

## **“A Prototype for the Nation”**

Early Gay Coalition Building in the 1965 New York Review Board Conference



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*Cover Image: Dick Leitsch at the Mattachine Society of New York office in 1965, Louis Liotta, New York Post Archives via Getty Images.*

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## Introduction

In the early afternoon of October 12, 1965, Dick Leitsch arrived at the corner of 40<sup>th</sup> Street and 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue.<sup>1</sup> Leitsch was a handsome thirty-year-old white man from a Catholic family in Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>2</sup> He was also gay. Accompanied by Julian Hodges and Irwin D. Strauss, he was representing the New York branch of the Mattachine Society, the oldest homosexual emancipation organization in the United States, at the New York Review Board Conference.<sup>3</sup>

The conference's aim was to reform the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board, the municipal body that heard police misconduct complaints, by changing the panel's composition from three policemen to nine civilian representatives.<sup>4</sup> It was attended by thirty-eight delegates, representing diverse organizations such as the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Puerto Rican Bar Association, and Citizens Union.<sup>5</sup> While the conference only lasted a day, it was part of a multi-year campaign for independent civilian review from the summer of 1964 to the end of 1966.

The Mattachine Society's attendance is surprising. The national organization was first founded in 1951 as part of the homophile<sup>6</sup> movement that emerged after World War II.<sup>7</sup> At a time

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<sup>1</sup> "NYC Review Board Conference Program," October 12, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, Mattachine Society of New York, Inc. (MSNY) Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. McFadden, "Dick Leitsch, Whose 'Sip-In' Was a Gay Rights Milestone, Dies at 83," *New York Times*, June 22, 2018.

<sup>3</sup> "NYC Review Board Conference Program," October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>4</sup> "The Organization and Purposes of the NYC Review Board Conference," February 15, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records.

<sup>5</sup> "NYC Review Board Conference Program," October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>6</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, Box 14, Folder 39, New York Police Department (NYPD) Intelligence Records, New York Municipal Archives. The term "homophile" first appeared in 1920s Germany in response to psychoanalytic theories that claimed homosexuals were incapable of love. By the 60s, "homophile" was defined as "pertaining to the social movement devoted to the improvement of the status of the homosexual." The Mattachine explicitly differentiated the term from "homosexual," especially because some activists were straight allies. I use the term "homophile" in this paper to reflect how these organizations identified themselves.

<sup>7</sup> John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 58.

when homosexuals were widely seen as sick or sinful, the Mattachine generally promoted the view that homosexuals should respond to anti-gay oppression by accommodating to social norms and institutions.<sup>8</sup> The New York branch, which was founded in 1955, initially echoed the national organization's mission: to educate the public about homosexuality, to provide a space for gay socialization, and to connect homosexuals to lawyers, ministers, and medical professionals.<sup>9</sup> Until 1965, the Mattachine Society of New York explicitly recused itself from political activity, and outside of its 450 members, it had little visibility and influence.<sup>10</sup> The predominantly white and male-dominated Mattachine had no previous history of collaborating with non-homophile groups, while the NYCLU and NAACP knew little about homosexual issues. Yet the experience of police brutality and entrapment brought them together.

This thesis argues that, through the Civilian Complaint Review Board campaign, the Mattachine Society of New York legitimized its status as a minority civil rights organization—and homosexuals as a minority group. In 1965, the Mattachine underwent a major leadership change, where Leitsch and Hodges replaced the moderate “old guard,” and began to embrace political advocacy and direct action.<sup>11</sup> The conference would be the earliest instance of gay activists working in a unified coalition with established civil rights organizations. After October 12, representatives from the NAACP, Puerto Rican Bar Association, Urban League, and other participating organizations had a more robust understanding of how lesbians and gay men were uniquely harmed by policing.

The coalition ultimately failed to create an all-civilian review board. In November 1966, after the proposed alternative was rejected in a city-wide referendum, New York was left with the

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<sup>8</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 87.

<sup>9</sup> “The Mattachine Society, Inc. of New York,” September 22, 1965, Box 14, Folder 38, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>10</sup> “The Mattachine Society, Inc.,” September 22, 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records; D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 206.

<sup>11</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 166-168.

same three-policeman review board that it had two years earlier. But the campaign was still pivotal. By the end of 1966, the Mattachine Society of New York used its new alliances to successfully advocate against anti-gay policing. For the other civil rights and civil liberties organizations, the civilian review campaign would be the first time that discrimination against homosexuals was seen in tandem with discrimination against other minority groups.

Ultimately, this thesis illustrates how homophile activists developed coalitions with Black civil rights activists to engage in a laborious fight for political visibility—years before Stonewall and “Gay Power” and far earlier than most historians have imagined.

### *Literature Review*

Several scholars have written on the history of New York’s Civilian Complaint Review Board, but all of them focus on the 1966 battle between the police union and Mayor John Lindsay. Months after his election in November 1965, Lindsay issued an executive order adding four civilians to the existing three-policeman board. But a city wide-referendum in November 1966, which was called for by the police union, eventually voted to repeal the hybrid board.<sup>12</sup> Both Christopher Hayes’s *The Harlem Uprising: Segregation and Inequality in Postwar New York City* and Clarence Taylor’s *Fight the Power: African Americans and the Long History of Police Brutality in New York City* portray the Civilian Complaint Review Board campaign as a complete failure, and the 1966 referendum as proof of intensifying racial fissures in New York City.<sup>13</sup> Hayes focuses on the 1964 Harlem protests against police brutality and how civilian oversight was one of the “most persistently demanded policy change[s]” after the uprisings.<sup>14</sup> His

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<sup>12</sup> Christopher Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising: Segregation and Inequality in Postwar New York City*, *The Harlem Uprising* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2021), 222, 235.

<sup>13</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 240.

<sup>14</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 207.

study concludes that, after November 1966, “racial hostility and resentment in the city would intensify for decades.”<sup>15</sup> Taylor takes on the broader history of police brutality in New York, spanning the 1940s to Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration in the 2010s. While the review board campaign could have been a prime opportunity for improving police-community relations, Taylor argues, the police union’s referendum stoked the myth that civilian oversight would promote Black crime.<sup>16</sup>

Alongside their exclusive focus on the political battle, both studies overlook the review board campaign’s significance to the local organizations that represented New York’s various racial, ethnic, and religious communities, which played a central role in the 1965 Review Board Conference. Ruth Cowan’s “The New York City Civilian Review Board Referendum of 1966: A Case Study of Mass Politics” and Hayes’s “The heart of the city: civil rights, resistance and police reform in New York City, 1945-1966” mention the conference, but only describe the NAACP and NYCLU’s involvement in detail.<sup>17</sup>

In contrast, this thesis explores the coalitional politics of the Review Board Conference, and how it preceded, influenced, and disagreed with Lindsay’s decision to add four civilians to the review board. At a time when many historians have argued that Northern civil rights organizing was on the decline,<sup>18</sup> it is significant that an interracial coalition with diverse interests and demographic makeups presented a unified front against police misconduct. By analyzing the coalition’s strategies and impacts, especially from the Mattachine’s perspective, I challenge the

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<sup>15</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 240.

<sup>16</sup> Clarence Taylor, *Fight the Power: African Americans and the Long History of Police Brutality in New York City*, (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 143-145.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Cowan, “The New York City Civilian Review Board Referendum of 1966: A Case Study of Mass Politics” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1970); Christopher Hayes, “The Heart of the City: Civil Rights, Resistance and Police Reform in New York City, 1945-1966” (Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> As I elaborate in Chapter I, both Christopher Hayes and Martha Biondi have labeled the 1940s and 50s as the peak of civil rights in New York, and the following decades as a period of decline.

prevailing historiographical narrative that the 1966 referendum was a mere failure.

There is less literature on the Mattachine Society. Toby Marotta's *The Politics of Homosexuality* offers a brief history of the national organization and the New York affiliate, but it positions the Mattachine as a mere precursor to the gay liberation movement of later decades, rather than as a legitimate gay activist group.<sup>19</sup> John D'Emilio's *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970* constitutes the first and only comprehensive national history of the homophile movement. D'Emilio challenges popular myth—which situates the beginning of the gay rights movement at the 1969 Stonewall Riots—by narrating the development of homophile organizations in the 1950s.<sup>20</sup> Still, he portrays the New York Mattachine as a moderate and accommodationist organization that was limited in its contributions to gay life, especially compared to the militant organizing of the 1970s and 80s. This thesis both extends and problematizes D'Emilio's work by arguing that the Mattachine Society of New York not only laid the groundwork for later activism, but also took an active role in local political organizing.

Finally, two historians have studied coalitions between early gay organizations and civil rights groups in other cities. Timothy Stewart-Winter's *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* studies how the Mattachine Midwest forged links with Black activist groups and politicians in the 1980s. By the end of the decade, Stewart-Winter argues, Chicago's Black political leaders began to explicitly endorse gay rights in exchange for gay neighborhoods becoming a reliable voting bloc for them.<sup>21</sup> Christina Hanhardt's *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood*

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<sup>19</sup> Toby Marotta, *The Politics of Homosexuality* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981). Other works, such as Martin Meeker's "Behind the Mask of Respectability: Reconsidering the Mattachine Society and Male Homophile Practice, 1950s and 1960s," only detail the history of the national organization and the later San Francisco branch.

<sup>20</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 5.

<sup>21</sup> Timothy Stewart-Winter, *Queer Clout: Chicago and the Rise of Gay Politics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 184.



*History and the Politics of Violence* constructs a similar argument for San Francisco, as she traces the history of how the city’s gay and lesbian activists became involved in issues of urban development, crime and policing, and poverty.<sup>22</sup> While Hanhardt’s focus is on the West Coast, she briefly draws a parallel between Citizens Alert, a San Francisco reform group that included homophile activists, and the Mattachine’s involvement in the New York Review Board Conference.<sup>23</sup> My thesis builds off of Stewart-Winter’s and Hanhardt’s studies to demonstrate that substantial gay-Black coalitional work also occurred in New York, decades before either historian suggests.

