

The Queer/Gay Assimilationist Split: The Suits vs. the Sluts

by Benjamin H. Shepard

“I’ll say it loud; I’ll say it proud: I love drug companies,” HIV-positive Andrew Sullivan recently boasted in *The New York Times Magazine*. As one of the most visible gay journalists in the nation, the statement spoke to a core dilemma within a gay and lesbian movement split between gay assimilationists, such as Sullivan, and social justice minded queers. The question was, how had this free-market loving Tory Thatcherite become a spokesman for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) movement? Sullivan’s cavalier boast neglected the point that ACT UP, the pro-queer AIDS direct action group, had not only spent almost fifteen years fighting to get expedited approval for life saving medications, but had put their bodies on the line to get drug companies to lower prices so people could actually afford them. If ever there was a beneficiary of ACT UP’s work, it was Sullivan, yet on more than one occasion in the mainstream press this gay, HIV-positive man has flaunted his contempt for their legacy. Sullivan explained that his medications cost his insurance company some \$15,600 a year. And he seemed to be saying now that “I’ve got mine,” the ongoing AIDS epidemic—now predominantly affecting poor people, drug users, minority women, and those in the developing world who cannot afford the life saving drugs—no longer mattered. The problem was that Sullivan was not alone.

Protease inhibitors transformed HIV/AIDS from a disease that brought almost certain death within a few years to a possibly chronic disease. Before protease inhibitors, gay people with HIV/AIDS were forced to fight for their lives. This meant challenging a system

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that allowed the AIDS carnage to spread. Fighting AIDS meant fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and the lack of access to health care in America. "After we kick the shit out of this disease I intend to be alive to kick the shit out of this system so that it will never happen again," Vito Russo, an HIV-positive gay man who unlike Sullivan did not have health insurance, pledged in October 1988. While Russo did not live to see it, ACT UP spent the next twelve years living up to his words. And battling drug companies was a cornerstone of the group's work. Yet, with the health brought by the life saving drugs in 1996, the urgency of the queer social justice activism which made those medications available in the United States became an inconvenience that gay assimilationists, such as Andrew Sullivan, felt privileged to ignore. AIDS drugs were not an isolated example. As the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) movement has gained visibility, commercialization threatens wholly to subvert the movement's substance.

A case in point was last year's bland Millennium March on Washington. Before 2000 there had been three national gay and lesbian marches on Washington. Each event marked a dominant issue in the history of the GLBT movement. The 1979 march, held a decade after Stonewall and within months of the White Night Riots in San Francisco, focused on themes of visibility against homophobia; the 1987 march targeted a mounting AIDS crisis; and in 1993, gays in the military. Then there was the Millennium March on Washington held on April 30, 2000. The 2000 march didn't reflect a unifying issue so much as a profound chasm within the movement itself. On one side were queers who sought to link the GLBT movement with broader social justice issues, and on the other were the by now professional bureaucratic cadre of single issue gay assimilationist organizations aspiring for place at the national policy table. Queers, who envisioned their movement as a critique of social, sexual, and economic "regimes of the normal" rejected the Millennium March, while mainstream gay groups who sought to portray the gay community as "just like everyone else" turned to corporate sponsorship for the event. And you had to really search to find any mention of AIDS in the march. The Millennium March illustrated the ways an increasing number of gays have turned their backs on the les-

sons of AIDS activism, gay liberation and their links with broader social justice movements.

In the years since the twenty-fifth anniversary of Stonewall in 1994, the split between the gay assimilationists and the queer activists has only grown and grown. Some, such as author Sara Schulman, blame the problem on the “homocrats” seduced into inaction by Bill Clinton. Yet, the phenomenon is not unique to the last decade. Since the birth of the modern gay liberation movement in 1969, there has been a queer/gay assimilationist split.

Homophiles vs. Liberationists

Differences of approach mark the entire history of the gay liberation movement. Gay liberation began in the late 1960s with the epochal recognition that official intimidation was all too regular a feature of gay and lesbian social life, and that successful public resistance was possible. Liberation meant queers would fight back. Flash points included the police raids and ensuing riots at the California Hall in San Francisco in 1965 and the Stonewall Inn in New York in 1969.

