

Gay Liberation Comes to Dixie—Slowly

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This article examines a little studied aspect of southern politics: the emergence of gay rights activists as players in mainstream southern politics. The article examines state-by-state electoral successes of openly-gay candidates throughout the South as well as the impact of gay rights activists on public policy (at both the local and state level), hate crimes legislation, employment rights, higher education, and private business.

The movement of homosexuals from the shadows of society to open participation in public life has been a major national trend during the past three decades, and the South has not been in the forefront of this development. However, significant evidence suggests that, as Dixie has accommodated to other social changes, it is adapting to gay liberation—albeit more slowly than the rest of the nation.

How Many Gays in the South?

It is likely that the South has about the same share of gay residents as the rest of the country. According to a 1998 study of exit polls conducted by the Policy Institute of the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF), all regions of the nation, including the South, have about the same share of gay voters (Bailey 2000). In exit polling for the 2000 presidential election, nationally, some four percent of voters answered yes to the question, are you gay or lesbian? In the South, three percent answered yes (CNN.com 2001a). In the 2000 census, same-sex couples who self-identified as “unmarried partners” were as prevalent in the South as elsewhere. Four southern jurisdictions were among the top ten nationally for the share of gay couples—Arlington County, VA; DeKalb County, GA; Alexandria, VA; and Monroe County, FL, which includes Key West (Cohn 2001). The gay presence was not limited to urban areas. In Mississippi, the census found same-sex couples in every one of the state’s 82 counties, with a total of 4,774 statewide (Harden 2001). In Tennessee, where the census revealed the presence of 10,189 same-sex couples, all 95 counties were represented (Miller 2001).

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The South Resists

The South has never been on the cutting edge of social change. Historically, the region has undergone more momentous changes than the rest of the nation, but most of these revolutions in law and custom—such as the abolition of slavery and the dismantling of segregation—were imposed from outside.

In addition to the South's generally conservative stance on most issues, resistance to acceptance of gay people has been reinforced by the South's strong religiosity, especially among the region's large number of Protestant fundamentalists. The percentage of the South's population that belongs to an organized religion is significantly higher than the rest of the country, averaging 61 percent for the 13-state region, compared to 55 percent for the country as a whole. Every southern state except Florida and Virginia exceed the national average in church membership (Bradley, Green, Jones, Lynn, and McNeil 1992). Moreover, southern Christians tend to stick closely to the tenets of their faiths. In a recent survey in Oklahoma, 90 percent of respondents said they believed that Jesus was bodily resurrected, and 91 percent believed in hell (*The Tulsa World* 2001). Moreover, the religious beliefs of southerners frequently spill over into politics. In Tennessee, 74 of the state's 95 counties have recently passed a resolution calling for the posting of the Ten Commandments in various public forums (*The Tennessee Journal* 2001).

The conservatism of the region on sexual matters may be illustrated by a survey on home video "sex movies." In the West, 40 percent of households possess such films; in the Northeast, 37 percent have them; in the Midwest, the figure is 21 percent; and in the South, the number is the lowest of any region—only 14 percent (*The Oregonian* 2000). On gay issues specifically, the region is also more conservative than the rest of the nation. In a 1996 Gallup Poll asking if homosexuals should be able to marry, 28 percent of non-southerners answered yes, to 23 percent of southerners (Wyman 1996a).

As a result, just as the region resisted the civil rights movement and has given a lethargic response to feminism, the South has been a center of resistance to the changes sought by gay activists. Indeed, the counter-revolution to the gay movement began in the South, though not in its most "southern" city. In 1977, after the Miami-Dade County board of commissioners passed an ordinance banning discrimination against gay people, entertainer and active Southern Baptist Anita Bryant, a resident of the city, led a campaign to force repeal of the ordinance. Opponents gathered enough signatures to put the issue on the ballot. The campaign was bitter, often with

religious overtones. Bryant referred to “homosexual recruiters” and contended that homosexuality “is an abomination under the laws of God and man” (Clendinen and Nagourney 1999, 299, 291).

The final vote, in a heavier than normal turnout of 45 percent, was 202,319 (70%) in favor of repeal of the gay rights ordinance to 89,562 (30%) against repeal. Almost every neighborhood, including the normally liberal Jewish areas, voted to overturn the ordinance. The one exception was Coconut Grove, where many gay voters lived (Clendinen and Nagourney 1999).

The defeat of Miami’s gay rights law sparked an anti-gay movement that was successful throughout the South, stemming or turning back changes sought by gay activists and imposing additional restrictions on gay people as well.

Later in 1977, the Arkansas legislature passed a bill outlawing same-sex sodomy. Governor Bill Clinton, later known for his pro-gay views, remained silent during the debate and did not veto the legislation (Bull and Gallagher 1996). In Atlanta, Mayor Maynard Jackson proclaimed “Civil Liberties Days” instead of Gay Pride Day, as he had done in 1976 (Bull and Gallagher 1996, 319). Jackson changed the name in response to protests from a group of fundamentalist ministers who had taken out a full-page newspaper advertisement asserting that the mayor was “taking pride in perverted sex.” Then 20 of the ministers met with the mayor to urge their point on him personally.

Anita Bryant did not confine her anti-gay activities to Miami. In 1978, she was instrumental in persuading the Oklahoma legislature to pass a law giving local school boards broad authority to fire gay teachers. This law was later held unconstitutional in a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court (Bull and Gallagher 1996). That same year, after an 18-month battle, the Gay Activists Alliance at the University of Oklahoma lost its bid for official recognition from the school (Thompson 1994).

In 1984, the Houston City Council passed two ordinances extending civil rights protections by a narrow vote while a group of opponents gathered in the council chambers sang “Onward Christian Soldiers.” The rights law foes quickly collected enough signatures to force a referendum in 1986. Opponents used arguments similar to those that anti-gay-rights groups had found effective in Miami seven years earlier, including showing footage of film taken of gay rights events in San Francisco where the behavior of participants was less than decorous. Although the measure had the support of Mayor Kathy Whitmire, a longtime ally of Houston’s large gay population, the anti-gay forces won by 81 to 19 percent, an overwhelming four-to-one margin (Bull and Gallagher 1996).