This thesis will bridge the “end” of interracial civil rights organizing in New York with the “beginning” of militant gay activism in the city—as argued by historians of the civilian review board and of the homophile movement, respectively, about the mid-1960s. Against existing historiography, I argue that the Civilian Complaint Review Board campaign was not a mere failure, and that the Mattachine Society of New York was not a mere predecessor to the history of gay activism. Between 1964 and 1966, the Mattachine joined a noteworthy coalition that confronted both anti-gay and anti-Black police misconduct while simultaneously transforming itself into a fully-fledged advocate for gay rights.

**Chapter I** contextualizes the initial push for independent civilian review within the broader landscape of anti-gay and anti-Black policing practices. Both forms of repression escalated in 1964: the mayor and police cracked down on gay gathering places, while the police killing of a Black teenager caused Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant to erupt into protests.

**Chapter II** narrates the concurrent development of the Civilian Complaint Review Board

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<sup>22</sup> Christina B. Hanhardt, *Safe Space: Gay Neighborhood History and the Politics of Violence* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 70.

coalition and the rise of a new “militant” leadership in the Mattachine Society in 1965, and how the two subsequently converged at the Review Board Conference. The Mattachine not only used the conference to inform a straight audience about anti-gay policing, but also to assert itself as a legitimate member of the civil rights coalition. Finally, **Chapter III** contrasts the review board coalition’s losses—from Lindsay’s hybrid board to the referendum—with the Mattachine’s positive memory of the campaign. 1966 was a landmark year for the Mattachine Society of New York: it achieved victories in its anti-entrapment and anti-bar raid campaigns, which it credited to the new alliances it had formed during the conference. By analyzing these two seemingly contradictory accounts of 1966, I argue that, despite its short-term failures, the review board campaign was a pivotal moment in the development of gay activism and coalitional politics in New York City.

## I.

### Policing, 1964

After a night out in Greenwich Village, Pablo Mojica, a gay Columbia University student, went to Chick'n Rib for a quick meal with his friend. In the restaurant, Pablo quickly noticed two “attractive and resplendent” strangers in their mid-twenties—dressed in “tight white trousers”—approaching them. The strangers asked Pablo if he lived in the Village, and when he answered that he was from Queens, they offered him and his friend a ride home. Once they were in the car, the younger man flirtatiously asked Pablo and his friend what they “liked.” Pablo replied, “anything.” Then, “[t]hey went for their ride—to the police station.”<sup>24</sup>

In 1964, the Mattachine Society of New York received hundreds of cases like Pablo's. New York City's homosexual population faced a high risk of police confrontation, usually via entrapment (inducing criminal activity), harassment, and sweeps of popular cruising spots, such as parks and bars. Once arrests happened, gay men and lesbians were at risk of being publicly exposed and losing their jobs, not to mention their friends and families. While anti-gay policing had gradually risen throughout the postwar decades, 1964 was an especially bad year. Mayor Robert F. Wagner Jr., in preparation for that year's World's Fair, had instructed the police to escalate homosexuality-related arrests to prevent the city from developing a “gay image.”<sup>25</sup>

But the year 1964 is more known for the Harlem “Riots”: six sweltering days of protests that began after an off-duty police lieutenant shot and killed a fifteen-year-old Black boy.<sup>26</sup> The protests, which took place in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant (New York's two largest Black

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<sup>24</sup> “Pablo Mojica—From Queens,” Box 3, Folder 30, MSNY Records.

<sup>25</sup> David Carter, *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*, 1st ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), chap. 2, E-book.

<sup>26</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 3-4. The second section of this chapter will discuss the controversies around how these protests were named, including the popular notion that they were “rioters.”

neighborhoods), received nationwide news coverage and were a hot-button issue for both civil rights leaders and tough-on-crime conservatives. By many historical accounts, the events of that summer were an inevitable culmination of worsening race relations in the city, which saw an increase in residential segregation, employment and housing discrimination, and anti-Black violence throughout the decade.<sup>27</sup>

This chapter explores the different concerns faced by gay and Black New Yorkers in the 1960s, ranging from police misconduct to everyday forms of discrimination. Both groups were harmed not only by the legal consequences of being arrested, but by policing itself: gay New Yorkers feared being exposed to their families, friends, and employers, while Black New Yorkers knew that any police interaction could result in violence. These threats existed regardless of whether they were guilty of a crime. At the same time, there was little overlap between these experiences. Police were unlikely to devise elaborate plans to arrest Black residents, while white gay men rarely faced indiscriminate police brutality. This section illustrates how, over the course of the year, civil rights and homophile activists converged on the demand for independent civilian review—laying the groundwork for the 1965 Review Board Conference.

*An “all-out war... against homosexuals”*

The Mattachine Society of New York was first founded in 1955 as an affiliate of the national organization in California.<sup>28</sup> When the national Mattachine was dissolved in March 1961, the New York branch incorporated as an independent organization.<sup>29</sup> It was run entirely by volunteers with full-time jobs: the office opened from 6 to 9 P.M. on weekdays and from noon to

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<sup>27</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 85-86.

<sup>28</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 89-90.

<sup>29</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 123.

5 P.M. on Saturdays.<sup>30</sup> Its members were mostly white middle-class gay men.<sup>31</sup> The organization was primarily a social services and education group that primarily sponsored monthly public meetings, with speakers ranging from lawyers to psychiatrists, some of whom were unsympathetic towards homosexuals.<sup>32</sup> This reflected the belief of many homophile activists at the time: that professional “experts” were necessary to legitimate the movement, even if they harbored negative or incorrect attitudes towards homosexuality.<sup>33</sup> The Mattachine also ran two publications, the public-facing *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* and the members-only Mattachine Newsletter, reflecting its dual purpose of educating the public and its majority-homosexual membership. Both publications ran a mix of editorials, informational articles, advertisements for homosexual books and movies, and upcoming events.<sup>34</sup> While the Mattachine Society’s reach was limited, its open discussion of gay life—both positive and negative—allowed many homosexual New Yorkers to feel less isolated.

From the beginning, the Mattachine Society confronted a wide range of police misconduct cases, ranging from direct solicitation and entrapment—like in Pablo Mojica’s case—to large-scale bar raids. While the Society had a few campaigns to combat policing, such as distributing “What to do if you are arrested” pamphlets, its approach was limited and piecemeal.<sup>35</sup> The organization usually responded to requests for help by referring the person to a

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<sup>30</sup> Dick Leitsch, interview by Mason Funk, *The Outwards Archive*, August 11, 2016, <https://theoutwardsarchive.org/interview/leitsch-dick/>.

<sup>31</sup> Stewart-Winter attributes this to the fact that, “[f]or gay people of color and for white women, the gay rights movement was often not the one that spoke most directly to their daily concerns,” especially because anti-gay policing disproportionately affected white men with the capital and means to cruise publicly or patronize gay bars. Timothy Stewart-Winter, “Queer Law and Order: Sex, Criminality, and Policing in the Late Twentieth-Century United States,” *Journal of American History* 102, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 69.

<sup>32</sup> Public Meetings of the Mattachine Society, 1956, Box 5, Folder 16, MSNY Records. Some meeting titles that suggest the speaker may have been unsympathetic towards gay men include: “What is a Sex Delinquent?,” “The Wrong and Right of a Protective Society Such as Mattachine,” and “When does the Homophile Need Psychiatric Treatment?”

<sup>33</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 116.

<sup>34</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Pamphlet, “What to do if you are arrested,” Box 5, Folder 16, MSNY Records.

trusted attorney or, in egregious instances of police misconduct, by writing letters to the police commissioner.<sup>36</sup>

But in 1964, anti-gay policing was reaching a breaking point, and the Mattachine Society was prompted to step up. That March, Enid K. Gerling, one of the Mattachine’s trusted attorney contacts, wrote to the organization about how two of her clients lost their government jobs due to homosexuality-related charges, even after they were acquitted. Her letter urged: “WHY DON’T YOU GET BUSY.”<sup>37</sup> J.W., a gay Manhattan resident who was entrapped by a plainclothes policeman, wrote to the Mattachine: “I was advised by several of the inmates that there was an all-out war by the N.Y. Police Dept. against homosexuals and the city ‘tombs’ is [sic] literally overflowing with these poor unfortunates.”<sup>38</sup> While J.W. had already received an attorney referral from the Mattachine, his letter alerted the organization to the sheer scope of the policing problem.

By the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, most homosexuals knew to be suspicious of the attractive young man flirting with them in public. Anna Lvovsky argues that learning to avoid undercover police officers became a “right of entry” for newcomers to homosexual spaces.<sup>39</sup> Entrapment methods ranged from propositioning—simply asking someone if they wanted to hook up—to complicated and duplicitous strategies. Police targeted areas that were popular cruising<sup>40</sup> zones, such as bars, parks, and public bathrooms. In the Atlantic Avenue subway station in Brooklyn, for example, the transit police created a hole between two booths in the men’s bathroom to lure gay men into

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<sup>36</sup> Enid Gerling to MSNY staff, March 14, 1964, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records; Mattachine Society of New York to Police Commissioner Vincent Broderick, July 6, 1965, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records.

<sup>37</sup> Enid Gerling to MSNY staff, March 14, 1964, MSNY Records.

<sup>38</sup> J.W. (Manhattan) to MSNY staff, February 4, 1965, Box 2, Folder 5, MSNY Records.

<sup>39</sup> Anna Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol: Cops, Courts, and the Struggle over Urban Gay Life before Stonewall*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 148.