On July 9, 1969, the Mattachine Society held a meeting to follow up on the Stonewall Riots. For well over a decade, this honorable and veteran homophile group had approached gay rights from an apologist perspective, downplaying their roots in the milieu of the Communist Party, and asking but for tolerance; the most they could imagine to be possible. After Stonewall, a new gay radicalism overwhelmed this incrementalism, a new group and movement was born at the meeting called by the Mattachine Society. Its name was the Gay Liberation Front (GLF); the movement, gay liberation. The Gay Liberation Front, named to reference third world movements, aimed to fight the cultural homophobia alongside racism, sexism, and militarism. The movement aimed to free sexuality, transform the family as an institution, end anti-queer violence, and develop a new vocabulary for the erotic.¹ It was a social movement built on public visibility, personal exploration or growth, and an understanding that oppression based on sexual identity took place in a broad social context. R. D. Laing’s late 1960s slogan, “The personal is political” was central. “Better Blatant, Than Latent!” liberationists

declared, rejecting defensive notions of privacy, propriety, and incrementalism that characterized the homophile organizations.²

Martha Shelly, who co-founded the GLF, asserted: "Other organizations were for people who wanted to join the mainstream, who thought the only thing wrong with American society is that they excluded gays." People who saw things that way did not stay long around the GLF unless they changed their minds. GLF activists, on the other hand, sought to address the pervasive racism and militarism which plagued American culture as much as homophobia. GLF worked with anti-racist groups, even building a tenuous but forward leaning alliance with the Black Panthers.³

Gay Liberationists worked from the vantage point that all oppression—from sexism, to racism, to the Vietnam War—originated from a single source: a white, heterosexist, male dominated capitalist society. An editorial in the *San Francisco Free Press* outlines the approach: "The same oppressive government and society that massacres Vietnamese and victimizes American servicemen conscripted to fight an unjust and imperialistic war oppresses and alienates all of us who fail or refuse to comply with its concept of accepted behavior." As much as anything, GLF targeted an oppressive social structure. Nick Benton of the *San Francisco Gay Sunshine*, explained that the movement spoke for:

Those who see themselves as oppressed—politically oppressed by an oppressor that not only is down on homosexuality, but equally down on all things that are not white, straight, middle class, pro-establishment. It should harken to a greater cause—that cause of human liberation, of which homosexual liberation is just one aspect.⁴

But this sort of broad political vision was not truly shared by many who were comfortable and conformable enough in their own lives, their sex life alone excepted. Shortly after the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in 1969, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) split from the group to lobby for legislative reform for gays. The GAA constitution stated the group was "exclusively devoted to the liberation of homosexuals and avoids involvement in any program of action not obviously relevant to homosexuals." Exposing a split which would continue for the

next three decades, GLF loyalists accused the GAA of being overly white, patriarchal, and assimilationist.⁵

Sexuality and Difference

Nothing divided the new liberationists from the homophiles more than strategies around the role of sex within the movement. For the homophiles (the predecessors to today's assimilationists), gay sexuality was something to keep quiet about or apologize for. For the liberationists, gay sex was something to revel within and create global solidarity around; "Perverts of the world unite!" was a central GLF anthem. Gay liberationists recognized that while many homosexuals claimed they were just like everyone else, the dominant culture did not see them that way. As such, gay liberation, in alliance with women's liberation, created a vision of sexuality as cultural transformation. Autonomy of the body from the state was a central principle of both movements. Both movements questioned basic tenets of family structure and patriarchal authority in America.⁶

For liberationists, "gay" was a revolutionary identity capable of disarming institutions which pathologized sexuality: teachers, psychiatrists, police. Their movement would free us all from the shame, guilt and sin that attached to sexual activity and would expose the rigidities of gender to be historical constructs within our means to dissolve. David Patten, an AIDS activist who came out in the seventies, suggests, "Gay Liberation was about more than just coming out as queer, it was about allowing all people to come out as who they are."

Former GLFer Jack Nichols recalls his vision of the era: "I began hoping—in contrast to the ghetto separatists—for a final melting of gay/straight divisions and the creating of a sexually integrated society in which everybody would be free to love and make love without self identifying though specialized sexual labels." Sex roles and monolithic categories of heterosexuality and homosexuality were bound to fade within a potential bisexuality. Instead of serving as a tool for production or an indicator of social status, sexuality was understood as something pleasurable and relational. Queer theory of a generation later would build on the vision of emancipated sexuality articulated within the cultural conversation created during gay liberation.