The anti-gay reaction continued into the early 1990s. After the Tampa city council enacted a nondiscrimination ordinance in 1992 that included gays, a group of Christian conservatives were able to get the issue on the ballot, and the ordinance was repealed (Thompson 1994). It was later reinstated, however, by a court ruling (Bull and Gallagher 1996). In 1993 in Cobb County, Georgia, after a local theater group produced “Lips Together, Teeth Apart,” a play about AIDS by gay playwright Terence McNally, the county commission voted not to fund arts projects that contravene community standards (Bull and Gallagher 1996). That same year in Williamson County, Texas, which includes Tyler, in response to learning that Apple Computer granted domestic-partner benefits to gay couples, the county board voted 3 to 2 against tax breaks for a proposed facility for the company (Bull and Gallagher 1996). Under considerable business and political pressure, the board later reversed itself. And in 1994, after the city of Austin, Texas, adopted a domestic-partner benefits policy, opponents obtained enough signatures to force a referendum on the issue. Even in supposedly liberal Austin, the domestic-partner provision was defeated by 62 to 38 percent.

Georgia was not the only state where a drama production sparked a strong anti-gay reaction. In North Carolina in 1997, a local group staged “Angels in America,” a prize-winning play that had been the hit of Broadway. The play, which had a gay theme and featured male nudity, had been funded in part by county arts funds. In response, the Mecklenburg County commissioners, in a narrow five-to-four vote, discontinued funding to arts groups that promote “exposure to perverted forms of sexuality.” The action by a coalition of four Republicans—associated with the religious conservative wing of the party—and one Democrat brought about a strong reaction from the city’s establishment. A group of 28 top chief executive officers of major corporations in Charlotte opposed the commission’s action and began an effort to get more moderate political leadership for the county. *The Charlotte Observer* denounced the commission majority and noted that in next year’s elections, “the democratic process will appropriately determine who speaks for Charlotte” (Wyman 1997a).

Indeed, a year later, Charlotte board member George Higgins, one of the anti-gay group known as the “Gang of Five,” was defeated in the Republican primary and replaced by Tom Cox, a moderate ex-city council member. Two other Christian conservatives were reelected, but no longer were able to form a majority on the commission (Wyman 1998a).

In 2001, 21 years after Miami voters voted down a gay rights law, the Miami-Dade county commission passed the law again. The action was the culmination of an extensive and well-organized lobbying and public relations

campaign by SAVE Dade, a gay rights group in the area. The new law amended the Miami-Dade County charter, extending the Human Rights Ordinance to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation in jobs, housing, and public accommodations.

But the past is never past in the South. In 2001, operating under the banner of “Take Back Miami-Dade,” opponents of the gay rights law collected some 51,000 signatures calling for repeal of the gay rights law. Miami-Dade Mayor Alex Panelist, who supports the rights ordinance, held a hearing with Christian Coalition leaders and other opponents of the gay rights law in hopes of dissuading them from going forward with their challenge. The anti-gay side, however, remained vehemently committed to forcing a repeal referendum, labeling those who support the pro-gay law as “merchants of death,” a reference to the AIDS epidemic. The commission voted for a referendum, to be held on September 10, 2002 (Wyman 2001b). In addition to backing from Mayor Panelist, the rights law has support from a majority of county commissioners and from Miami Beach Mayor David Dermer, an ally of Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R), as well as a coalition of local gay groups, unions and other traditionally liberal groups. Many Miami political and business leaders also support the gay rights law, in part because they fear that a contentious campaign followed by the law’s defeat will insult gay citizens and hurt tourism in the area (Wyman 2001b).

With ideological groups across the nation interested in the outcome—as they were in 1977Cboth sides have substantial outside support. Supporting the gay rights law is a coalition of gay and liberal groups, including the AFL-CIO, the NAACP and the Human Rights Campaign. “It’s going to be a great national battle, with national organizations in both sides taking part,” says Jorge Mursuli, the Florida director of People for the American Way. A former chair of the gay rights group SAVE-Dade—which the *Miami Herald* calls “the powerful SAVE Dade”—Mursuli is still heavily involved in the Miami rights campaign (Wyman 2001).

Across the South, the gay response to the region’s anti-gay climate has taken a range of forms. In Dallas, for example, to celebrate the first National Coming Out Day in October, 1988, some 450 lesbians and gay men took out a full page advertisement in the *Dallas Morning News* listing their names (Thompson 1994). In Atlanta, a more humorous but potentially less effective tactic was adopted by activists who protested the Georgia law banning sodomy by placing on the State House grounds inflatable dolls of the same gender in compromising positions (Thompson 1994). In 1991, a group of gay activists arranged for a helicopter to drop a giant condom over the Arlington, Virginia, home of U.S. Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) to protest his views on AIDS prevention (Thompson 1994).

More importantly, a large number of gay organizations have developed throughout the South, some focusing on civil rights issues, others on political involvement, and still others on partisan politics. As a result, slowly but surely, the South's gay citizens have gained a voice in Dixie policy-making at both the state and local levels.

Gay Movement Makes Progress

Despite a long list of setbacks in a region with a history of social conservatism, the gay liberation movement has begun to make substantial progress in the South. "Things have changed dramatically in the last decade," State Representative Glen Mamey (D), an openly gay member of the Texas legislature, said in 1996; "There are two openly gay members on the Dallas city council. The gay organizations in the state are vibrant. Our lobby at the state level is doing great things. We're not able to pass a civil rights bill, but we are able to stop most bad things. We came within one vote of adding sexual orientation to hate crimes legislation" (Wyman 1996b).

To start with, despite a lack of enthusiasm for gay causes by most southern voters, many have also been reluctant to give the issue a high priority, in part, this writer suspects, because it is one of those topics—like abortion—that they just don't like to talk about. Thus, the anti-gay movement rarely became the overriding issue, with the intensity of support of—by comparison—the resistance to racial integration.