<sup>40</sup> Cruising refers to the practice of soliciting sex in public spaces, which was a common way for gay men to find sexual partners in the twentieth century.

sodomy and used the peepholes behind the toilets to apprehend individuals who entered the stalls.<sup>41</sup>

But, over time, departments developed more elaborate entrapment schemes. Decoys, as the impersonating officers were known, were advised by their instructors to wear “tight pants, sneakers or sandals, tight jackets and sweaters with the sleeves pushed up near the elbows...[t]o arrest these predatory homosexuals.”<sup>42</sup> Officers were taught that putting a light coat or sweater on one’s lap was the “universal signal,” learned gay slang, and operated under the philosophy that “[a]n effective police decoy must be indistinguishable from a homosexual.”<sup>43</sup> Some departments, such as the LAPD, would host workshops on gay life, clothing, and even the work of homophile organizations—an ironically thoughtful study of queer life.<sup>44</sup> In New York, arrested homosexuals were usually charged with violation of Section 722 of the New York Penal Code, which banned “soliciting men for the purpose of committing a crime against nature or other lewdness.”<sup>45</sup>

Entrapment was not the only tactic that police used against homosexuals. From 1923, when the New York State Legislature criminalized gay solicitation as “degenerate disorderly conduct,” officers conducted organized sweeps and mass arrests in popular cruising zones.<sup>46</sup> In 1947, Harvey Milk, who would later become the first openly gay man elected to public office in California, was arrested in one such sweep at Central Park.<sup>47</sup> While there are no exact statistics

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<sup>41</sup> Irwin D. Strauss to Commissioner Leary, March 14, 1966, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records.

<sup>42</sup> John B. Williams, *Vice Control in California*, 1972, quoted in Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, 157.

<sup>43</sup> Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Lvovsky, *Vice Patrol*, 154. While Lvovsky only discusses this kind of instruction and research in the context of the LAPD, it is possible that the NYPD acted similarly. The Municipal Archives’ New York Police Department Intelligence files contain multiple documents from the Mattachine Society of New York, including the organization’s purpose and membership, suggesting that the NYPD was closely monitoring the organization as well.

<sup>45</sup> Former New York Penal Law § 722(8).

<sup>46</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York* (Basic Books, 1994), 172.

<sup>47</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 183.

measuring the frequency of anti-gay policing, one opinion piece estimated that, in the mid-1960s, there were almost a hundred homosexual solicitation arrests per week.<sup>48</sup>

Once arrested, gay men and lesbians faced all sorts of consequences.<sup>49</sup> Disorderly or lewd conduct was a minor offense, so a guilty charge usually led to a fine or minimal jail time.<sup>50</sup> But police and court officials often contacted the arrestee's families or employers—and even occasionally published their names in the newspaper—causing many homosexuals to lose their jobs, friends, and family, even if they were acquitted.<sup>51</sup> These extra-legal consequences, which the Mattachine Society dubbed the “wrath of society,” were more terrifying and damaging than legal sanctions.<sup>52</sup>

Establishments frequented by a homosexual clientele were also in jeopardy. Following the 1933 repeal of Prohibition, New York's newly established State Liquor Authority banned bars from serving or employing homosexuals because their very presence was deemed “disorderly.”<sup>53</sup> To enforce these laws, officers raided bars known to serve gay men and lesbians.<sup>54</sup> These raids were devastating for business owners. After five of her customers were arrested for homosexual solicitation, one Greenwich Village tavern owner lost her liquor license and was obliged to put a “Raided Premises” sign in her window. Once she put up the sign, the tavern rapidly lost business.<sup>55</sup> Other unlucky establishments were shut down altogether.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Fred Cherry, “Lindsay's Homosexual Sell-Out,” 1969, Box 14, Folder 36, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>49</sup> While this thesis does not focus on the different experiences that white gay men and lesbians had with policing, it is worth noting that cruising and bar-going—the two activities that posed the highest risk of arrest—were predominantly done by gay men. This is because women in this period generally lacked the physical and financial autonomy to patronize bars or solicit sex in public. D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 98-99.

<sup>50</sup> George Chauncey, “The Forgotten History of Gay Entrapment,” *The Atlantic*, June 25, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/06/before-stonewall-biggest-threat-was-entrapment/590536/>.

<sup>51</sup> Chauncey, “The Forgotten History.”

<sup>52</sup> Memoranda, 1965, Box 3, Folder 30, MSNY Records.

<sup>53</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 337.

<sup>54</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 231.

<sup>55</sup> James A. Weschler, “Entrapment Inc.,” March 7, 1966, Box 3, Folder 30, MSNY Records.

<sup>56</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 231.



Routine bar raids had a significant impact on gay social life. At a time when most homosexuals were not “out” in their daily lives, the bars allowed them to meet and collectively forge social mores, cultural tastes, and gay identity.<sup>57</sup> The knowledge that cops could infiltrate at any point worsened the anxieties of patrons who were already paranoid of exposure. It also became increasingly common for bars to refuse to serve gay men and lesbians.<sup>58</sup> The intense fear that many homosexuals felt in the 1960s is captured in the following Mattachine memo:

In New York City, any stranger [sic] who propositions you for a homosexual act...could possibly be a disguised police officer. Every men’s room in the public parks and the subways of this city has a peep-hole...Any bar or restaurant that shows itself willing to serve food or drink to homosexuals becomes marked by the police for closing.<sup>59</sup>

By the end of the year, some Mattachine members began pushing the organization to take a more politically assertive stance against anti-gay policing. At the 1964 annual meeting of the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO), an informal affiliation of four homophile groups, Julian Hodges urged attendees to follow the example of the Black Civil Rights Movement, which “never really advanced until it became politically oriented.”<sup>60</sup> Two speakers, both from the National Capital ACLU—which had worked closely with the Washington Mattachine—echoed Hodges’s sentiment and stressed that the homophile movement should “recognize our solidarity with other minority groups.”<sup>61</sup> While Hodges’s call for action was not accepted by ECHO at the time, the Mattachine would soon encounter a prime opportunity to demonstrate its solidarity.

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<sup>57</sup> While this thesis largely focuses on gay male socialization and policing, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis have studied the formative role that bars played in lesbian socialization. See Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, ““They Was No One to Mess With”: The Construction of the Butch Role in the Lesbian Community of the 1940s and 1950s,” in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, ed. Joan Nestle, 1st ed. (Alyson Publications, 1992).

<sup>58</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 231.

<sup>59</sup> Memoranda, 1965, Box 3, Folder 30, MSNY Records.

<sup>60</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, November or December 1964, Box 1996, Folder 7, American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) Records.

<sup>61</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, November or December 1964, ACLU Records.

*Post-Civil Rights Era New York*

In the 1940s and 50s, Black New Yorkers successfully pushed the city and state into enacting monumental anti-discrimination laws on employment, housing, public accommodations, and education.<sup>62</sup> The Second World War brought many Southerners to Northern cities: the Black population in New York rose 62 percent between 1940 and 1950, directly increasing popular support for civil rights issues. It also led many Black veterans to point out the hypocrisy of fighting for democracy abroad while facing inequality at home.<sup>63</sup>

But by the 1960s, progress towards racial equality was stalling. Many Black activists from the earlier period were persecuted and censored by anticommunist policies and became less active towards the late 1950s.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, the victories of the Southern Civil Rights Movement had little effect in the North, where de jure segregation had already been replaced by de facto. Black New Yorkers in this decade did not need legal equality, but equal treatment from employers, landlords, judges, and government officials.<sup>65</sup>

Christopher Hayes attributes the 1964 Harlem protests to several factors: residential and educational segregation, employment discrimination, and growing tensions between Black New Yorkers and police.<sup>66</sup> Urban renewal, alternatively known as “slum clearance,” leveled block after block in Black and Puerto Rican neighborhoods to build newer units that the original residents could not afford. This repeated process of demolition worsened existing residential segregation by displacing people of color from integrated areas into poorer and overcrowded ones. By 1956, Harlem alone had fifty-five percent of Manhattan’s public housing.<sup>67</sup> Segregated

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<sup>62</sup> Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>63</sup> Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 3, 13.

<sup>64</sup> Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 137.

<sup>65</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 5.

<sup>66</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 11, 25.

housing led to segregated schools; unsurprisingly, majority-Black schools were under-resourced, understaffed, and overcrowded, and consequently faced high dropout rates.<sup>68</sup> To residents who were financially crowded out of affordable housing, the legal prohibition on housing discrimination—which New York enacted in the 1940s—did not mean much. Similarly, laws banning employment discrimination could not stop powerful white trade unions and racist employers from relegating Black people to low-wage service jobs with little upward mobility.<sup>69</sup>

While New Yorkers of color faced obstacles in every aspect of their lives, the most violent and ubiquitous threat was the police. Police brutality was concentrated in majority-Black and Puerto Rican<sup>70</sup> neighborhoods like Central Harlem, Brownsville, Bedford-Stuyvesant, and Crown Heights, especially because the New York Police Department was 95% white and 99% male.<sup>71</sup> Violence against arrestees was commonplace and even expected. Former detective Bill Phillips recalled: “I guess I was a believer that if these guys did something, whatever means you could use to extract it, short of hanging him out the window or murdering the guy, it was OK.”<sup>72</sup> Some officers joined in reluctantly, as brutality demonstrated one’s “commitment to the brotherhood.”<sup>73</sup> While racially charged tough-on-crime rhetoric might be familiar to modern ears, the nonchalance with which these officers described police brutality is particularly striking.

The police were also mired in corruption. Many NYPD officers expected businesses to give them free meals, goods and services, and even payments—or risk excessive fines and police harassment. Police frequently allowed businesses to commit low-level violations in exchange for

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<sup>68</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 2.

<sup>69</sup> Biondi, *To Stand and Fight*, 19.

<sup>70</sup> Scholarship about discrimination, race relations, and police brutality in 1960s New York either focuses on Black experiences or discusses Black and Puerto Rican experiences in tandem. In this thesis, I discuss both groups only when Puerto Rican experiences are explicitly noted in secondary sources or archival material.

<sup>71</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 85, 103.

<sup>72</sup> Bill Phillips, quoted in Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 86.