And, of course, the idea of a liberated, uncategorized sexuality was a tremendous threat to institutionalized heterosexuality/normativity,

defined against what it is not—queer—more than what it is for. Despite the GLF's positioning as a "unisexual" group, many lesbians were torn between gay liberation and the women's movement. "We have to have our chance as women to realize where we are. We're here because we do relate to men's and women's gay liberation, but we must reserve the right to make certain decisions ourselves," one woman in GLF explained. A number of women left GLF over differing notions of what exactly sexual liberation meant and in frustration with chauvinism in the group. GLF would not survive these tensions, but the liberation movement broke out in dozens and then hundreds of countries around the world. The breakdown of GLF went along with a shift to separatist positions between gay men and lesbians, gay and women's liberation. Nonetheless, throughout the rest of the 1970s an obvious self interest in mutual support—e.g., not to have two pride parades—disguised that fact.

In the following years, the gay liberation movement become more and more institutionalized. The struggle shifted from grass-roots community groups to legal battles in the hands of lawyers. In 1973, *The Advocate*, a gay newspaper, editorialized that the gay liberation movement should be run by "responsible, talented, experts with a widespread financial backing from all strata of the gay community." The problem was that a politics of respectability required a basic trust in just that capitalist social structure that only a couple of years earlier GLF had described as sexist, racist, and homophobic. Many had become queer not to fit in. Countless gays, lesbians and queers, particularly gender/fetish, SM, leather, or transgender communities had very little interest in fitting into the status quo. A conflict between the suits and the sluts would characterize much of the history of the GLBT movement and its inherent divides.

Battling the Right

The first national gay and lesbian march on Washington was held in 1979. The march was a challenge to the first incarnations of the Christian Right which were taking the gay freedom movement very seriously. The Reagan election of 1980 produced a significant threat. And by the early 1980s it was clear that the AIDS epidemic was threatening the very existence of queer communities: assimilationists, activists, homophiles, and quiet closeted types alike.

Everyone. The 1986 *Bowers v. Hardwick* Supreme Court decision upholding the ancient and vicious pre-liberation sodomy laws confirmed a widespread cultural attack against both gays and lesbians.

The AIDS quilt, a collection of individual memorial quilts for those who had died of the virus, was first unfolded at the 1987 march on Washington. The quilt's presence, organized by former Harvey Milk aide Cleve Jones, symbolized a continuity of the struggle from the 1979 march and movement. Old time gay liberationists and first time activists converged for the march. Sixty-four people were arrested for stopping traffic in front of the White House as the Names Quilt was laid out for the first time. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) was but three months old. For a brief moment, gay and queer worlds, radicals and incrementalists, united against the governmental indifference to the epidemic.⁷ Long-time organizer Leslie Cagan recalled: "It was an extremely powerful day because there was a kind of unity in our communities that the AIDS crisis had helped bring about." It was in the context of the AIDS crisis that many lesbians and gay men started working together again.

For the next three years, ACT UP merged its anger with the legacy of Gay Liberation, snatching the gay movement out of the hands of an assimilationist civil rights lobby. The group's 1989 Stonewall 20 rally clearly marked the link between AIDS and queer activism. For a brief moment, AIDS activism, and the social justice activism driving it, were linked with queer activism. AIDS topped the GLBT civil rights agenda. Carrying a banner reading: "The Tradition, Lesbians and Gay Men Fighting Back!" marchers chanted:

Arrest us, just try it.

Remember, Stonewall was a riot.

The Clinton Years

After Pat Buchanan's call for "a culture war" at the Republican Convention in 1992, for a time gays unified behind Clinton. After the 1992 election, Clinton and the New Democrats had the support of the gay constituency without having to do much, ("don't ask don't tell"). Nonetheless, the Clinton administration gave "official" gays and lesbians the apparent proximity to power they had never had during the

Reagan-Bush years. And surely this contributed to the assimilationist strength within the movement.

