



Teaching LGBTQ History

a project of Our Family Coalition

Anti-LGBTQ+ Activism and the Rise of the New Right

Author(s): Hayley Smith

Subject: History

Topic: Integrated

Grade Level: High school: Grade 11

Overview

This lesson allows students to critically examine the political countermovement that sought to disenfranchise the LGBTQ+ community, beginning with the 1970s efforts to repeal the United States' early anti-discrimination ordinances protecting gay men and lesbians.

Time: 60 minutes

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn how and why a coalition of social conservatives mobilized against a growing movement for queer rights by campaigning against the Equal Rights Amendment, federal interference with public schools, and any/all kinds of gender/sexual nonconformity they deemed harmful to “American family values” (i.e. white, Christian, heterosexual, middle class).
- Students will learn how the LGBTQ+ community mobilized against social, religious, and political backlash while growing increasingly visible and forming alliances with other oppressed groups.

Essential Questions:

1. How did social conservatives respond to calls for sexual and/or gender liberation?
2. What were their explanations for this reaction?
3. How did queer communities respond to this conservative countermovement?
4. What were/are the consequences of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric?

Standards:

HSS 11.8 Students analyze the economic boom and social transformation of post-World War II America.

HSS 11.10 Students analyze the development of civil rights, voting rights, and equal rights.

HSS 11.11 Students analyze the major social problems and domestic policy issues in contemporary American society.

CCSL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 16 P 421 By the mid-1970s, LGBT mobilization led to successes: the American Psychiatric Association stopped diagnosing homosexuality as a mental illness; 17 states had repealed laws criminalizing gay sexual behavior; 36 cities had passed laws banning antigay discrimination; and gay-identified neighborhoods had emerged in major cities

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 16 P 427 Ronald Reagan won the presidency and forged a new Republican Party by uniting fiscal and social conservatives with a landslide victory. Reagan called for a smaller government by decreasing taxes on individuals and businesses -- what his administration termed supply side economics -- and deregulating industries. He supported a stronger government that would outlaw abortion and appealed to social conservatives seeking to promote heterosexual marriage, to oppose ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, to support faith-based cultural advocacy, to champion individual accomplishment, and to oppose many safety-net programs.

HISTORY FRAMEWORK: CH 16 P 431 Consideration should be given to the major social and political challenges of contemporary America. The growth of the LGBT rights movement, for example, led to the pioneering role of gay politicians such as Elaine Noble, who was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974, and Harvey Milk, elected in 1977 to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

Vocabulary:

Conservative: holding to traditional attitudes and values and cautious about change or innovation, typically in relation to politics or religion.

Countermovement: a movement or other action made in opposition to another.

Liberal: open to new behavior or opinions and willing to discard traditional values.

Queer: an umbrella term for sexual and/or gender expressions that are not heterosexual and/or cisgender.

Teacher Background:

Teachers should research mid-20th century movements for LGBTQ+ rights as well as the countermovements that sought to undo any and all of the social and legal progress these groups had made. A good place to start would be to familiarize oneself with people including, but not limited to:

- Elaine Noble
- Harvey Milk
- Anita Bryant

- John Briggs
- Phyllis Schlafly
- Jerry Falwell

Teachers should also familiarize themselves with campaigns and organizations such as, but not limited to:

- The National Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights
- National Gay Task Force
- The Dade County Coalition for the Humanistic Rights of Gays
- The Gay Activists' Alliance
- The Bay Area Coalition Against the Briggs Initiative
- The Family Research Council
- Save Our Children
- Moral Majority
- STOP-ERA

Materials:

- Computer
- Projector
- Whiteboard
- [Primary source packet](#)
- [Slide deck](#)