<sup>73</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 86.

regular bribes or would promise to provide an arrestee with legal assistance if they paid up. Officers would even burglarize crime scenes by pocketing cash from businesses that were broken into. Graft was profitable; one officer admitted that he averaged between sixty to a hundred dollars monthly in income from bribes.<sup>74</sup> Predictably, corruption was worse in Black neighborhoods. In Central Harlem, the police systematically participated in criminal enterprises such as gambling, sex trafficking, and drug dealing, often with the knowledge of department leadership.<sup>75</sup> Harlem was even nicknamed “The Gold Coast” because of how much money officers could make through graft.<sup>76</sup>

In this context, it might seem surprising that the residents of these neighborhoods called for more policing, not less. They faced high rates of violence and property crime that were frequently ignored by the police, with the rationale that violence was normal in “ghetto neighborhoods.”<sup>77</sup> Black communities thus faced dual threats of violence—from crime and from police—with little recourse. This, in turn, bred a strong sense of frustration and animosity towards the police: if the NYPD was well-staffed enough to constantly brutalize their neighborhoods, why could they not effectively prosecute neighborhood gangs, violent crime, and property theft? Moreover, if the city’s powerful public safety solution was *participating* in crime, who would keep residents safe?

These simmering tensions ignited on July 16, 1964, just fourteen days after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the federal Civil Rights Act into law. On this hot summer day, James Powell, a ninth grader at Robert F. Wagner Junior High on East 76th Street, was hanging out by

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<sup>74</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 92-93.

<sup>75</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 88.

<sup>76</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 100.

<sup>77</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 86-87.

an apartment building across the street from the school.<sup>78</sup> When a heated argument between Powell and the apartment superintendent escalated into a chase, off-duty police lieutenant Thomas Gilligan, who was leaving a nearby store, fired three shots at the boy. The second shot was fatal. Gilligan and two other passerby later claimed that Powell had a knife during the struggle; the boy's friends, the superintendent, and fifty other witnesses never saw one.<sup>79</sup>

Two days later, on July 18, several local branches of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), a national civil rights organization, held a rally in Harlem calling for Gilligan's suspension.<sup>80</sup> While the protest started nonviolently, both the people and the police grew agitated when the crowd marched to the Twenty-Eighth Precinct at 123rd and Eighth Avenue. With the arrival of the NYPD's Tactical Patrol Force, who were armed with clubs and axe handles, the scene erupted into chaos. By July 20, the protests had spread to Bedford-Stuyvesant, where Brooklyn's largest Black community lived.<sup>81</sup> The protests drew thousands of Black New Yorkers and received national—and generally hostile—media attention: *TIME* Magazine described the protesters as a “screaming mob,” “[h]ate preaching demagogues,” “raunchy radicals,” “hoodlums,” and, as they would most commonly be remembered, “rioters.”<sup>82</sup> But from the protesters' standpoint, the police were responsible for the turmoil. The uprisings ended with one death, 140 injuries, and 478 arrests, including several reports of officers shooting demonstrators. Over a hundred people filed charges of police brutality against the NYPD.<sup>83</sup>

Black leaders were divided on how to respond. Martin Luther King Jr. and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP emphasized federal civil rights successes and called for a moratorium on protests,

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<sup>78</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 100.

<sup>79</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 111-112.

<sup>80</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 118, 102.

<sup>82</sup> “The Nation,” *TIME Magazine* 84, no. 5, July 31, 1964.

<sup>83</sup> Cowan, “The New York City,” 152.

while James Farmer, chairman of CORE, argued that demonstrations were necessary to pressure the city into action.<sup>84</sup> By the end of the six days, they converged on civilian review, especially because CORE had already been pressuring the city for an independent review board and had even met with Police Commissioner Michael J. Murphy that April.<sup>85</sup>

### *The Civilian Complaint Review Board*

The earliest call for a Civilian Complaint Review Board came in 1935, when then-mayor Fiorella La Guardia formed a commission to study police-civilian relations after a major race riot in Harlem. The commission recommended that the city form a Citizens' Public Safety Committee made up of five to seven Harlem citizens to adjudicate complaints of alleged police brutality.<sup>86</sup> While La Guardia ignored the recommendation, fearing NYPD backlash, calls for police review were taken up by local civil rights groups. In 1948, the New York NAACP formed its own Committee of Action against Police Brutality to investigate and act against police brutality complaints.<sup>87</sup>

A municipal review board was ultimately created by scandal. In 1953, the public learned that the city's police commissioner had made a secret deal with the U.S. Department of Justice to shield the NYPD from a federal investigation over police brutality. Widespread condemnation from civil rights groups, city officials, and the House Judiciary Subcommittee eventually compelled the department to create a police review board that year; however, the board was made up of three deputy police commissioners, and all investigations were done by commanding officers.<sup>88</sup> If the accused officer was found guilty of misconduct, a pseudo-criminal trial would

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<sup>84</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 100.

<sup>85</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 107.

<sup>86</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 85-86.

<sup>87</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 88.

<sup>88</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 93.

take place, and the board would submit recommendations to the police commissioner. Still, the commissioner had the final say over any disciplinary consequences.<sup>89</sup>

Predictably, the board—which essentially had the NYPD investigating itself—brought few police officers to justice. Only one out of ten cases made it past the preliminary review board hearing, and even fewer resulted in disciplinary sanctions.<sup>90</sup> Civil rights and civil liberties groups demanded further accountability, and in April 1964, Upper West Side City Councilmember Theodore Weiss proposed an all-civilian nine-person board. But initially, the bill received little support. Only one other councilmember, Stanley Isaacs, had previously vocalized support for civilian review, but he had died in 1962. More problematically, Democratic Mayor Wagner, who effectively controlled the City Council, was notoriously unwilling to enact municipal reforms—especially those that were fiercely opposed by the police.<sup>91</sup>

The Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant protests reignited the demand for independent civilian review. On July 20, midway through the demonstrations, Commissioner Murphy and Acting Mayor Paul R. Screvane met with representatives from the National Negro American Labor Council, CORE, Urban League, and the NAACP.<sup>92</sup> While the city promised a number of temporary solutions, such as assigning more Black police officers to Harlem, CORE Chairman James Farmer advocated for the creation of an all-civilian review board.<sup>93</sup> Two days later, influential Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell Jr. named independent civilian review as one of five demands that could end the demonstrations.<sup>94</sup>

On July 27, the NYCLU convened a meeting “for purposes of drawing up a united

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<sup>89</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 94.

<sup>90</sup> “Statement of Aryeh Neier, Executive Director,” July 13, 1965, Box 1083, Folder 2, ACLU Records.

<sup>91</sup> Cowan, “The New York City,” 117-121.

<sup>92</sup> Peter Kihss, “City to Increase Negro Policemen on Harlem Duty,” *New York Times*, July 21, 1964. Shortly before the protests, Mayor Wagner had left for Geneva to attend a meeting, which is why Screvane was made acting mayor.

<sup>93</sup> Kihss, “City to Increase.”

<sup>94</sup> Warren Weaver Jr., “Powell Says Riots Can End if Mayor Meets 5 Demands,” *New York Times*, July 22, 1964.

statement” for the establishment of an independent Civilian Complaint Review Board.<sup>95</sup> The organization then circulated a statement arguing that an independent board would improve police-community relations and lower the risk of future protests.<sup>96</sup> The NYCLU’s efforts, coupled with the CORE-led civil rights delegation, generated new momentum for the Weiss Bill.

In the remaining months of 1964, several organizations developed strategies to advocate for review board reforms.<sup>97</sup> Initially, organizers stressed the urgency of preventing more protests, as well as the fact that two other cities had effective independent civilian review boards:

Philadelphia and Rochester.<sup>98</sup> Philadelphia established a police advisory board to investigate complaints of police brutality in 1958 via an executive order by the mayor. Similarly, Rochester created a review board in 1963 that, unlike Philadelphia’s, expressly banned the inclusion of active law enforcement officers.<sup>99</sup> Still, both review boards were entirely composed of civilians, and in August, a special subcommittee of Weiss and four other city councilmembers travelled to the two cities and concluded that both review boards were highly effective.<sup>100</sup>

The most important argument in favor of a civilian review board was police brutality against racial minorities. By the end of 1964, the civil rights groups were the leading voices in the pro-civilian review faction, and even the NYCLU thought of civilian review as “closely tied to the civil rights problem” because “the police are inclined to [be] more heavy-handed toward Negro than towards White suspects.”<sup>101</sup> Police brutality thus became the initial focus of the review board coalition.

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<sup>95</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Dr. Gerald Ehrenreich, August 17, 1965, Box 1080, Folder 1, ACLU Records.

<sup>96</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 110.

<sup>97</sup> Hayes, “The Heart of the City,” 196-197.

<sup>98</sup> “Compilation and Summary of ACLU File Material on Civilian Police Review Boards,” October 8, 1964, Box 1080, Folder 11, ACLU Records.

<sup>99</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander, “Structures of Civilian Complaint Review Boards,” October 1964, Box 1080, Folder 7, ACLU Records.

<sup>100</sup> Hayes, “The Heart of the City,” 196-197.

<sup>101</sup> “Compilation and Summary,” October 8, 1964, ACLU Records.



## II.

### Creating a Coalition, 1965

By 1965, independent civilian review was a hot-button issue in the city. In his first public speech to the New York County Lawyers Association that May, mayoral candidate John Vliet Lindsay proposed a “middle road” solution: adding four civilians to the existing three-policeman board.<sup>102</sup> Predictably, Lindsay’s plan was criticized by both sides. Farmer and Weiss were sympathetic to Lindsay’s focus on police misconduct but maintained that police should not be on the board, while Commissioner Murphy and Governor Rockefeller argued that the existing board should not be changed at all.<sup>103</sup>

Around the same time, a multi-group advocacy coalition began forming around the Weiss Bill. The bill proposed a review board of nine appointed civilians that would investigate complaints, conduct public hearings, and issue disciplinary recommendations concerning excessive use-of-force by police personnel.<sup>104</sup> The bill also mandated that the New York Police Department investigate the board’s complaints and give the board the jurisdiction to make recommendations about policy and legislation.<sup>105</sup> The coalition, which called itself the New York Review Board Conference (and later Committee), was made up of the city’s leading civil rights and civil liberties groups. It was solidified during its first meeting on October 12, 1965.

