscular society." The opposite, a male body that is open to the world, is not acquired only by being sodomized. Consider the popular representations of the body of President Clinton himself. Visual images and jokes constantly focus on his body. Whether eating or jogging or fornicating, he is portrayed as a man of inexhaustible appetites, like a character in Rabelais. Clinton's proclivity for political compromise and his willingness to accept a woman as his equal only reinforce this construction of his body as open and penetrable. One might argue that such a body is the perfect figure of democracy—embracing and inclusive—yet at the same time its lack of discrimination deeply threatens the system of anus-surveillance. Actually, the grotesque body, as Bakhtin (1984) characterized such Rabelaisian figures, is both radically democratic and profoundly antinationalistic—but that is another story.

What the university loses when it fails to encompass lesbian and gay studies is not only knowledge of the presence of homosexuality in history and culture—the kind of evidence Lévi-Strauss overlooked—but analysis of homophobia and the role it has played in constructing the present—evidence of which Hayden White overlooked. These cases underscore how censorship is sometimes omission as well as erasure, how homophobia takes the form of forgetting as well as hating.

What is at stake is not "political correctness," or "celebrating the lesbian and gay lifestyle," or "victim studies," or "white male bashing." What is at stake is and always has been the integrity of the Western tradition of scholarship, whether the studies that historians and anthropologists produce under the auspices of the academy are objective, thorough, accurate, balanced, rigorous, and complete—in a word, scholarly—and whether they can be so as long as subjects like homosexuality, homosexual persons, and homophobia are systematically excluded. The academy today is like Amasa Delano—vaguely aware that its racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual makeup does not reflect the diversity of society but imagining this state of affairs in the most benign terms, blind to the deliberate

acts of omission that have produced it. Having consigned us to the second-class citizenship of its margins, in underfunded departments of ethnic, women's, and now gay and lesbian studies, the academy, like Delano, seems conscious only of its magnanimity toward the multicultural Others massing at its gates.

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## Notes

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1. Roscoe 1987, 1991, 1994, 1995 and Williams 1986.
2. Results of my research on the third-gender priesthoods are forthcoming in *History of Religions*.
3. See Roscoe 1995. Oviedo, for example, in his *Historia general*, asserts that sodomy was universal in the Americas (1959[1535]:1:118–119, 4:377, 5:9). Díaz refers to sodomy no less than nine times in his narrative of the conquest of Mexico (1982[1632]:8, 96, 97, 99, 115, 158, 163, 182, 646–647); López de Gómara mentions sodomy at least ten times (1922[1552]:1:69, 104, 106, 113, 119, 128, 163, 171, 177, 2:218); Cieza de León 12 times (1924[1553]:96, 164, 166, 171, 190, 205–207, 253–254, 294, 324); Herrera 16 times (1991[1601–15]:passim); Garcilasso de la Vega three times (1943[1609]:1:155, 2:29–30, 236); and Torquemada five times (1943[1723]:12, 380, 392–394, 427).

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## Names of Death

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I RARELY LISTEN to AM radio, and then only on long trips after music loses its charm. But the day before I began writing this, driving through northern Florida, tuning in and tuning out talk show hosts and gospel hour preachers as though I'd strayed into a shopping mall of narrow views, I encountered a local broadcast of a live press conference at the Alachua County courthouse. That morning a jury had recommended that a serial killer be sentenced to five death penalties, one for each of the students he murdered. Reporters interviewed the attorneys first: the defense attorney, who had little to say, and the prosecutor, who consumed most of his air time explaining how he had

avoided appellate issues to assure a swift execution. Then questions turned to the families of the victims. Understandably, not all of them were up to answering, and they had elected one from their group—a mother—to read the statement they had written in the moments after hearing the jury's recommendation. Only once, toward the end of her speech, did the mother choke on the names of the victims, names she repeated many, many times: Sonja, Christina, Christa, Manny, and Tracy. Each time she repeated those names, my vision suffered. I shouldn't have kept driving. I have two daughters myself, but it wasn't just that. The names of those four young women and one young man, repeated by family and friends, created a kinship among victims and survivors that entangled the other deaths I had been hearing about that week.