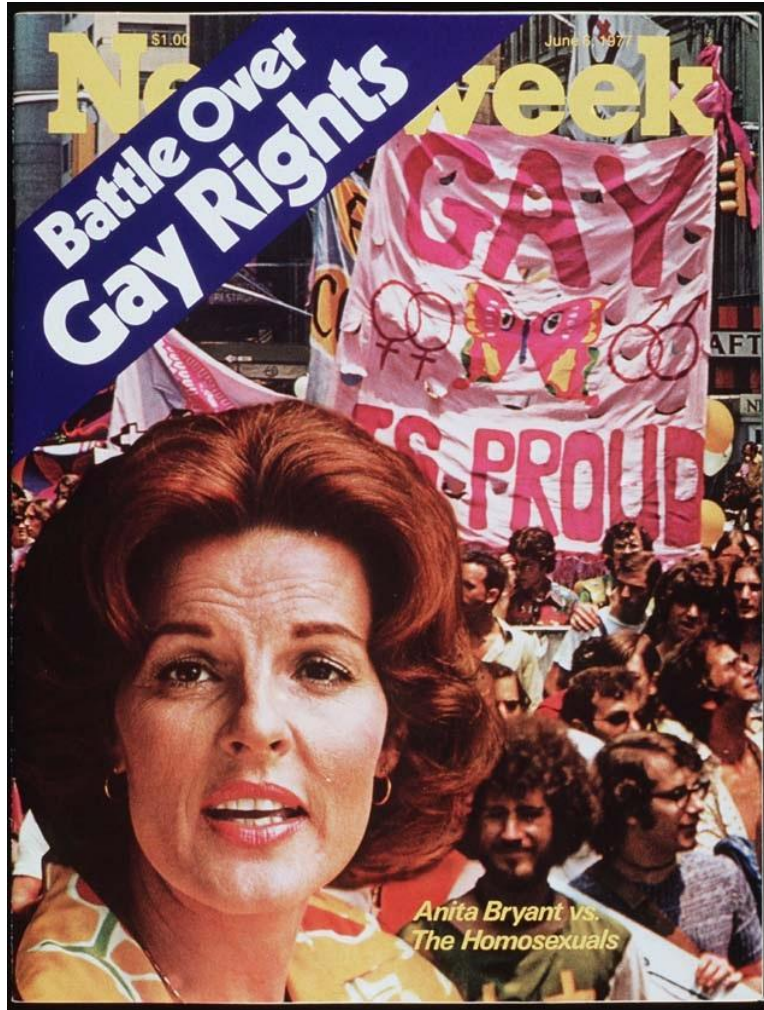
Instruction:

Slideshow (40 minutes total)

- Introduce the topic and let students know that you will be discussing anti-LGBTQ activism and the rise of the New Right in the United States. Use the projector to show the “Anti-LGBTQ Activism and the New Right” slideshow.
- Consider the following outline to structure the presentation.

Introductory activity (5 minutes)

- Project the image below onto the board (included in the slideshow) and invite students to closely study it and spend a few minutes writing down any questions it brings up for them -- no question is too small!
- Invite a few students to share what came up for them, and encourage students to keep the list of questions to the side throughout the lesson.



Newsweek Magazine, “Anita Bryant vs. The Homosexuals”, 6 June 1977.

Historical context (15 minutes)

- Consider some of the bullet points below.
- Introduce the background:
 - Typically speaking, a countermovement does not gain mainstream prominence until the movement it seeks to counteract has seen some level of success. This is certainly the case for American anti-LGBTQ+ campaigns of the 1970s and 1980s.
 - The 1960s were a period of significant social change in the United States, and the movements for social progress saw legal victory in the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1968. By the mid-1970s, the young LGBTQ+ rights movement was more visible than ever before, with queer-identified neighborhoods in major cities and groups using similar tactics to those used by the civil rights and feminist movements to gain legal rights and political representation. Elaine Noble became the first openly queer person to be voted into public office when she was elected

to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1974. Just a few years later, gay activist Harvey Milk was elected to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1977.