The Mattachine Society of New York entered the year as a relatively unknown organization with no experience in political advocacy but ended 1965 as a steering member of the Review Board Conference. To understand the organization’s transformation, this chapter

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<sup>102</sup> “Text of Lindsay’s Address to New York Lawyers,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1965.

<sup>103</sup> “Text of Lindsay’s Address.”

<sup>104</sup> “Re: CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD,” Social Action Committee of the Community Church of New York, August 10, 1965, Box 3, Folder 10, MSNY Records.

<sup>105</sup> “Re: CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD,” August 10, 1965, MSNY Records.

tracks the concurrent development of the civilian review campaign and the rise of a “militant” faction in the Mattachine. Through its involvement in the conference, the Mattachine Society of New York successfully positioned itself as a legitimate member of the civil rights coalition.

### *A Split in the Mattachine*

In March 1965, the *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* alerted ECHO members to two bills “of great importance to the homosexual community.”<sup>106</sup> The first was State Senate Bill SI-135, which outlawed employers from asking prospective employees if they had been arrested, and the second was the Weiss Bill. The magazine stressed that both bills were supported by “leading citizens of the state,” such as the NYCLU and NAACP, and encouraged readers to sign and mail petitions in support of the pending legislation.<sup>107</sup> The article, while brief, demonstrated that there was increased interest in having the Mattachine participate in political organizing—especially against policing—as Hodges had urged in his 1964 speech.

When ECHO was first formed in January 1963, it included the New York Mattachine Society, the New York branch of the Daughters of Bilitis (a lesbian homophile organization), the Janus Society of Philadelphia (formerly the Philadelphia Mattachine), and the Washington Mattachine.<sup>108</sup> The Washington branch was especially influential. It was founded in 1961 by the pugnacious Frank Kameny, a former government astronomer who was fired for being gay.<sup>109</sup> His dismissal prompted him to fight a multi-year campaign—on his own and with the Mattachine—against anti-gay employment discrimination by the U.S. government.<sup>110</sup> Today, Kameny is remembered as the “father of the gay rights movement,” but in the early 1960s, he was a

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<sup>106</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, March 1965, Box 1966, Folder 7, ACLU Records.

<sup>107</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, March 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>108</sup> Joan Frazer, “A History of ECHO,” Box 3, Folder 25, MSNY Records.

<sup>109</sup> Eric Cervini, *The Deviant's War: The Homosexual vs. the United States of America*, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020), chap. 2, E-book.

<sup>110</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 154.

controversial voice of militancy in the homophile movement.<sup>111</sup>

Because of Kameny, the Mattachine Society of Washington had more of a political orientation than any of the other ECHO members. Unlike the other affiliates, the Washington branch's constitution explicitly identified the organization as a civil liberties group and stipulated that it was *not* meant for socializing.<sup>112</sup> In 1962, members of the Washington Mattachine wrote to every high-ranking representative and Executive Department official about the U.S. Civil Service Commission's discrimination against homosexuals. By 1963, the organization successfully lobbied against H.R. 5990: a bill to revoke the Washington Mattachine's non-profit license and curtail its funding.<sup>113</sup>

Kameny's approach drew the ire of the "old guard" homophile leadership, which feared that political action would be met with fierce government repression. To their credit, the older activists recalled the 1950s Lavender Scare, where, alongside communists, the federal government aggressively purged anyone suspected of being gay.<sup>114</sup> They worried that, if the Mattachine drew too much attention to itself, it would bring about government persecution and retaliation. But the new activists saw the old leadership's concerns as outdated. Kameny, along with Julian Hodges, Dick Leitsch, Craig Rodwell, and Randy Wicker from the New York Mattachine, used ECHO as a space to discuss strategies for pushing their organizations into being more politically active.<sup>115</sup> The militants were not only frustrated by the old guard's

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<sup>111</sup> Brooke Spoelsa, "#Pride50: Father of the Gay Rights Movement Frank Kameny," *NBC News*, June 3, 2019, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/pride50-frank-kameny-father-gay-rights-movement-n1005216>.

<sup>112</sup> Cervini, *The Deviant's War*, chap. 6.

<sup>113</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 154-157.

<sup>114</sup> For a more detailed history of the Lavender Scare and Cold War era anti-gay repression, see David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>115</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 161. Chapter III will discuss the use of the term "militant"—and whether it was appropriate for discussing the organization's work—in more detail, but other terms used synonymously included "social actionist" and "radical."

unwillingness to sponsor direct political action, but also its tendency to platform doctors who espoused the medical model, which claimed that homosexuality was a mental illness.<sup>116</sup>

John D’Emilio describes the May 1965 board elections as the “breaking point” for tensions between the militants and the old guard.<sup>117</sup> In his campaign, Hodges argued that the “Mattachine should be as militant as other minorities” by participating in activism and political advocacy, a position that he had articulated since the 1964 ECHO convention.<sup>118</sup> The old guard platformed Donald Webster Cory. Cory was initially a staunch advocate of homosexuals but, by the 1960s, claimed that homosexuals were “sick” and should be cured—even drawing an analogy between homosexuality and alcoholism.<sup>119</sup> Ultimately, the militant faction took two-thirds of the votes: Julian Hodges was elected president, and Dick Leitsch was elected vice president and president-elect for the following year. Most of the old guard left the Mattachine Society altogether.<sup>120</sup>

Leitsch quickly became the face of the new Mattachine, especially after Hodges’s abrupt resignation in November made him the organization’s president until 1971.<sup>121</sup> Leitsch had moved from Kentucky to New York in 1959, where he worked various odd jobs as a bartender, waiter, and journalist. He first realized he was attracted to boys while attending St. Patrick’s elementary school. His parents, some of the first white members of the Louisville NAACP, gave Leitsch a

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<sup>116</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 162-163.

<sup>117</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 165.

<sup>118</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, May 1965, Box 1996, Folder 7, ACLU Records; D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 167.

<sup>119</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 18, 166. Cory’s position reflected the belief of many—if not most—doctors and psychiatrists in the post-war era, who used the medical model to justify putting homosexuals in asylums and to condemn homosexuality as a disease, i.e., a threat to society.

<sup>120</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 166-168.

<sup>121</sup> Dick Leitsch to Martin Manosevits (Rutgers professor that the Mattachine had been doing research with), November 19, 1965, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records. It is not entirely clear why Hodges resigned, but it seems to have been for personal reasons that compelled him to leave New York City.

front-row seat to the Southern Civil Rights Movement.<sup>122</sup> They were also supportive of his homosexuality, although Leitsch himself felt a great tension between his sexuality and his Catholic upbringing and faith.<sup>123</sup>

In New York, Leitsch started a love affair with Craig Rodwell, who introduced him to the Mattachine Society; recounting these events in a 1971 interview, Leitsch half-jokingly confessed that he only joined the organization to “check out [Rodwell’s] alibis” for missing their dates.<sup>124</sup> But once he became involved, Leitsch found that the Mattachine was a “total disaster area.”<sup>125</sup> Its members “weren’t confronting the social conditions which oppressed homosexuals” and were instead relying on professionals to validate that homosexuality was “all right.”<sup>126</sup> By May 1965, he was poised to lead the New York branch towards a more militant direction.

The *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* article about SI-135 and the Weiss Bill demonstrates that, as early as March, the militants had a sizeable presence in ECHO.<sup>127</sup> It also suggests some homophile activists were interested in civilian review, which may have been why the review board coalition was one of the first projects of the new New York leadership. With the May elections, the Mattachine Society of New York would finally “stop thinking of politics as too dirty for our clean hands,” as Hodges had argued, and begin collaborating with civil rights and civil liberties groups in the city.<sup>128</sup> The militants’ victory would have a lasting impact in the years to come.

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<sup>122</sup> Robert D. McFadden, “Dick Leitsch, Whose ‘Sip-In’ Was a Gay Rights Milestone, Dies at 83,” *New York Times*, June 22, 2018.

<sup>123</sup> McFadden, “Dick Leitsch, Whose ‘Sip-In.’”

<sup>124</sup> “Interview with a Homosexual Spokesman,” November 1971, *Sexual Behavior*, Box 21, Folder 13, Dick Leitsch (DL) Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library.

<sup>125</sup> “Interview with a Homosexual Spokesman,” November 1971, DL Papers.

<sup>126</sup> “Interview with a Homosexual Spokesman,” November 1971, DL Papers.

<sup>127</sup> By contrast, the Mattachine Newsletter, which was published by the board of the Mattachine Society of New York (which was still led by the old guard in March 1965), did not mention the two bills.

<sup>128</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, May 1965, ACLU Records.

*Civilian Control or Bust!*

A few weeks after the Mattachine board elections, the civil rights groups, NYCLU, Citizens Union, and the Community Church of New York began aggressively advocating for the Weiss Bill to the City Council. On June 29, CORE led a demonstration at City Hall in support of the bill.<sup>129</sup> In July, multiple organizations delivered public testimonies at City Council hearings to underscore the importance of civilian control.<sup>130</sup> Without an independent board, the NYCLU argued, New Yorkers were not only subject to unfair adjudication of police complaints but would also be deterred from complaining in the first place.<sup>131</sup>

Advocates of the Weiss Bill also had to combat more moderate review board proposals, including Lindsay's hybrid police-civilian board and five other city council bills that had surfaced that spring.<sup>132</sup> Both Councilmembers Saul Sharison and Richard Aldrich proposed bills to change the composition of the board; however, Sharison's board included deputy police commissioners, while Aldrich's consisted of the deputy mayor and a staff of lawyers and investigators and was much more limited in its jurisdiction. Councilmember Paul O'Dwyer's bill had the mayor appoint an "ombudsman," who would investigate and publicize findings about the conduct of any city agency or employee. But the ombudsman would not have the same adjudicatory power as the review board. The remaining two bills did not change the composition of the board whatsoever—only its responsibilities.<sup>133</sup> If the goal was to check police misconduct, argued ACLU Associate Director Alan Reitman, the Weiss Bill offered the "fairest and most

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<sup>129</sup> Homer Bigart, "Police Pickets to Keep Pistols," *New York Times*, June 29, 1965.