In Houston, for example, despite Houston voters' lack of enthusiasm for gay rights, in 1985 they reelected Mayor Kathy Whitmire, who had supported the gay rights measure, by 59 to 40 percent over a vociferously anti-gay opponent, Louie Welch. All eight candidates who campaigned on a specifically anti-gay platform—dubbed "the straight slate"—lost by wide margins (Wyman 1985). And in 1987, following the overwhelming vote in 1986 to repeal the gay rights measure that Whitmire supported, she was reelected with 74 percent of the vote in a seven-candidate field (Wyman 1987).

Moreover, there is increasing evidence that many southerners are willing to accept that gay citizens should have equal protection under the law, even to the extent of holding public office. Urban areas, where gay residents are often concentrated, have begun to elect openly gay candidates to office. Many city and county governments have passed pro-gay laws. And southern legislatures have passed, or have come close to passing, pro-gay legislation, such as proposals to provide extra penalties for hate crimes against minorities, including gays.

Gay Officeholders

By January 2002, there were 30 openly gay elected officials in the South, including two state legislators (Appendix A). These 30 officeholders account for some 15 percent of the 202 gay elected officials nationwide, less than half the South's 33 percent share of the nation's population (Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund 2002; hereafter GLVF). Most southern gay candidates have been elected recently. In 1997, Cathy Woolard, a lesbian and former operative for the gay lobby, the Human Rights Campaign, won election to the Atlanta city council, becoming the first openly gay officeholder in the state. Since Woolard's initial election, six other gay candidates have won elections in Georgia, including lesbian Karla Drenner to the state House of Representatives.

All of the South's gay officeholders are Democrats, although some were elected in non-partisan contests. None of the officeholders are Republicans. Dallas City Councilman John Loza, though elected in a non-partisan election, was a declared Republican. However, he has since become a Democrat. While their numbers are small, the presence of even one openly gay member of a council or legislature can exert major influence. The city councils of Atlanta and Orlando, for example, each passed pro-gay policies with the encouragement of a lesbian member. Texas state Representative Glen Mamey has been a major force on gay issues in his state's legislature (McNeely 2001).

Florida

The first and for a long time the only openly gay person to hold elective office in Florida—or in the entire South, for that matter—was Richard Heyman, who was elected mayor of Key West in 1979 (Terra 2002). This resort community has attracted gay residents for many years, creating both a gay constituency and a gay-tolerant straight population.

Today, however, Florida has 11 openly gay people holding elective office, more than any other southern state. The most prominent is Patty Sheehan, elected to the Orlando city council in 2000, when she defeated an incumbent in a runoff by 52 to 48 percent. Her district includes many people who work in Disneyland and other nearby amusement parks (Wyman 2002a). Shortly after her election, Sheehan was instrumental in helping pass a city ordinance banning job-related bias for city employees. The ordinance passed unanimously after vigorous debate, despite a major protest in 1998 when the city allowed rainbow flags, a symbol of gay liberation, to fly in the city for a month. This was the decision that prompted television

evangelist and former presidential candidate Pat Robertson to warn that God would punish Orlando with tornadoes or meteors (Tracy 2000).

In Wilton Manors, a Broward County town of some 13,000 people, the mayor and two council members form a majority of the city's governing board. The town has a substantial gay population; the 2000 census indicated as many as 17 percent of couples sharing a home are "unmarried partners" of the same sex (*Miami Herald* 2002).

Georgia

In 1997, the Peach State elected its first openly gay public official. In Atlanta's municipal election, two openly gay candidates, Malcolm Gideons and Cathy Woolard, forced city council incumbents into runoffs. Woolard, who got the *Atlanta Constitution's* endorsement, won the runoff, defeating incumbent Mary Davis by 52 to 48 percent and becoming the state's first openly gay officeholder (Wyman 1997b).

A former operative for the Human Rights Campaign, a Washington-based gay political group, Woolard quickly made a name for herself on the council by helping pass a domestic partners policy that appealed to the city's gay minority. But she refused to be pigeonholed as "the gay council member." She made a name for herself as chair of the committee with responsibility for Atlanta's mega-size airport. She even angered some gay voters when she voted for a 2 a.m. closing time for bars (Wyman 1997b).

Four years later, Woolard entered the race for city council president. In the first primary, she placed second to City Councilman Michael Julian Bond, son of national NAACP leader Julian Bond. Bond received 24,140 votes (32%), to Woolard's 21,240 (28%), with 14,154 (19%) for Julia Emmons, 13,198 (18%) for Mable Thomas and 2,221 (3%) for Morris Finley (Wyman 2001m). One gay activist noted that on election night the city's seasoned political observers "were astounded at her vote and where it came from." In particular, Woolard, who is white, was well organized in both black and white neighborhoods, a political rarity in this race-conscious city (Wyman 2001m). In the runoff, Woolard moved ahead of Bond, receiving 22,012 (55%) to 18,187 (45%) for Bond, and assumed the city's second highest office.

Woolard won in part because she had established a record on the council that appealed to a large number of the city's voters, gay and straight, black and white. But she also won because she is a skillful politician who understands how to win elections. Brian Bond, executive director of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, which helped Woolard raise funds, said she is "the most organized person in the world" (Wyman 2001j). Her campaign

amassed a database of supporters, who were then mailed to and telephoned extensively in the campaign's final days. In the runoff, turnout in Woolard's gay-heavy District Six was 28 percent, compared to 21 percent citywide. Overall, Woolard's vote increased by 817 votes from the first primary, while Julian Bond's declined by 5,927. "It was Politics 101," said Beth Schapiro of Atlanta, Woolard's pollster and strategist (Wyman 2001i).