- In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association removed “homosexuality” from its list of psychological disorders. By the mid-1970s, 17 states had repealed laws that criminalized queer sexual behavior, and 36 cities had passed laws banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.
- Explore the backlash:
 - While many of the ideals that defined 1960s counterculture continued into 1970s popular culture, there remained many Americans who saw cultural change as a direct threat to their preferred way of life; these social conservatives formed what came to be known as the New Right, a Republican coalition that focused solely on social issues instead of the traditional economic conservatism that the party had previously campaigned on.
 - These stances included, but were not limited to, the opposition to abortion, same-sex marriage, equal rights for women, and racial integration of schools through the act of busing, as well as support for Christian prayer in public schools, traditional gender roles, and respectability of the white middle-class heterosexual nuclear family, which they publically regarded as the cornerstone of American society.
 - The New Right, also referred to as the Religious Right, used their (usually Christian, but occasionally Jewish) faith as justification for opposing civil rights for queer people. They argued that supporting queer rights violated their religious freedom and put their children in danger, arguments that continue to undermine efforts for LGBTQ+ rights.
 - The most influential anti-LGBTQ+ campaign was Save Our Children, led by conservative celebrity Anita Bryant. The former pop singer was outraged upon learning that Miami-Dade County in Florida, where she resided with her family, had passed an anti-discrimination ordinance (in areas of employment, housing, and public accommodations) for gay men and lesbians in 1977.
 - Based on the wildly-false narrative that all queer people were child molesters who sought to “recruit” young people into their “lifestyle,” Bryant centered her campaign around the American parent’s “right” to shield their children from the existence of queer people. In response to the accusation that she was spreading hateful propaganda, Bryant famously replied “I don’t hate the homosexuals! But as a mother, I must protect my children from their evil influence. . . They want to recruit your children and teach them the virtues of becoming a homosexual.”
 - Using Florida’s initiative process, Save Our Children (SOC) gathered enough signatures to put a repeal measure on the 1978 election ballot, which succeeded in overturning the anti-discrimination ordinance in Miami-Dade county. Inspired

by their landslide victory, Bryant decided to take her message beyond her home in Florida and started a national SOC campaign that aimed to repeal similar laws all across the country.

- Inspired by Anita Bryant's success in Florida, California State Senator John Briggs (R - Fullerton) introduced Proposition 6 in 1978, an initiative that would make queer people as well as those in favor of queer rights ineligible for employment in the California public school system (similar state laws already existed in Oklahoma and Arkansas). However, the Briggs Initiative (as it was often referred to) was defeated by California voters, in large part due to successful mounting of the "No on 6" campaign of LGBTQ+ activists and allies, of which Harvey Milk was the public face.
- While the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was often promoted as women's rights legislation, the ratification of the amendment would have also granted LGBTQ+ people significant freedoms like marriage equality in addition to anti-discrimination protections. Phyllis Schlafly, organizer of the STOP-ERA campaign, mobilized conservative opposition by pointing this out; she argued that the ERA would lead to "sex-mixing," policies allowing same-sex marriage and adoption of children by queer parents in addition to all-gender public bathrooms and locker rooms. Ultimately, the amendment was not ratified, and historians usually credit Schlafly's mobilization of conservative white women for its narrow defeat.

Activity (20 minutes)

- Introduce the class to some primary sources.
 - The first image below is a flier made by the Save Our Children organization to argue against LGBTQ+ rights in the late 1970s.
 - The second is a Save Our Children flier supporting California's Proposition 6 in 1978 (commonly known as The Briggs Initiative).
 - The third is a flier advertising an information session on the Briggs Initiative in 1978, held by a group of LGBTQ+ activists and allies.
 - The fourth is an image of clergy marching in protest of the Briggs Initiative in 1978.



SOC Flyer, "There Is No 'Human Right' to Corrupt Our Children." (#7439, box 11, folder 7, James M. Foster Papers, Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library).

The California Legislature Refuses to ban Openly Practicing Homosexual Teachers from our schools.



Senator John V. Briggs
and Reverend Louis
Sheldon have started a
Petition drive to ban homosexual teachers
by election.

Just such a petition drive succeeded in
Miami, where Senator John V. Briggs worked
closely with Anita Bryant... **SENATOR BRIGGS
WAS THE ONLY PUBLIC OFFICIAL FROM
CALIFORNIA TO HELP ANITA BRYANT!**

Anita Bryant and
Senator
John Briggs
Work for Morality



YOUR HELP IS NEEDED NOW!

312,000 Signatures are needed!

1 Sign this petition TODAY! Ban Homosexual Teachers. Have other members of your household sign. Fill in all places indicated. MAIL TODAY!

2 Indicate, if you have the time, that you will circulate additional petitions. Petitions will be mailed to you.

The California Legislature Refuses to Ban Openly Practicing Homosexual Teachers from Our Schools. California Proposition 6 Briggs Initiative Collection, 1977-1980, ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives. Alexander Street Database. Web.

EVENING of EDUCATION and CULTURE



FOR WOMEN and MEN TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE BRIGGS INITIATIVE

IF PASSED, THE BRIGGS INITIATIVE WOULD GIVE LOCAL CALIFORNIA SCHOOL BOARDS THE POWER TO DISMISS ANY PERSON WHO IS GAY OR ANY PERSON WHO OPENLY SUPPORTS GAY RIGHTS.