<sup>130</sup> Testimony by the Social Action Committee of the Community Church of New York at City Council Public Hearing, July 13, 1965, Box 1080, Folder 5, ACLU Records.

<sup>131</sup> "Statement of Aryeh Neier, Executive Director," July 13, 1965, Box 1083, Folder 2, ACLU Records.

<sup>132</sup> Alan Reitman to Marjorie M. Friedlander, August 23, 1965, Box 1080, Folder 7, ACLU Records.

<sup>133</sup> "Re: CIVILIAN COMPLAINT REVIEW BOARD," August 10, 1965, MSNY Records.

meaningful mechanism” because it had the “indispensable ingredient of full civilian control.”<sup>134</sup>

Beyond the practical reasons to support the Weiss Bill, Councilmember Theodore Weiss was a reform Democrat with a strong track record of supporting police reform, making him a logical ally for the progressive organizations. In 1962, when George Rundquist from the ACLU first raised the question of independent civilian review, Weiss discussed the proposal with fellow councilmembers and spoke at special meetings with civil rights groups. By the time he introduced his own bill in 1964, he explicitly cited police brutality as the reason why civilian review was necessary.<sup>135</sup>

In August 1965, as the City Council considered these different review board proposals, Marjorie M. Friedlander of the Community Church of New York began reaching out to organizations that she believed might be interested in attending a Review Board Conference. The main purpose of the conference was to mobilize support for the Weiss Bill and possibly amend it.<sup>136</sup> To make the coalition as effective as possible, Friedlander asked invitees to “independently formulate a list of strengthening amendments...for synthesizing.”<sup>137</sup> Different groups were expected to address different types of police misconduct: the NAACP and Puerto Rican Bar Association might be more concerned with police brutality, while the ACLU might be more informed about unwarranted search and seizure.<sup>138</sup>

Friedlander was the chairman of the Community Church’s Social Action Committee and was responsible for mobilizing its resources into the review board campaign. It is worth noting

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<sup>134</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, Box 3, Folder 9, MSNY Records; Reitman to Friedlander, August 23, 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>135</sup> Cowan, “The New York City,” Interestingly, Weiss would later become a leading voice in the fight to increase federal funding for HIV/AIDS.

<sup>136</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Robert L. Carter, August 19, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

<sup>137</sup> Friedlander to Carter, August 19, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>138</sup> Friedlander to Carter, August 19, 1965, NAACP Papers.

that there are few records of Friedlander herself, almost as if she did not exist outside of the conference.<sup>139</sup> The only information about her personal life comes from Ruth Cowan's dissertation, which states that Friedlander's interest in civilian review started in either late 1964 or early 1965, while she was conducting research for a term paper.<sup>140</sup>

Despite her relative obscurity, Friedlander played an important role as the key liaison between gay activists and the civil rights coalition. In fact, as early as August 1964, she wrote to Dr. Gerald Ehrenreich of the Greater Kansas City ACLU with her hopes "that the Weiss Bill be considerably broadened to encompass other aspects of police misconduct in addition to brutality."<sup>141</sup> By her July 1965 testimony in the City Council, she explicitly clarified that the "other aspects" included "discrimination because [of] religion, ethnic background, or sexual deviance" and the "entrapment and harassment of homosexuals."<sup>142</sup>

There is another gap in the archives when it comes to the Mattachine Society's initial involvement in the Review Board Conference. What we know is that Friedlander and Leitsch informally discussed civilian review in August, and that she sent the Mattachine an official invitation to the conference on September 13.<sup>143</sup> Before then, in March, Hodges and Leitsch attempted to organize a Society-wide petition for the Weiss Bill but faced substantial opposition from the "old-timers."<sup>144</sup> Once the militants took over the Mattachine's leadership in May, they were able to pursue the civilian review board campaign more aggressively. Yet without much information on Friedlander's background, it is unclear what led her to contact Leitsch or the

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<sup>139</sup> Marjorie Friedlander's personal papers, which are cited by Ruth Cowan, are no longer available, and the Community Church's own archives were not accessible due to storage issues. Outside of Cowan's dissertation and a footnote in Hanhardt's book, Friedlander is not mentioned in any secondary sources.

<sup>140</sup> Cowan, "The New York City," 228.

<sup>141</sup> Friedlander to Dr. Ehrenreich, August 17, 1964, ACLU Records.

<sup>142</sup> Testimony by the Social Action Committee, July 13, 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>143</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Dick Leitsch, September 13, 1965, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records; Marjorie M. Friedlander to Dick Leitsch, August 12, 1965, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records.

<sup>144</sup> Dick Leitsch to S. Farrell, March 18, 1965, Box 5, Folder 9, MSNY Records.



Mattachine Society, or even why she was concerned about anti-gay policing in the first place.

Regardless of her motivations, Friedlander's conference invitation for William Stringfellow and Frank Patton—two of the Mattachine's most reliable attorney contacts—highlighted the urgency of pro-gay reforms to the review board. She argued that the board should “provide redress for homosexuals subjected to police harassment and abuse under the sodomy and vagrancy statutes.”<sup>145</sup> Stringfellow and Patton were invited so they could educate the other (presumably straight) attendees about anti-gay policing.

Friedlander's letter also named the symbolic significance of the conference: “If the NYC Review board encompasses the homosexual and police, it will act as a prototype for the nation for other communities to emulate. This would be a breakthrough for the homosexual in his relations with the police and officialdom.”<sup>146</sup> The language of “prototype” and “breakthrough” suggests that the activists saw both the review board *and* the coalition building efforts to be significant for the homosexual community. Both Friedlander and Leitsch, who was consulted in drafting the invitation,<sup>147</sup> were highly conscious of the fact that police reforms rarely encompassed gay issues and that homosexual activists could not easily raise these concerns to city officials on their own.

The conference organizers also had each representative offer their views on the board as a whole. The “Questionnaire on Civilian Review Board Issues,” which was distributed by Friedlander and Citizens Union in September, was a ten-page survey about attendees' views on the objectives and ideal composition of the review board.<sup>148</sup> One of the sections focused on

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<sup>145</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to William Stringfellow and Frank Patton, August 16, 1965, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records.

<sup>146</sup> Friedlander to Stringfellow and Patton, August 16, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>147</sup> Leitsch was copied on the letter, and had previously corresponded with Friedlander about homophile participation in the Review Board Conference.

<sup>148</sup> “Questionnaire on Civilian Review Board Issues,” September 23, 1965, Box 19, Folder 624, NAACP Papers.

whether the board should limit its concerns to police brutality or if it should consider other kinds of misconduct as well. These included “confession by trickery,” “visits or phone calls to employers and landlords designed to besmirch the reputation of any person,” and “discrimination because of . . . sexual non-orthodoxy,” each of which alluded to anti-gay policing: entrapment by undercover police, risk of public exposure, and discrimination based on “deviant” sexual activity.<sup>149</sup> The questionnaire demonstrates that the conference organizers were interested in expanding review board advocacy to be more than a police brutality issue.

Christina Hanhardt observes that, in this period, New York homophile activists were more concerned with entrapment and sodomy than physical violence, especially because white gay men were less likely to experience police brutality.<sup>150</sup> But while she argues that the Mattachine “opposed” the review board coalition’s initial emphasis on brutality, the pre-conference correspondence that she draws from suggests otherwise. Hanhardt quotes from Friedlander’s letter to Stringfellow and Patton, where Friedlander states that “a CCRB should concern itself with more than police brutality and excessive use-of-force.”<sup>151</sup> But Leitsch and the other homophile representatives never argued that the board should focus *less* on brutality, just that it should also encompass other forms of misconduct. Moreover, it was the conference organizers, not the Mattachine, who pushed to enlarge the scope of review—with the intention of creating a more comprehensive and effective board. Thus, the attempts to expand the review board’s jurisdiction demonstrated the coalition’s cohesion, rather than disagreement.

Interestingly, the basic contours of homophile activists’ concerns were somewhat understood and supported by civil rights groups. In the NAACP’s annotated copy of the

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<sup>149</sup> “Questionnaire on Civilian Review Board Issues,” September 23, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>150</sup> Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 70.

<sup>151</sup> Friedlander to Stringfellow and Patton, August 16, 1965, cited in Hanhardt, *Safe Space*, 70.

September questionnaire, the organization answered “no” when asked if complaints should be restricted to brutality and excessive use-of-force.<sup>152</sup> Regarding whether hearings should be public or private, it wrote in the margins that hearings should be public “except where Board feels issues are best kept private (e.g., accusation of homosexuality).”<sup>153</sup> Even before the NAACP met the homophile representatives at the conference, it seemingly found homosexual concerns to be significant enough to note separately in the pre-conference questionnaire. While the reasons are unclear, it is possible that Friedlander’s remarks to the City Council that summer, which explicitly mentioned anti-gay policing, prompted the NAACP’s attention.

Still, the Mattachine was clearly a lesser-known participant. Friedlander’s initial invitation to the NAACP in August listed several other organizations that were invited, including the ACLU, New York City Bar Association, and the New York Young Democrats Club. But only the Mattachine was accompanied by a description: “Mattachine Society (in relation to police abuses against the homosexual, e.g. entrapment, etc.)”<sup>154</sup> This suggests that Friedlander did not expect the civil rights groups to have previously heard of the homophile organization. But by highlighting and clarifying the Mattachine’s participation, Friedlander helped lay the groundwork for the more substantial collaboration that would ensue between the homophile and civil rights organizations at the conference.