Woolard was also able to garner a significant minority of the African-American vote in this often racially polarized city. Woolard, who is white, received an estimated 21 percent of the African-American vote, while Bond, who is black, garnered only seven percent of white voters, in part because he was perceived as an ally of the controversial incumbent Mayor Bill Campbell (Wyman 2001i). The fact that the city had elected Shirley Franklin, an African American, as mayor only three weeks earlier may have mitigated the racial component in the voting.

Atlanta has a large gay community, attracting a number of gay men and lesbians from the surrounding Deep South states. But while this minority provided Woolard, Fauver, and the other gay candidates with a small base of support, it is not large enough to account for their victories. Perhaps more significant is the fact that heterosexual voters voted for gay candidates in large numbers. "I don't think my sexual orientation played any role in the campaign," Woolard said, although she did note that the gay community got "pretty excited" about her candidacy and showed up in large numbers for her victory party. After her election, Woolard again stressed city management issues, saying that her first order of business was getting the new council sworn in and getting to work on budget issues (Wyman 2001k).

Woolard was not the only gay victory in Georgia in 2001. All told, five openly gay candidates made the runoff in metro-Atlanta. In the runoff, two were successful—Woolard and civic activist Anne Fauver, who won a 55 to 45 percent victory in Woolard's old council district. A third candidate, gay activist Paul Zucca, lost his runoff for an at-large post on the council by a narrow 47 to 53 percent. The two other gay candidates lost runoffs by larger margins (Wyman 2001m).

Why the sudden explosion of successful gay candidates in the Georgia capital? Harry Knox of Georgia Equality, said the results show "the political maturity of the gay community, not only in running, but in being successful" (Wyman 2001e). "It's part of the maturing of Atlanta and the metropolitan area," said longtime gay activist Larry Pellegrini, with voters now willing "to look at credentials, look beyond orientation as an issue" (Wyman 2001f). Pellegrini also notes that most of these candidates "have paid their dues in neighborhood activities" prior to running for office (Wyman 2001f).

Woolard's election in particular pushed the envelope for gay politics in the South. She is the first openly gay person elected to citywide office in Atlanta, one of the South's largest and most influential cities. Among the nation's major cities, only San Francisco, where a gay man, Tom Ammiano, serves as president of the board of supervisors, has elected an openly gay person to such a high office.

In addition to the major inroads by gay officeholders into Atlanta government, the region also elected a member of the Georgia legislature. In July 2000, lesbian Karla Drenner won a close Democratic primary for the Georgia legislature in an Atlanta suburban district. Drenner, an environmental consultant, campaigned on issues related to the environment and to education. She criss-crossed the district, knocking on doors. Although this was her first try for public office, she had attended a Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund training session earlier in the year. Both Atlanta newspapers, the liberal *Atlanta Constitution* and the more conservative *Atlanta Journal*, endorsed Drenner. She defeated incumbent state Representative June Hegstrom (D), whose strong pro-gay record created a dilemma for some of the state's gay political groups. For example, the Georgia Equality Project, a gay group, endorsed Hegstrom. Because Drenner had no General Election opponent, her primary victory was tantamount to election (Wyman 2000c).

The Atlanta-area elections of gay candidates over the past few years suggest a moderating of traditional anti-gay attitudes by many voters in the South. While southerners are fond of saying that Atlanta "is not really southern," the city is a magnet not just for gay people but for young people from throughout the Deep South who leave home to seek better employment opportunities. If Atlanta can elect a lesbian to its second most powerful position, and its suburbs send a lesbian to the legislature, other Dixie bailiwicks may soon be amenable to electing gay candidates to public office.

Kentucky

In 1998, openly gay Matt Solsberg ran for a seat on the Fayette County (Lexington, etc.) Council. He ran in a fairly urban district near the county's airport, populated mainly by middle-income voters. Solsberg was endorsed by the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund, indicating he passed muster as qualified for the job he was seeking and as having a reasonable chance of winning. However, in the three-way non-partisan primary, Solsberg came in third with 17 percent of the vote, behind incumbent Richard Maloney with 57 percent, and a second-place contender with 26 percent. Kentucky has no openly gay officeholders.

Louisiana

In 1999, Larry Bagneris, Jr., a longtime civic and gay activist, ran for the state House of Representatives in the 93rd District, which includes the French Quarter, where a number of gay voters reside. In addition to support from influential gay groups, such as the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund and Louisiana's Lesbian and Gay Political Action Committee, Bagneris won the endorsement of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and local labor and education groups. Democrat Bagneris, who is a self-described Creole—local parlance for people of mixed African-American and French ancestry—sought to build a coalition between the affluent bohemians in the Quarter and lower-income blacks in nearby neighborhoods. But during the campaign, he said, “Between racism in the white community and homophobia in the black community, it’s been difficult” (Wyman 1999c).

In the October 23 non-partisan primary with seven candidates, Bagneris came in second with 1,367 votes (24%) to 2,515 (44%) for Karen Carter, also a Democrat. Carter is an African-American and the daughter of a former New Orleans city councilman who is still a force in local politics (Wyman 1999b). In the November 20 runoff, Bagneris got 40 percent to Carter’s 60 percent (Wyman 1999d).

That same year, another openly gay man, Randy Evans, a Republican, also ran for the legislature. He got 2,765 votes (30%) to incumbent Mitch Landrieu’s (D) 6,575 (70%) in the 89th District. Landrieu also benefited from family ties—he is the brother of U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu and the son of the late New Orleans Mayor Moon Landrieu (Wyman 1999b).

North Carolina

In November 2000, Wilmington attorney Julia Boseman, a lesbian, was elected to one of five seats on the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners. Boseman, 33, is a lifelong resident of the area and has an extensive record of community service (GLVF 2002; New Hanover County North Carolina 2000). Elsewhere, Carrboro, NC, has an openly gay mayor, Michael Nelson. In 2001, Nelson won re-election by 1,737 to 864—67 to 33 percent—over business consultant Stacy Smith (Wyman 2001h).

