

A. Cyrus Warner
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Dear Lou,

Your good letter of the 11th inst. arrived about two weeks ago. I do not ordinarily take so long to reply, and I had, in fact, commenced this communication the day after receiving yours, but the overwhelming crush of work in connexion with M.S.N.Y.'s report on the E.R.G.H.O. -- a copy of which is enclosed -- plus the pressure of my own affairs, followed by a four-day visit to Boston all prevented me from completing it.

I am delighted to accept your kind invitation to speak at the San Francisco seminar which you have so ably organised; I consider it an honour to be invited. However, my acceptance must be made subject to two caveats, both of which could cast a pale over my ability to go to San Francisco. One is the state of my health. As you no doubt know, I was injured last year in Kansas City, and I am still suffering from the dizziness which resulted from that blow; at times it even seems to be worse, although at the present time I can -- thankfully -- report a definite amelioration. This past November I had ear surgery which made for an improvement in my hearing, but the ear itself does not feel right. I have been told that dizziness from severe concussions of the kind I experienced can be expected to last between a year and a year and a half. While I did drive some 8,000 miles last year after Kansas City, visiting Texas, Arizona, and, finally, San Francisco, I sometimes wonder how I ever did it. However, I am definitely planning to attend next summer's NACHO conference in San Francisco, and there is no reason at all why I cannot arrange my schedule so as to arrive several days early in order to participate in the seminar you have arranged.

The second proviso involves my ability to obtain someone to stay with my great-aunt, with whom I live, and who is in her ninetieth year. Last year I succeeded in obtaining a lady to stay with her here, and I was also able to do so when I went to Boston last week. Everything else being equal, this same lady will be available for the summer. But I must keep my finger, for man proposes but God disposes. Assuming that the two conditions are met, and that my aunt's own health remains good, I shall make the trip and shall be only too glad to fit my schedule to your plans.

Permit me now to congratulate you on the establishment of a course on homosexuality at your university, the prospectus of which you were good enough to send me. I conceive this to be one of the most significant achievements on the part of anyone in the movement, and of unparalleled importance. I am sure I need not mention to you the consequences which resulted over the centuries from the conspiracy of silence within which the subject of homosexuality has traditionally been enshrouded. The problem is a by-product of Christian attitudes toward heresy, of which homosexuality forms an integral part. The historian wishing to write a history of heresy is, perforce, limited in his investigation of the subject almost entirely to sources written from the viewpoint of the Church -- the persecutor and exterminator -- since the heretics themselves and all their writings were suppressed and burned. Because of the Church's ruthless destruction of all evidence of heresy, we are today unable to examine the writings and views of the heretics on a basis of equality with those of the Church, with the result that the evidence at our disposal produces a natural bias in favour of the Church. Thus even the most objective historian is handicapped in his approach to the subject because most of the available material is derived from the heretics' persecutors. Homosexuality, which has always been regarded as a sexual heresy, is an integral part of this picture. Historically it has been closely linked with religious heresy on the one hand and witchcraft on the other, the punishment for all three having been death, usually by burning. All heretics were routinely suspected of and accused of homosexuality, and all homosexuals were held to be heretics. The psychological roots of modern anti-homosexual prejudice are understandable only within the context of heresy. This explains why present-day assailants of homosexuals conceive

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of themselves as public benefactors.

The tragic consequences of this are evident on all sides. For the homosexual himself it has prevented the development of that sense of personal dignity which is an ancillary function of the historical process -- the recognition of one's role in a continuing historical tradition going back centuries in the past and giving promise of continuing into the future. Thus an American derives a sense of well-being from being able to look back to the great figures of his historical past -- Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln -- and, in so doing, he gains a sense of personal pride from being able to place himself in some niche -- no matter how small -- within that national tradition. But every human being is multi-faceted, and the same process occurs with respect to every other grouping with which we are associated or to which we belong -- religious, ethnic, social, cultural, professional, educational, etc. A Congregationalist, for example, can take similar pride in the religious accomplishments of his religious forebears in the settlement of colonial New England and in his own place in that tradition. Similarly, a doctor derives a sense of personal worth from forming a part of the tradition of healing which began with Hippocrates, burgeoned forth during the late Renaissance in the work of Paré and Vesalius, and has continued ever since. The same is true of lawyers, who can trace with pride their professional lineage back to the Roman consuls, to the legal codifications under Justinian, then to the early common lawyers in the royal courts of England, and, finally, to the glorious effulgence of that tradition in the centuries of Coke and Blackstone.