*“A red-letter day”: October 12, 1965*

On October 12, 1965, twenty-seven delegates from fourteen local organizations, three local civic leaders, and eight observers convened at the Brotherhood-In-Action Conference

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<sup>152</sup> “Questionnaire on Civilian Review Board Issues,” September 23, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>153</sup> “Questionnaire on Civilian Review Board Issues,” September 23, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>154</sup> Friedlander to Carter, August 19, 1965, NAACP Papers.

Center for the New York Review Board Conference.<sup>155</sup> Despite being closed to the press, the conference featured several notable participants: it was co-chaired by Professor Norman Dorsen, director of the Civil Liberties Program at the New York University School of Law, and Theodore Ellenoff, Chairman of the Civil Rights and Civil Liberties Committee of the American Jewish Committee in New York.<sup>156</sup>

After Dorsen delivered his opening remarks, the conference moved to a series of panels regarding police-citizen relations.<sup>157</sup> For the first four, which were grouped under “The Minority and the Police,” Friedlander selected delegates to serve as “consultants” who would brief the attendees on the minority community they represented. Robert L. Carter, General Counsel of the NAACP, was the consultant for “The Negro and the Police,” Roberto Lebron, President of the Puerto Rican Bar Association of New York, spoke on “The Puerto Rican and the Police,” Charles V. Drew from the New York Young Republican Club presented on “The Derelict and the Police,” and Frank Patton Jr. briefed the conference on “The Homosexual and the Police.”<sup>158</sup>

The *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* later reported that Patton’s presentation “gave many of the representatives their first glimpse of the harassment and entrapment of homosexuals by the police as a matter of policy.”<sup>159</sup> The presentations served to build rapport between the different organizations, given that some of them had a limited history of cooperation—especially the *Mattachine*. More importantly, by including anti-gay policing alongside Black, Puerto Rican, and homeless New Yorkers’ concerns, the conference recognized homosexuals as a minority group in

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<sup>155</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>156</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records. Friedlander’s letter to Alan Reitman, the Associate Director of ACLU, read: “In order to encourage the utmost of frankness...we are not permitting representatives of radio, TV, or the newspapers to come as observers.” Marjorie M. Friedlander to Alan Reitman, October 4, 1965, Box 1080, Folder 12, ACLU Records.

<sup>157</sup> “NYC Review Board Conference Program,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>158</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Robert L. Carter, August 31, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers.

<sup>159</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

search of rights, rather than as morally or medically deficient individuals.

The conference then moved to discussing different civilian review procedures. Representatives from Philadelphia and Rochester spoke about the structure and operations of their police advisory boards, while other panels covered the right-to-counsel, the role of an ombudsman, and human relations in civilian review. After the dinner break, Dr. James Avery Joyce, a lawyer, author, and consultant to the United Nations, delivered the keynote address, “The Right of the Individual to Redress On the World Scene,” a change in pace from the technical discussions of legislation and policy.<sup>160</sup>

The “actual business”<sup>161</sup> of the conference began half an hour after sunset. Participants convened in “working groups” to draft strengthening amendments and conference recommendations.<sup>162</sup> Nine attendees formed the Weiss Bill Amendment Committee: Friedlander, Aryeh Neier, Arnold Hoffman, and Harold Rothwax from the New York Civil Liberties Union, William Goffen of Citizens Union, Roberto Lebron and Barry Ivan Slotnick of the Puerto Rican Bar Association of New York, and Leitsch and Hodges from the Mattachine Society.<sup>163</sup>

Of the nine amendments that the committee proposed, the first and seventh were the most significant to the Mattachine: enlarging the board’s review scope beyond “excessive use of physical force” and allowing hearings to be private “per the request of either the complainant or accused police officer.”<sup>164</sup> The first, as Friedlander told Stringfellow and Patton in her invitation, would have the board investigate discrimination and entrapment in addition to brutality. The

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<sup>160</sup> “NYC Review Board Conference Program,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>161</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>162</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>163</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records. While it is unclear how the committee was selected, it is notable that two members of the Mattachine sat alongside the conference organizers and representatives of the most prominent organizations. Perhaps the Mattachine played a larger role in planning the conference than the existing documents suggest, or—more likely—concerns affecting homosexuals were seen as significant enough to necessitate gay representation on the committee.

<sup>164</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

committee defined “misconduct” as including, but not limited to:

[M]istreatment; abusive language; unreasonable arrest; unreasonable detention; unreasonable search and seizure; unlawful destruction or confiscation of property; failure to prevent the suicide of a prisoner; denial of any civil right or civil liberty; discrimination because of race, religion, national origin, or sexual non-conformity.<sup>165</sup>

The revised definition contained echoes of different delegates’ concerns: Lebron’s presentation on “The Puerto Rican and the Police” commented on “several alleged suicides of Puerto Ricans while in police custody,” while “unreasonable arrest” could be read as a reference to entrapment tactics.<sup>166</sup> The seventh amendment, as the NAACP previously noted, would allow an individual to file a complaint about a homosexuality-related arrest without publicly exposing their identity. Other amendments included giving the board the ability to make recommendations about police department policy and preventing former law enforcement from serving on the board.<sup>167</sup> While most of these changes aggressively expanded the power of the board, some served as compromises. The second amendment removed the board’s ability to issue disciplinary recommendations by limiting its power to just findings-of-fact, and the ninth amendment guaranteed right-to-counsel for both the complainant and the accused officer.<sup>168</sup> Ultimately, the amendment committee aggressively advocated for its own aggregate vision of the review board while simultaneously being attentive to the political feasibility of the Weiss Bill.

The *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*’s description of the New York Review Board Conference barely mentioned how the Weiss Bill or new amendments would affect homosexuals. Instead, the article read like the organizers’ summary of the event: a neutral, expository account of the panels and workshops, a list of the final amendments, as well as a portrayal of the

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<sup>165</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>166</sup> Roberto Lebron, “The Puerto Rican and the Police,” October 12, 1965, Box 3, Folder 9, MSNY Records.

<sup>167</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>168</sup> “Proposed Amendments to the Weiss Bill,” October 12, 1965, MSNY Records.

conference as a united front that came to “consensus” over all of its recommendations.<sup>169</sup> The closest the article came to expressing an opinion was the claim that October 12 was a “red-letter day in New York City.”<sup>170</sup>

This was likely because of the publication’s primary readership: namely the *Mattachine*’s members in New York and across the East Coast, as well as other, more moderate homophile organizations. To a gay readership that was deeply familiar with police abuse of power, it was not necessary to explain entrapment and harassment, but it *was* important to highlight the organization’s first political advocacy campaign. Thus, the article portrayed the New York *Mattachine* as being seamlessly integrated into the civil rights coalition, and thus having fully actualized Leitsch’s and Hodges’s election promises.

This framing also built off of the *Mattachine*’s pre-conference report at the September 1965 ECHO conference, where it described its “liaison” with other groups as a notable accomplishment.<sup>171</sup> The statement that “[t]he *Mattachine* Society Inc. of New York, along with the other human rights and civil rights organizations represented at the conference, will be asked to...work for [the amendments’] implementation” deliberately situated *Mattachine* as adjacent to the NAACP and the ACLU.<sup>172</sup> The *Mattachine*’s new leadership presented its participation in the conference as a significant and novel act—an act that marked the organization’s transition from social services and education into gay rights activism.

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<sup>169</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>170</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>171</sup> ECHO 65, September 24, 1965, Box 44, Folder 5, DL Papers.

<sup>172</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, November-December 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records.

### *The Review Board Coalition*

On November 2, 1965, John Lindsay was elected as New York's 103<sup>rd</sup> mayor.<sup>173</sup> Lindsay, a progressive Republican, was a breath of fresh air for New York progressives, especially compared to the obstinate Wagner administration.<sup>174</sup> There was good reason to have faith in Lindsay. As a congressman, he helped draft the 1957, 1960, and 1964 Civil Rights Acts, and he had been more amenable to civilian review than either the Democratic or Conservative Party candidates.<sup>175</sup> The Mattachine found it especially promising that Lindsay had previously voted against H.R. 5990, the bill to revoke the Washington branch's funding.<sup>176</sup> Eight days after the election, Leitsch wrote: "I am probably even happier than Mr. Hodges over the victory of John Lindsay."<sup>177</sup>

While Lindsay's election was generally seen in a positive light, his compromise proposal for a review board made up of both civilians and police, which he had announced earlier that May, presented the pro-Weiss camp with a formidable rival. His proposal was harshly criticized by the members of the coalition, who maintained that only full civilian control was an effective check on police misconduct. Shortly after the Review Board Conference, Friedlander had proposed the creation of a "permanent NYC Civilian Review Committee to become specialized in civilian review and function as perpetual catalytic agents."<sup>178</sup> While the committee's initial focus was to implement the Weiss amendments, it quickly shifted to opposing the Lindsay plan. "Our task is to prevail upon both Weiss and Lindsay to liberalize their conception of civilian

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<sup>173</sup> "Lindsay's Astounding Victory," *New York Times*, November 3, 1965.

<sup>174</sup> "John Lindsay Speaks," May 13, 1965, Box 130, Folder 746, John Vliet Lindsay Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

<sup>175</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 130-133.

<sup>176</sup> Dick Leitsch to John V. Lindsay, November 10, 1965, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records.