In 2001, Ray Warren, a former superior court judge who had announced his sexual orientation and subsequently switched from the Republican to the Democratic party, announced that he would seek the U.S. Senate seat being vacated by incumbent Jesse Helms (R). One voter survey showed Warren winning only four percent of the Democratic primary vote. In December of 2001, Warren ratcheted down his ambitions a notch,

announcing that he would instead challenge Congressman Robin Hayes (R) (Wyman 2001n), but he subsequently withdrew from that race as well.

Oklahoma

In 1996 in western Oklahoma's 6th congressional district, Paul Barby, a wealthy rancher, oilman, former university board member, and long-time Democratic Party activist, challenged freshman Congressman Frank Lucas, a Republican. Before the campaign began, Barby announced that he is gay. He conducted an aggressive campaign, with populist economic themes designed to appeal to the region's agricultural base. During the campaign, Barby's brother announced that he and other family members were voting for Lucas, citing policy differences with their gay family member. Barby spent some \$417,000 of his own money and narrowly carried urban Oklahoma County. However, Lucas carried the rest of the district handily, winning the election with 113,499 votes (64%) to Barby's 64,173 (36%) (Barone and Ujifusa 1998).

In 1998, Barby ran again. This time, he had an opponent in the Democratic primary, W.T. "Dub" Whalen, a high school coach and history teacher. Barby had name ID from his well funded '96 campaign as well as considerable support among Democratic activists. He won the primary with 39,906 votes (62%) to 24,050 (38%) (Wyman 1998b). In the General Election, however, Barby lost to Lucas again, garnering 43,555 (33%) to Lucas's 85,261 (65%) (Barone and Ujifusa 1998). Barby's sexual orientation undoubtedly hurt him. However, had he been heterosexual, he probably would have lost both contests. In 2000, Lucas defeated a well-organized, well-funded challenge by straight state Representative Randy Beutler (D) by 20 percentage points (Barone and Ujifusa 1998).

But Barby may have begun to accustom this conservative state to gay political participation. In 2002 in Oklahoma County, openly gay lawyer Jim Roth is running for county commissioner in District One. As the current county attorney and chief deputy to the county clerk, Roth is the highest-ranking openly gay official—though unelected—in Oklahoma. Whether he will win is uncertain at this point. He does have the endorsement of the Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund. Moreover, Oklahoma County is the only county Barby carried in his first congressional race in 1996.

South Carolina

In Charleston, in 2000, incumbent Solicitor David Schwacke (R), who had been "outed" by party foes, sought reelection anyway. Schwacke's

challenger, former assistant solicitor Ralph Hoisington, outspent Schwacke by \$120,000 to \$34,000. Moreover, he raised issues that focused attention on Schwacke's sexual orientation—charging, for example, that Schwacke had mishandled a child molesting case. Schwacke carried cosmopolitan Charleston County by about 1,000 votes, but lost suburban/rural Berkeley County by some 1,200, losing by a mere 217 votes out of 30,677 cast (Wyman 2000a).

Texas

In 1991, Glen Maxey, a schoolteacher and later the executive director for the Lesbian/Gay Rights Lobby of Texas, won a special election in an Austin district to become the first openly gay member of the Texas legislature as well as the first in any legislature in the South. When he first went to the legislature, some of the members refused to speak to him or to shake his hand. Gradually, however, he became an influential member, working effectively on such issues as education and welfare as well as gay rights (McNeely 2001). He was, for example, a key player in getting the hate crimes law passed.

Maxey, the first and only openly gay member of the Texas legislature, announced he will not seek re-election next year (2003). Maxey, 49, was elected in 1991 and had been thinking about stepping down, primarily because of the financial pressures of being a low-paid lawmaker. Redistricting was the icing on the cake—Maxey was placed in the same district with two other Democratic representatives, insuring a costly primary battle had he run again (Wyman 2001n).

In Houston, lesbian activist and oil and gas analyst Annise Parker won a city council runoff in 1997 by 58 to 42 percent, becoming Houston's first openly gay officeholder. On the council, she worked on hate crimes and discrimination issues as well as issues of more general interest (Annise Parker 2002). During her second term, she helped pass an ordinance providing domestic partnership benefits for unmarried couples, whether heterosexual or homosexual. A group of the city's religious conservatives successfully circulated petitions which allowed Houston's electorate to vote up or down on the new domestic partner law. In 2001, when Parker was up for reelection to the council, the anti-domestic partner initiative was on the ballot. Voters chose to repeal the program by 52 to 48 percent. But they simultaneously reelected Parker without a runoff, giving her 51 percent over two opponents (Wyman 2001g).

In Travis County, which includes Austin, voters in 1996 elected lesbian Margo Frasier as the county sheriff. She became the first openly gay sheriff

in the nation. Frasier revitalized the department's efforts to stem domestic violence, working with the prosecutor and a local shelter for women to form a Family Protection Team. In 2000, her opponent attempted to use her sexual orientation against her, but Frasier was reelected (GLVF 2002).

Virginia

The Old Dominion elected its first openly gay officeholder in November 1997, when Jay Fisette won his second bid to become a member of the Arlington County Board. The county is a suburb of Washington, DC. Fisette garnered 62 percent of the vote (Wyman 2001h). In 2001, Fisette (D) was reelected by 61 to 39 percent. Fisette, who is now chairman of the board, is a former director of the gay-oriented Whitman-Walker Clinic in nearby Washington, DC (Wyman 2001h).

In Virginia's District 38, also in the cosmopolitan northern part of the state, openly gay Danny Smith (R) lost his bid for the House of Delegates, but made a respectable showing—37 to 59 percent. The campaign demonstrated that, in some contests, partisanship is thicker than sexual orientation. In Fisette's race, the local Log Cabin Republicans, a gay group, endorsed his opponent, straight independent Michael Clancy. And in Smith's race, the Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Democrats helped raise money for his opponent, straight Delegate Robert Hull (D) (Wyman 2001h).