But what does the homosexual, male or female, have to look back to? To a tradition of darkness and oppression, which has frequently turned his own life into one of utter self-immolation. No wonder so many homosexuals pathetically grasp for some sense of social belonging by tacking off the list of names of prominent persons in history who were, or are thought to have been, homosexuals. In their pitiable attempts at personal self-esteem, they feel -- and rightly so -- that their own vicarious association with such men as Julius Caesar, William Rufus, Michelangelo, and James I can provide that sense of personal identification with our culture and its traditions which society itself has done everything to destroy. Where the heterosexual is constantly having his own self-esteem justified and buttressed by the accolades constantly being bestowed on the state of fatherhood and motherhood, by the supposed virtues of bearing and rearing children and the prospects of domestic bliss derivative therefrom, the homosexual has traditionally been portrayed as depraved, or at least sick, and his sexual acts as evil and sinful. Only one other group in our contemporary society has had a similar experience, and that is the black man. Our society is now in the process of making amends for its inhumanity to the negro, in which process the Church is in the forefront. Thus it is no accident that the demand for "black" courses in our schools and universities should play such a central role in this process of racial rehabilitation. It is only through such courses that the silence which has ignored the black and the bigotry which has condemned him to inferiority can be removed. Such courses serve a two-fold purpose. They enlighten those who are prejudiced, and they put a halt to the self-denigration rampant amongst the victims of that prejudice. A few years ago, Warren Robbins, a former U. S. foreign service officer who became head of the Frederick Douglass Institute of Negro Art and History and also head of the Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C., wrote as follows:

"The widespread myth that the Negro American has no past other than slavery and savagery has constituted one of the most tragic -- and unnecessary -- stumbling blocks in his thinking about himself, while, at the same time, it has been a prime source of racial prejudice. It is essential to evoke in the Negro American that feeling of ethnic pride and sense of connection with an antecedent culture which is indispensable to his development." (Italics mine.)

With equal fidelity to the facts, Robbins's statement could be altered as follows:

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"The widespread myth that homosexuals have no past, and that homosexuality is unnatural and sinful, has constituted one of the most tragic -- and unnecessary -- stumbling blocks in the homosexual's thinking about himself, while, at the same time, it has been a prime source of anti-homosexual prejudice. It is essential to evoke in the homosexual that feeling of pride and sense of connection with homosexuals of antecedent cultures which is indispensable to his own development and sense of personal dignity."

Barnaby C. Keeney, former president of Brown, and, for the past several years, head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, who last week, as you no doubt read, so ably testified before a joint Senate-House committee looking into the imbalance in Federal appropriations for the humanities *vis-a-vis* the sciences, once wrote: "There is not much doubt that historians have short-changed the American Negro." Again substituting "homosexual" for "American Negro" would do no violence to the facts.

In sum, the course in homophile studies which you have been responsible for instituting constitutes one of the central building-blocks in this long-overdue process of social rehabilitation, whilst at the same time it provides the means for developing that sense of personal self-esteem amongst people who are homosexually oriented which is indispensable to their integration into the mainstream of American life. I can hardly convey to you my own feeling of pride at your accomplishment, let alone measure the extent to which every homosexual stands in your debt.

With kind personal regards and all good wishes, I am

Yours very sincerely,

Arthur

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P.S. A word about my pseudonym, Austen Wade. My name is Arthur Cyrus Warner, and, without the homophile movement I have always been known as Cyrus Warner. However, when I joined the Mattachine Society of New York some eighteen years ago, I enrolled, for obvious reasons, by my first name rather than by my second; consequently, I have been known within the movement as Arthur Warner. Several years ago, however, when I became head of the MSNY legal committee and my work began to involve outside publicity and public speaking, I adopted a pseudonym and selected Austen Wade, not only because this retained my own initials, but out of respect for Austen Chamberlain, son of Joseph Chamberlain whose political philosophy of Tory Radicalism most nearly approximated my own. I have no objection to the use of my real name within homophile circles, but I must request that Austen Wade be employed in any outside activity, such as the San Francisco seminar which you have arranged.

A. W.