By 1993, the movement was drifting right and signs of a split were emerging. Gays in the military had never been a theme that could unite the gay movement, as many queers thought the empire was more of a problem than the terms of service in its military. The split was clear and visible during the Stonewall 25th anniversary in 1994; one of the fundraising events was held on the aircraft carrier *Intrepid*. For a movement with roots in the antiwar movement, the symbolism was difficult to swallow. Advertisements of credit cards with rainbow flags on them appeared throughout the gay press in the weeks before the event. Many were turned off as much of the countercultural impulse of a once radical movement was being lost in the marketing of the anniversary. The celebration of Stonewall 25 revealed the encroachment of corporate influence on the movement.

1994 would also mark the beginning of a five year "sex panic" debate between gay journalists such as Gabrielle Rotello, Michelangelo Signorile, Andrew Sullivan, and Larry Kramer and queer activists/theorists such as Doug Crimp, Michael Warner, Eve Pendleton and Jim Eigo who favored the principles of gay liberation to the politics of assimilation. In a nod to the times, this ad hoc group of queer activists dubbed themselves SexPanic! In a series of books and articles Kramer, Sullivan, Rotello and Signorile narrated gay life from an apologist perspective, asking good gays to divorce themselves from their alter ego, "the promiscuous queer."⁸ Their storyline of gay life favored military service, the pro-life movement, marriage, tax cuts, law and order policies. SexPanic! rejected the notion that queer culture must give up its diverse sexual culture to gain respectability. Only a year earlier Andrew Sullivan had labeled queer activism, "a strange confluence of political abdication and psychological violence."⁹ The new sex wars were upon us. At issue was the question of who spoke for "the gay community" and consequently the sanitation of the movement. Both issues would continue to play out within discussions of the Millennium March.

March without a Reason

Rumblings about the Millennium March began in March of 1998. Few concerned could get a straight answer about the event.

By June, activists were aware that this was a top-down process being shaped behind closed doors by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) and the United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC) to the exclusion of diverse queer communities nationwide. The problem was that the Millennium March was an event called in the name of the gay community. Yet to the rest of the activist community, it appeared that five white Professional Gays and Lesbians sat down and made a decision to put on the march representing their views and definitions of gay community, and that decision was never open for reconsideration or elaboration.

On September 18, 1998, the Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process placed an ad in the *Washington Blade*. It stated: "Since February, when the Human Rights Campaign and the Metropolitan Community Church initiated their call for an event in the year 2000, there has been a disregard for our movement's history of grassroots empowerment." The Millennium March was not billed as a march for gay rights, let alone gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender anything. It was to be a patriotic family-values affair pitched to the right-wing media. Raucous social activists and transgender or leather folks were to be disappeared. The Ad Hoc Committee suggested that the problems of the march reflected a broader crisis of direction and definition that the movement must confront. Those problems were:

- How are community decisions made and who makes them?
- Who has access—who doesn't?
- Who has visibility—who doesn't?
- What is the relationship between money, control and power?

An Emerging Split

Within months of announcing plans for the Millennium March, the Human Rights Campaign announced its endorsement of pro-life Republican Al D'Amato for the U.S. Senate. The endorsement of a man who had supported Reagan's budget cuts, the repeal of abortion rights, and criminal neglect of the AIDS carnage was an act of profound political amnesia. The endorsement was a slap in the face of those who had supported the HRC. It brought to the forefront a glaring example of the divide between queers with an interest in social and economic justice for all, and gay advocates

who see their movement as a single issue. The following year, while queer groups nationwide took positions on recommending or rejecting the death penalty for Matthew Shepard's killers (Log Cabin Republicans for, NGLTF and Lambda against) HRC refused to take a position. Their spokesman explained that debates over social justice issues were not "germane" to their mission.¹⁰

In an essay entitled "Endorsement of D'Amato = Betrayal," Carmen Vasquez argued that those who question whether the progressive social justice agenda serves queers should ask the thousands of gays and lesbians on general assistance for whom budget cuts mean the difference between low-income housing and the street. Vasquez suggested the queer/gay assimilationist split "is a rift between those who want to be normal at any cost and those of us who believe gay liberation (and therefore reproductive rights) is a central and inviolable tenet of our struggle for freedom."¹¹ The idea of normal sexuality implies a culture of privilege that guarantees social injustice. A movement positioned to attain civil rights in some distant future, but to act today as power brokers for those who accept the prevailing social and economic system, has no room for sex radicals or gender deviant people of any kind, and much less for activists who seek to challenge the current social system. Leslie Cagan explains that,