Gay Political Impact

In 1976, while he was campaigning for the Democratic presidential nomination, former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter came out against discrimination based on sexual orientation (Thompson 1994). But Carter's stance was not typical, even for moderate Democrats in the South. In 1977, Florida Governor Reubin Askew announced that, were he a resident of Miami, he would vote to repeal its gay rights law. Then in 1979, after Carter had nominated Askew to be his special trade representative, Askew, in testimony before the Senate Finance Committee, said that he would not hire a homosexual on his staff (Thompson 1994).

More recently, however, many Democratic leaders throughout the South have developed a positive relationship with gay groups. In 2000, most southern delegations at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles had one or more openly gay delegates or alternates, usually an elected public official (Wyman 2000d). Their presence, probably due at least in part to the Democrats' affirmative-action type party rules, provoked no particular notice within or without the party.

In the summer of 2000, two days after lesbian Karla Drenner (D) was elected to the Georgia legislature, Governor Roy Barnes (D) spoke to the Atlanta Executive Network, a gay organization, to a standing-room-only crowd of 600. Barnes was the first governor in Peach State history to address a gay group in person (Wyman 2000c). Barnes is now the rule, not the exception, among southern Democratic leaders.

The Human Rights Campaign's legislative scorecard rates lawmakers based on their votes on gay-related issues. In the 106th Congress, the Democratic U.S. Senators from the South scored an average of 71 percent with HRC; the average Dixie Republican scored 10 percent (Human Rights Campaign 2002b). U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), for example rated a high 83 percent on the Human Rights Campaign scale; she has also been a speaker at the gay group's New Orleans dinner. Landrieu contends her pro-gay stance is not a problem in her home state, commenting that "Louisiana is . . . sort of live and let live. Sort of a laid-back state—people are not hard-edged" (Wyman 2000b).

The Democratic Party courts the gay vote in the South and benefits from it. There are some 16 Stonewall Democratic clubs—named for a gay bar in Greenwich Village, not the Confederate general—active in six southern states (FL, GA, NC, OK, TX, and VA). In the 2000 election, gay Democratic campaign operatives worked full-time in Florida. And in states where Gore had no chance, gay groups raised money. In Dallas, for example, a gay fundraiser featuring President Clinton as the speaker raised \$400,000 for the Democratic National Committee (Wyman 2000g). In 2000, exit polls showed gay voters nationally were 70 percent for Gore, 25 percent for Bush and five percent for Nader (CNN.com 2001a).

Gay involvement also helped other Democratic candidates. Candace Gingrich, a lesbian and the Democratic sister of former House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R), campaigned in Florida's 22nd District (Ft. Lauderdale) on behalf of challenger Elaine Bloom (D), who got 49 percent in her bid to unseat U.S. Representative Clay Shaw (R) (Wyman 2000f).

Not all Dixie Democrats display tolerance toward gays, however. In 2001, South Carolina's state Democratic chair Dick Harpootlian accused a Republican candidate who had never married of being "light in his loafers." In general, however, by the 1990s, southern Democrats could no longer express anti-gay attitudes without paying a political penalty. In 1993, for example, when U.S. Senator Lloyd Bentsen (D-TX) resigned from the Senate, U.S. Representative Jim Chapman (D), a populist from East Texas, tried to persuade Governor Ann Richards (D-TX) to appoint him to the vacancy. Richards, however, declined, because Chapman had publicly

opposed gay rights and gay organizations in Texas objected to his appointment (Wyman 1995).

The relationship between gays and the southern GOP has been mostly hostile, with state party platforms containing anti-gay language and with Republican candidates frequently taking anti-gay positions on issues. Texas Republicans may be the most anti-gay: in June, 1998, they refused to allow the Log Cabin Republicans to have a booth at the party's state convention. A party spokesman accused gays of being pedophiles and cross-dressers and Log Cabin of being an anti-Christian hate group. When the Log Cabin group held a rally across the street from the convention to protest their exclusion, a group of anti-gay demonstrators, including several GOP convention delegates, disrupted the proceedings, even jumping on the stage while speakers tried to address the crowd (Wyman 2002c).

In 2000 in Virginia, in a Republican congressional primary in the 1st District, which includes the city of Newport News, two-term legislator Jo Ann Davis, a conservative Christian, and Mike Rothfeld, another Christian conservative, attacked the third candidate, businessman Paul Jost, for his past support of a local gay rights measure. Rothfeld distributed a photograph of two men kissing, accompanied by the caption, "Paul Jost's vision of Virginia" (Wyman 2000a). Davis won the primary and the general election.

But a thaw in gay-GOP relations may have begun. The office of the National Log Cabin Republicans in Washington maintains that it has a "working relationship" with four of the 13 state Republican Parties in the South—Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Virginia (Wyman 2001a). In 1999, two conservative Republican congressmen from Oklahoma made political contact with gay GOPers. Tom Coburn (R), who has a special interest in health issues, including AIDS, addressed a meeting of the Log Cabin Republicans in Washington. And Ernest Istook, who chairs the District of Columbia appropriations subcommittee, benefited from a fundraiser hosted by gay Washington, DC, city councilman David Catania (R) (Wyman 1999a). In Florida, in Congressman Bill McCollum's (R) 2000 U.S. Senate campaign, national Log Cabin Executive Director Rich Tafel appeared at a Miami news conference in support of McCollum, who had endorsed a federal hate crimes bill that included gays (Wyman 2000e).

In 2001, Virginia's U.S. Senator John Warner (R) was an honorary host at a Log Cabin reception at the GOP state convention in Richmond, and U.S. Representative Tom Davis, who chairs the National Republican Congressional Committee, has spoken to the Log Cabin club in his district. This relationship was strained in the 2001 fall campaign, however, when Virginia's Republican candidate for governor, Mark Earley, proclaimed that he had "Virginia values, not Vermont values," a reference to the legalization

of same-sex civil unions in the New England state. And a GOP radio ad noted that one of the Democratic candidates “wants to legalize gay marriage in Virginia.” While Democrat Mark Warner had not endorsed civil unions, his running mate for lieutenant governor did endorse equal benefits for same-sex couples during his primary campaign. The anti-gay ploy appeared to backfire on Earley, who was severely criticized by the state’s newspapers, and he quickly dropped it (Wyman 2001d).