NOT A SINGLE ISSUE

WE BELIEVE THE BRIGGS INITIATIVE IS CONNECTED TO THE ATTACKS ON THIRD WORLD PEOPLE, WOMEN, AND WORKING CLASS PEOPLE IN THIS COUNTRY AND INTERNATIONALLY. WE ARE COMMITTED TO FIGHTING ALL THESE ATTACKS.

Evening of Education and Culture for Women and Men to Learn More About the Briggs Initiative.
Lesbian Schoolteachers and Gay Teachers and Schoolworkers, 1978. GLBT Historical Society,
2018. [Web.](#)



Jarvis, Elaine Gay. "Gay Freedom Day parade." Elaine Gay Jarvis Papers (2018-90), GLBT Historical Society, 1978. [Web.](#)

- Separate the students into small groups and ask the students to consider the following questions:
 - What do you see in these images?
 - How is the LGBTQ+ community represented in each image?
 - What perspective are these images arguing, and what tactics are being used?
 - Do these tactics seem familiar, unexpected, shocking?
 - Which groups have a stake in each of these struggles? What coalitions, relationships, alliances do you notice in these sources?
- After allowing students to discuss in smaller groups for 15 minutes, bring the class back to a larger discussion. Invite students from each group to share what they discussed.
 - What did you discuss in your groups? Did anything familiar, unexpected, or shocking arise while studying these sources?
 - What were the outcomes of anti-LGBTQ+ activism?
 - What are the consequences of anti-LGBTQ+ activism that we can see today?

Extension activity:

- As an extension of the class session, encourage students to analyze the ways in which localized social issues reach the federal government by studying the Reagan administration and its response to the HIV/AIDS crisis by studying the following sources:
 - Sections one and three from chapter 12: The New Right from Dan Allosso's *US History II: Gilded Age to Present*
<https://mlpp.pressbooks.pub/ushistory2/chapter/the-new-right/>
 - Video clip that contains audio from Ronald Reagan's presidential press secretary discussing the HIV/AIDS epidemic [CW: *Disrespectful and harmful characterizations of HIV/AIDS, images of HIV/AIDS patients*]
<https://www.vox.com/2015/12/1/9828348/ronald-reagan-hiv-aids>
 - Optional supplementary source: interview with activist Larry Kramer
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/aids/interviews/kramer.html>
- As students consider these sources, encourage them to reflect on the following questions:
 - What connections can you draw between anti-LGBTQ activism and the Reagan administration? What is the relationship between anti-LGBTQ activism and Reaganism?
 - What were the goals of anti-LGBTQ activism? How did the Reagan presidency accomplish these ends?
 - Apart from social groups or movements, how did political entities respond to the HIV/AIDS crisis? How did the government respond?

Relevant Resources:

Barrett-Fox, Rebecca. "Cobelligerents in Antigay Activism: Westboro Baptist Church and the Religious Right." *God Hates: Westboro Baptist Church, American Nationalism, and the Religious Right*, University Press of Kansas, 2016, pp. 113–137.

Fetner, Tina. "Working Anita Bryant: The Impact of Christian Anti-Gay Activism on Lesbian and Gay Movement Claims." *Social Problems*, vol. 48, no. 3, 2001, pp. 411–428.

Frank, Gillian. “‘The Civil Rights of Parents’: Race and Conservative Politics in Anita Bryant's Campaign against Gay Rights in 1970s Florida.” *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2013, pp. 126–160.

GLBT Historical Society. “Primary Source Set: Briggs Initiative.” *GLBT Historical Society Museum and Archives*, <https://www.glbthistory.org/primary-source-set-briggs-initiative>. Accessed 20 January 2021.

Self, Robert O. “The Reagan Devolution: Movement Conservatives and the Right's Days of Rage, 1988–1994.” *Recapturing the Oval Office: New Historical Approaches to the American Presidency*, edited by Brian Balogh and Bruce J. Schulman, Cornell University Press, Ithaca; London, 2015, pp. 75–92.

Author Information:

Hayley Smith is a Spring 2019 education intern with Our Family Coalition in San Francisco, CA. She is currently an undergraduate at San Francisco State University, pursuing degrees in History and Women & Gender Studies.