...the divisions that we see in the gay movement now can certainly be traced back to the earliest days. In fact, it has only been magnified as we've gotten bigger and more institutions and organizations have been built. But there really is a profound difference between those people whose real agenda is about integrating out gay people into the various structures of this culture: the economic, the social, the cultural, the political.... And that's one sort of thread, one perspective in this community. The other one which I certainly align myself with, as [do] the other members of the Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process, is that we are critical of the whole ball of wax. And its not about integrating ourselves into this, its about adding. What the struggle for gay liberation does is to add another level of understanding about the nature of the oppression that we're up against.

Debate over the D'Amato endorsement and the Millennium March dominated the November National Gay and Lesbian Task Force meetings held in November 1998 in Pittsburgh. The Ad Hoc Committee for an Open Process held a number of open meetings during the conference. "You've betrayed women, people of color and poor people by endorsing D'Amato," Robert Haaland of the San Francisco Tenants' Union told Human Rights Campaign representatives during one session. Suzanne Pharr argued that a progressive movement has to address multiple concerns. She said, "To have single-issue politics means that we think that we're only queer, and we're not. We want to live fully in this society. Liberation is not about liberation of just a piece of oneself....Do you want to create a better world or do you want to create a better world for queers?"¹²

The HRC maintains the D'Amato endorsement and the Millennium March were part of a pragmatic strategy designed to see their agenda enacted into law. Yet the group has very few results to show for this strategy. The End Discrimination Act did not make it through the Senate, while the homophobic Defense of Marriage Act was signed into law by their hero Clinton. Hate Crimes laws, high on the HRC agenda, are problematic because they emphasize a law and order mentality over social justice and equal protection under the law. The HRC never came close to securing anything resembling justice for people who are gay and in the armed forces, while accepting the premise of an imperial military. Despite heavy lobbying, the group failed to beat back the pernicious Knight ballot initiative in California. As a result, activists are left wondering what the HRC has done with their millions and millions of dollars?

So the Split Continues

Today, queer/AIDS activists are taking the lessons of their early years and applying them to the inequalities of access to AIDS drugs across the world. Years after its supposed demise, ACT UP pickets hounded presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore over his vile campaign (prompted by the drug companies that poured cash into his coffers) against poor countries that manufacture generic versions of expensive life-saving drugs or import medicine at the best world price. Clinton and Gore backed off. AIDS activists played key roles in protests against the World Trade Organization

and World Bank, both of which had become clear obstacles to getting drugs into bodies of people with AIDS all over the world. At the same time the "I've got mine" assimilationists write their columns in the glossies eager for a gay right-wing voice. Yet until sodomy laws are repealed, no gay person, no matter how assimilated they feel, will be completely free from the threat of prosecution. Just two years ago, a gay couple in Texas were arrested for having sex at home.¹³

Leslie Cagan concluded,

I think that we, the queer activists, one of our particular roles, is to constantly be reminding the progressive social change movements that the issues of sexuality are not secondary. They do not wait until after the revolution. They have to be an integrated part of our political thinking and action. So it's not a question now of saying, we're done with the gay issues, and we're going to talk about class and race, it's about the much more full understanding of how these things all shape each other. Do we really want to be part of the mainstream? What we've hoped and what we've tried to contribute to this Millennium March is to have all these activists around the country look back at these issues and refocus on some of these kinds of issues in our movement and not just sort of go along to get along.

In the end, what is apparent is that the queer/gay assimilationist split is a class division within the gay movement. It is as much about capitalism as it is about anything else. "The question is what's going to happen as a result?" wondered author Sara Schulman. She continued:

The ideal would be that gay people could take our place in the left that we've never been allowed to have. That would be the best. I would rather be with people who have the same social vision as I do [but] they don't want us. The reason we can't right now be fully integrated into the broad left and be in a position of leadership, is because what gay liberation requires is that straight people see themselves as not neutral, not natural, and not objective. It requires that they be transformed in their self-image. And that's a high order. It is the same barrier that race has faced inside the left. It is about dominant people having to see themselves as subjective and not owning neutrality.