Public Policy: Cities and Counties

It took 21 years before Dade County-Miami passed another civil rights measure that includes gays. Moreover, as before, opponents have launched a petition drive to overturn the law. Nevertheless, in the past several decades, many southern jurisdictions—municipalities, counties and school districts—have adopted one or more policies that provide civil rights protections for their gay constituents. Across the country, some 241 local governments have adopted policies banning discrimination in their own hiring; 47 (20%) are in the South (Appendix B). Moreover, some 33 of these southern governments—including many of the region’s largest cities—have passed job-bias bans that include gays and cover private employers as well as local governments (Human Rights Campaign 2002a).

Much of this activity is a response to the political mobilization of the large concentrations of gay people in the South’s cities. In cities with more than 500,000 people, nearly nine percent of 1998 voters self-identified as gay or lesbian, compared to less than four percent in small towns and suburbs and about two percent in rural areas (Bailey 2000). As a result, politicians in southern cities are more likely to be responsive to gay concerns than those in other areas. This is not to suggest that governments in the South, even all major city governments, are sympathetic to the gay movement. In five southern states—AL, MS, SC, OK, and TN—no jurisdiction has adopted a non-discriminatory policy that includes gays.

Public Policy: State Legislatures

Southern state legislatures have generally been more receptive to social conservatives and less so to gay voters. Legislation opposed by the gay community, such as bills defining marriage as only between a man and a woman and bans on adoptions by same-sex couples, has generally been more successful in the South than elsewhere. And policies favored by gay activists have not fared as well as in the rest of the country. Not a single southern

state has passed civil rights legislation that includes gays, and ten of the 16 states where sodomy is still illegal are in the South.

This condition is changing, however, with laws favored by gay activists getting serious attention in most southern legislatures. One reason for the change has been the growth and persistence of gay lobbying groups in the South. Organizations such as Equality Florida, Georgia Equality Project, and the Lesbian and Gay Rights Lobby of Texas have learned to mobilize the gay community and its allies and now have a noticeable impact on southern legislatures. “The South is the next frontier of our movement,” noted David Elliot, a spokesman for the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force.

Hate Crimes Legislation

In recent years, gay activists have sought to persuade state legislatures to pass “hate crimes” laws, which seek to deter crimes against persons based on race, religion or sexual orientation, usually by providing stiffer penalties. Perhaps because opposition to crimes against gay people is a relatively easy stance to defend, southern legislatures have been more open to passing hate crimes laws than other policies sought by gay activists.

As of February 2002, 24 state legislatures across the nation have passed hate crimes laws that cover gay people. Six of them are in the South—Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Tennessee, and Texas. In addition, hate crimes bills have passed one house, but not both, in Alabama, Arkansas, and South Carolina. In 1999 the South Carolina state Senate passed a hate crimes bill that included sexual orientation by a vote of 39 to 5, with both the majority (D) and minority (R) leaders supporting the measure. “I thought I was in Rhode Island,” said Tony Snell, president of the South Carolina Gay and Lesbian Pride Movement. Governor Jim Hodges (D) agreed to sign the bill, but it subsequently failed in the House (Wyman 2001c).

In 2001, the Texas legislature, with a Republican Senate and a Democratic House, passed a bill providing for stiffer penalties for perpetrators of crimes motivated by hatred based on, among other criteria, sexual orientation. Governor Rick Perry (R) signed the bill into law. Many observers believe the law did not pass in 2000 because Republicans in the Texas legislature did not want then-Governor George W. Bush (R) to have to make a decision to sign or veto the bill, fearing that it would interfere with his presidential campaign (Duggan 2001).

In February, 2002, the Alabama state senate’s judiciary committee passed a bill adding sexual orientation to the state’s hate crimes law. The vote was narrow and partisan—six Democrats voted yes, five Republicans

voted no. The bill's prospects in the full Senate are unclear. Last year, the Alabama House passed a similar bill by 49 to 39 (Chandler 2002).

Employment Rights

Across the nation, 21 state governments have policies that prohibit discrimination against public employees based on sexual orientation; none of these is in the South.

In January 2002, newly inaugurated Virginia Governor Mark Warner (D) issued his first executive order, which banned discrimination based on race, religion and other factors by state agencies. Warner omitted sexual orientation, much to the dismay of the state's gay activists, including the Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Stonewall Democrats, who had worked actively on Warner's behalf (Wyman 2002b).

Higher Education

Of the 348 colleges and universities that have policies against discrimination based on sexual orientation, 68 (20%) are in the South (see also Appendix C) (Thompson 1994). In some institutions, such policies are adopted with little controversy. In others, however, the decision enters the political arena. In December, 2001, the faculty senate of the University of South Carolina voted in favor of an anti-discrimination policy that includes sexual orientation. In response, one of the school's trustees, Michael Mungo, contended that "gays are trying to take over the world," and several Republican lawmakers, including Lieutenant Governor Bob Peeler (who subsequently lost a primary bid in June 2002 to become the Republican candidate for governor), have come out against such a policy. In addition, state Senator John Hawkins (R) has introduced legislation to prevent state institutions from protecting gays from discrimination (Smith 2001).

While it is difficult to make significant comparisons among the states based on these low numbers, it is notable that the largest two states in the South—Texas and Florida—are not at the top of this list. North Carolina with 19 is first and Virginia with 11 is second.

The Private Sector

There are 298 companies on the Fortune 500 list with internal policies that prohibit workplace discrimination against gay employees. Fifty-two (17%) of these are based in the South. In addition, there are some 1145 smaller firms nationwide that have such policies; 144 (13%) are in the South

(Human Rights Campaign 2002c). Southern companies account for 196 (14%) of the 1443 firms nationwide that have non-discrimination policies that include gay employees (Appendix D).

Conclusion

The extent of pro-gay change in the South is impressive—given the conservative environment, both socially and politically—in which the changes have occurred. At the same time, the change in virtually all areas is consistently below the amount of change that is occurring in the rest of the country.

The South accounts for roughly 33 percent of the nation’s population, but only 15 percent of its openly gay officeholders, 20 percent of the local jurisdictions that have adopted a ban on anti-gay discrimination for their employees, 20 percent of the colleges and universities that bar anti-gay discrimination, and 14 percent of the business firms that have non-discrimination policies that include gays. And while six southern state legislatures have passed hate crimes legislation that applies to gays, none have passed basic civil rights legislation that bans anti-gay bias in jobs or housing.

Whether the changes and the rate of change are good or bad public policy depends ultimately on one’s values. Nevertheless, it appears that the South is behaving toward the gay movement much as it has toward other civil rights movements—resisting, but ultimately accepting, the aims of those who feel excluded.

APPENDIX A Openly Gay Officeholders in the South

Florida

Scott Bernstein	Dade Circuit Court Judge
Mark King Leban	Dade County Judge
Victoria Sigler	Dade County Judge
David Young	Dade Juvenile Court Judge
Patty Sheehan	Orlando City Council
John Fiore	Mayor of Wilton Manors
Gary Resnick	Wilton Manors City Council
Craig Sherritt	Wilton Manors City Council
Jeremy Anthony	Key West City Council
Greg Ullman	Miami Shores Village Council
Larry Gierer	Oakland Park City Commission

... continued

APPENDIX A (continued)

Georgia

Karla Drenner	House of Representatives
Cathy Woolard	President, Atlanta City Council
Anne Fauver	Atlanta City Council
Kecia Cunningham	Decatur City Commissioner
Bobby Carnes	East Point City Council
Alex Prince	East Point City Council
Al Fowler	Mayor of Pine Lake
Lisa Hudson	Pine Lake City Council

North Carolina

Michael Nelson	Mayor of Carrboro
Julia Boseman	Wilmington Co. Commission
Gloria Faley	Chapel Hill School Board

Texas

Glen Maxey	State House of Representatives
Margo Frasier	Travis County Sheriff
John Loza	Dallas City Council
Ed Oakley	Dallas City Council
Michael Dupree	Dallas Constable
Jose Plata	Dallas School Board
Annisie Parker	Houston City Council

Virginia

Jay Fissette	Arlington County Board
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Source: GLVF (2002).

APPENDIX B
47 Southern Localities with Pro-Gay Laws

Arkansas

Fayetteville

Florida

Broward County
Broward School District
Dade School District
Gainesville
Key West
Lake Worth
Lee County School Board

Leon County
Leon School District
Miami Beach
Miami-Dade County
Monroe County
Orlando
Palm Beach County
Pinellas County School District
Tallahassee
Tampa
West Palm Beach

... continued

APPENDIX B (continued)

<p>Georgia Atlanta Decatur DeKalb County Fulton County Lithia Springs Tybee Island</p> <p>Kentucky Henderson Jefferson County Lexington Louisville</p> <p>Louisiana New Orleans</p> <p>North Carolina Carrboro Chapel Hill Durham Raleigh</p>	<p>South Carolina Charleston Columbia</p> <p>Tennessee Marysville</p> <p>Texas Austin Dallas Fort Worth Houston</p> <p>Virginia Alexandria Arlington County Charlottesville Charlottesville School District Fairfax County Roanoke Virginia Beach</p>
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Source: Human Rights Campaign (2002a).

APPENDIX C
Southern Colleges and Universities that Ban Discrimination
Based on Sexual Orientation

<p>Alabama—0 None</p> <p>Arkansas—1 Hendrix College</p> <p>Florida—4 Eckerd College Rollins College University of Miami University of Tampa</p> <p>Georgia—7 Emory University Georgia Institute of Technology</p>	<p>Georgia Southern University Georgia State University Oglethorpe University University of Georgia West Georgia State University</p> <p>Kentucky—8 Berea College Centre College Eastern Kentucky University Spalding University Transylvania University University of Kentucky University of Louisville Western Kentucky University</p>
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APPENDIX C (continued)

Louisiana—2

Tulane University
University of Louisiana Lafayette

Mississippi—1

University of Mississippi

North Carolina—19

Appalachian State University
Davidson College
Duke University
East Carolina University
Elon College
Guilford College
North Carolina A&T State University
North Carolina Central University
North Carolina School of the Arts
North Carolina State University
Salem College
University of North Carolina
at Asheville
University of North Carolina
at Chapel Hill
University of North Carolina
at Charlotte
University of North Carolina
at Greensboro
University of North Carolina
at Wilmington
Wake Forest University
Warren Wilson College
Western Carolina University

Oklahoma—1

None

South Carolina—1

Furman University

Tennessee—3

East Tennessee State University
University of Memphis
Vanderbilt University

Texas—10

Huston-Tillotson College
Rice University
Southern Methodist University
Southwestern University
Texas A&M University
Texas Women's University
Trinity University
University of Houston
University of Texas
University of Texas at El Paso

Virginia—11

College of William and Mary
Hollins University
James Madison University
Mary Washington College
Old Dominion University
Radford University
Randolph Macon College
University of Richmond
University of Virginia
Virginia Commonwealth University
Virginia Polytechnic University
Washington and Lee University

Source: Human Rights Campaign (2002a).

APPENDIX D
State Breakdown of 196 Southern Companies with
Non-Discrimination Policies that Include Sexual Orientation

	Fortune 500	Other	Total
Alabama	1	1	2
Arkansas	1	2	3
Florida	5	14	19
Georgia	10	18	28
Kentucky	2	3	5
Louisiana	1	3	4
Mississippi	1	1	2
North Carolina	7	17	24
Oklahoma	0	2	2
South Carolina	0	3	3
Tennessee	2	5	7
Texas	14	42	56
Virginia	8	33	41
Total/South	52	144	196
Total/Nation	298	1145	1443

Source: Human Rights Campaign (2002c).

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