Martin Duberman has written about the same issue. In an essay entitled, "The Divided Left: Identity Politics vs. Class," he suggests that instead of considering identity vs. class, the often white, heterosexual left could actually benefit by considering the "emancipatory possibilities" of queer and feminist theory. Among queer and multi-cultural theorists, there is a debate about the inadequacy or possible transience of identity labels, such as "gay," "black," or "Latino." If the broader left were paying attention to the lessons of queer activism instead of asking queers to conform to heteronormative prerequisites, they could gain potent allies in the struggle against entrenched class (and race, and gender) hierarchies of privilege.¹⁴

In Conclusion

There is a way out of the queer/gay assimilationist split. Currently a number of queer activists are borrowing the lessons of Seattle and attempting to create a new queer politics which does not see identity or class based activism as zero sum games. An alliance of queer and labor activists is emerging; the first glimmer was the "Lesbian/Gay Labor Alliance" that formed to defeat the homophobic Briggs initiative in California in 1978. This ongoing development is set out in the excellent book *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance*, a volume of essays and interviews edited by Kitty Krupat and Patric McCreery, two American Studies graduate students at NYU. Their thesis is simple: "We start from the belief that sexual rights can be pursued most effectively through a radical coalition between labor and GLBT movements."¹⁵ To young people suddenly, personally, aware of their sexual oppression, the alliance of queer and labor activists offers more hope of changing the world, and their lives, for the better than anything on offer from the likes of Andrew Sullivan. A path opens up as a new century arises; a vision of teamsters, turtles, and queers blocking downtown intersections all over the world that should bring both a grin and a tear to such of the queers' homophile predecessors as have survived—who could have imagined?

NOTES

Interviews with the author: Leslie Cagan, 13 February, 2000; Sara Schulman, 3 August, 2001.

1. Dennis Altman, *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 83.

2. Michael Bronski, *The Pleasure Principle: Sex, Backlash, and the Struggle for Gay Freedom* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1998), 67.
3. See Donn Teal, *The Gay Militants: How Gay Liberation Began in America, 1969-1971* (New York : St. Martin's Press, 1971).
4. Nick Benton, "Who Needs It?," *Gay Sunshine*, August-September, 1970
5. Teal, 83, 98-109.
6. Bronski, 69.
7. See Jane Rosett, "Dressed for Arrest: The Day the Suits Seized the Street," *Poz Magazine*, May, 1997.
8. Michael Warner, "We're Queer, Remember?," *The Advocate*, 17 September, 1997, 7.
9. Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York: Vantage, 1996), 93.
10. Delia M. Rios "Debate Over the Death Penalty Reveals Diversity of the Gay Movement," *Newhouse News Service*, 2 April, 1999.
11. Carmen Vasquez, "Endorsement of D'Amato Equals Betrayal," *Gay Community News* 24, (1998); 14.
12. L. A. Johnson, "Differing Agendas Divide Activists," *Online Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, 14 November, 1998.
13. *Badpuppy*, "Texas: 2 Males Jailed for Private Bedroom Sex, Man Facing Sodomy Charges Under 119-Year Old Sodomy Law." *Gay Today*, 9 November, 1998.
14. Martin Duberman, "The Divided Left: Identity Politics vs. Class," in *Left Out: The Politics of Exclusion/Essays/1964-1999* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 426.
15. Kitty Krupat and Patric McCreery (eds.), *Out at Work: Building a Gay-Labor Alliance* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 2001), xi.

Fifty Years Ago in **MONTHLY REVIEW**

"The fringes of the ruling class do not reach to the fringes of the working class. Between the two there is a wide social space which is occupied by what we can hardly avoid calling the middle class. We should not forget, however, that the middle class is much more heterogeneous than either the ruling class or the working class. It has no solid core, and it shades off irregularly (and differently in different localities) into the fringes of the class above it and the class below it. Indeed we might say that the middle class consists of a collection of fringes, and that its social cohesion is largely due to the existence in all of its elements of a desire to be in the ruling class above it and to avoid being in the working class below it."

—Paul M. Sweezy, "The American Ruling Class: Part One,"
Monthly Review, May 1951, p. 16