<sup>177</sup> Leitsch to Manosevits, November 19, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>178</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Robert L. Carter, October 20, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers.



review,” Friedlander summarized in a December letter to the NAACP.<sup>179</sup>

That winter, every organization that was represented at the conference was invited to vote on the Weiss amendment committee’s proposals. The Mattachine held its vote during its quarterly business meeting on November 17, 1965, which was unanimously in support of both the Weiss Bill and the proposed amendments.<sup>180</sup> Ten other organizations voted in favor of the amendments, and by December 8, the conference shared its proposals with the mayor, City Council, and police commissioner. The coalition also made its first public appearance in a press conference at the NYCLU’s office.<sup>181</sup>

Internally to committee members, Friedlander emphasized the importance of aggressive political advocacy: “Our Conference Proposals are merely on paper. They contain no inherent power to force a change in the status quo.”<sup>182</sup> She also expressed a long-term vision for the coalition, which she described as a “permanent, cross-sectional Civilian Review Committee” that would “promote the creation and ripening of effective civilian review.”<sup>183</sup> Accordingly, during its first meeting on December 22, the committee created a strategy for “immediate political action” against its pressure targets in the mayor’s office and the City Council.<sup>184</sup> The review board coalition, including the Mattachine Society of New York, appeared ready to act.

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<sup>179</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Joan Franklin, December 7, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers.

<sup>180</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, January 1966, Box 14, Folder 39, NYPD Intelligence Records; Dick Leitsch to Mattachine Society of New York Member, November 2, 1965, Box 4, Folder 20, MSNY Records.

<sup>181</sup> NYCLU News Release, December 8, 1965, Box 1080, Folder 1, ACLU Records.

<sup>182</sup> Friedlander to Franklin, December 7, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>183</sup> Friedlander to Franklin, December 7, 1965, NAACP Papers.

<sup>184</sup> Telegram from Marjorie M. Friedlander to the NAACP, December 17, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers; Marjorie M. Friedlander to Robert L. Carter, December 28, 1965, Box 19, Folder 371, NAACP Papers.

### III.

#### Success or Failure? 1966

“Bitter laughter, deep hurt, cynical shrugs, forebodings of violence, a feeling that once again the white man had turned his back on the black man—these were reactions of Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant residents last night when they learned that the Civilian Complaint Review Board had been abolished by the city's voters.”<sup>185</sup>

— *New York Times*, November 9, 1966

If 1965 ended on a hopeful note, that optimism was quickly muted with the arrival of the new year. Despite Friedlander's expectation that the Review Board Conference would “grow rapidly in membership and support,” the first meeting of the year had such sparse attendance that the next invitation pointedly read: “[s]ome forget we are part of a group.”<sup>186</sup> Moreover, while the remaining members of the coalition worked with Theodore Weiss to amend and re-introduce his civilian review board proposal, in early May, Mayor Lindsay enacted his hybrid review board of four civilians and three policemen.<sup>187</sup> The announcement surprised the review board committee and ultimately rendered it obsolete.<sup>188</sup>

While the compromise board received criticism from the civil rights coalition, it faced even stronger opposition from the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association (PBA), the city's powerful police union. In June, the PBA partnered with the Conservative Party, the right-wing party that emerged in response to liberalism in the Republican Party, to campaign for a city-wide

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<sup>185</sup> Michael Stern, “Board's Defeat Elates Police, Saddens Negroes,” *New York Times*, November 9, 1966.

<sup>186</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Dr. R.J. Gallati, January 4, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records; Marjorie M. Friedlander to Frank D. O'Connor, January 4, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records; Marjorie M. Friedlander to New York Review Board Conference, January 31, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records.

<sup>187</sup> Memorandum, “The Weiss Diggs Bill,” 1966, Box 3, Folder 9, MSNY Records; Paul Hoffman, “Civilian Control of Police Review is Set Up By City,” *New York Times*, May 3, 1966.

<sup>188</sup> While the conference had engaged in some correspondence with the mayor's office towards the end of 1965, Lindsay remained committed to his hybrid board. A letter from Friedlander to Lindsay in January further suggests that the coalition had some trouble meeting with the mayor because of their disagreements. Lindsay's final announcement occurred without telling the group. Marjorie M. Friedlander to John V. Lindsay, January 25, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records.

referendum against the hybrid proposal.<sup>189</sup> The law-and-order coalition committed to spending almost \$2 million on the referendum, launching an aggressive and racially charged campaign that appealed to white voters' fears of Black crime.<sup>190</sup>

In response, members of the former Review Board Conference, including the NYCLU, Citizens Union, and the NAACP, created a forty-group coalition called the Federated Associations for Impartial Review (FAIR) in support of the hybrid board.<sup>191</sup> But unlike the conference's strong condemnations of police misconduct, FAIR was highly defensive. It emphasized how the hybrid board had police representation, protected police from "unfair and irresponsible complaints," and that the commissioner had final authority over the new board—the very aspects the initial coalition had opposed.<sup>192</sup>

Lindsay's hybrid board was repealed in a landslide vote on November 8, 1966: 1,307,738 to 768,592.<sup>193</sup> Black and Puerto Rican voters had overwhelmingly opposed the PBA's referendum, while white voters had largely supported it. The *New York Times* headline that day crudely stated: "Board's Defeat Elates Police, Saddens Negroes."<sup>194</sup> The multi-ethnic civil rights coalition—first as the Review Board Conference, then as FAIR—had failed. Clarence Taylor argues that the referendum would end "the opportunity for residents to have a voice in determining how the police operated" for years to come, while Christopher Hayes has gone as far as to deem 1966 "the end of the city's civil rights coalition among African Americans and white

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<sup>189</sup> The PBA existed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but only became a recognized bargaining unit after the 1958 "Little Wagner Act." The civilian review board referendum would be the first instance of the union participating in a political campaign.

<sup>190</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 214.

<sup>191</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 214.

<sup>192</sup> "Where Do You Stand on the Civilian Review Board?," 1966, Box 242, Folder 33, John V. Lindsay Papers.

<sup>193</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 157.

<sup>194</sup> Stern, "Board's Defeat Elates Police."

allies.”<sup>195</sup> New York would not have independent civilian review until 1993.<sup>196</sup>

The Mattachine’s account of 1966 contradicts the orthodox story in two ways. First, the organization continued to position itself as a leading member of the campaign, both during and after 1966, even though it gradually withdrew from the committee and did not even join FAIR. This is especially unusual considering that, by May, the original goals of the review board coalition had become unattainable—why would the organization take credit for a struggling campaign? Second, the Mattachine did not view the review board campaign as a failure, but as one of the many victories it accomplished in 1966.

This chapter analyzes these two inconsistencies to argue that the 1964-66 Civilian Complaint Review Board campaign cannot be strictly evaluated as a success or a failure. For the Mattachine Society of New York, participation in the review board coalition was as important as the outcome of the campaign: not only was it the first time that other reputable organizations understood and supported homosexual concerns, but its new allies also allowed the Mattachine to legitimize itself as a gay civil rights organization.

Ultimately, while efforts for independent civilian review were stymied by the November referendum, 1966 was a turning point for gay political organizing. This thesis has thus far narrated a history of early gay coalitional politics. From this perspective, the Review Board Conference *was* a victory, as it enabled the Mattachine to associate and collaborate with other civil rights groups in the city to combat anti-gay policing. As Leitsch later recounted: “We have done a lot in New York in the past few months...[we] made contacts in other organizations...used those contacts...Everything fell into place.”<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Taylor, *Fight the Power*, 156; Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 219.

<sup>196</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 248.

<sup>197</sup> Dick Leitsch to Elver Barker (Carl B. Harding), May 27, 1966, Box 1, Folder 12, MSNY Records.

### *Mattachine and Civilian Review*

By January, the Mattachine had begun pulling back from the review board campaign. Dick Leitsch was absent from the first few meetings of the review board committee despite being a member of the steering committee.<sup>198</sup> And it was Friedlander, not Leitsch, who advocated for the Weiss Bill amendment to allow private hearings. In her appeal to Councilmember Weiss, Friedlander noted how the change would have the largest effect on homosexual complainants: “A homosexual might file a complaint concerning police entrapment...A private hearing would protect him from public glare and such sanctions as social humiliation and loss of job.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, even as the review board committee directly addressed the concerns of gay New Yorkers, the Mattachine stepped out from the campaign.

That summer, as the focus shifted from the Weiss Bill to the Lindsay-PBA battle, almost all the organizations from the October 12th conference joined FAIR—even Citizens Union, which had left the review board committee due to ideological disagreements.<sup>200</sup> But the Mattachine never joined.<sup>201</sup> Dick Leitsch’s journal, which meticulously tracked the progress of every Mattachine campaign, mentioned the review board only once in 1966.<sup>202</sup>

The organization did remain somewhat independently involved. In an October 1966 letter to Mayor Lindsay, Timmons wrote: “members of the Mattachine Society Inc. of New York, all

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<sup>198</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to New York Review Board Conference, January 31, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records; Dick Leitsch’s personal datebook, 1966, Box 58, Folder 2, DL Papers.

<sup>199</sup> Marjorie M. Friedlander to Theodore Weiss, February 10, 1966, Box 3, Folder 7, MSNY Records. The exact quote read: “We feel all hearings should be public unless otherwise determined by the Board upon its own initiative or at the instance of either party for good cause shown. Among other things we had in mind the shielding of a homosexual complainant from public exposure. A homosexual might file a complaint concerning police entrapment, for example. A private hearing would protect him from public glare and such sanctions as social humiliation and loss of job.”

<sup>200</sup> “Members of FAIR,” 1966, Box 3, Folder 10, MSNY Records.

<sup>201</sup> “Members of FAIR,” 1966, MSNY Records.

<sup>202</sup> Dick Leitsch’s journal, 1966, Box 58, Folder 2, DL Papers. The mention was on May 2nd, the day Lindsay announced his hybrid board.

volunteers, made more than three hundred telephone calls to members of this society...urging them to vote ‘No’ on the Civilian Review Board proposition,” and “more than 10,000 leaflets will be handed out...in support of your Board.”<sup>203</sup> Still, the telephone campaign bore closer resemblance to the spring of 1965, when Leitsch and Hodges attempted to organize a Mattachine-wide petition for the Weiss Bill, than to the organization’s significant involvement in the Review Board Conference.

The Mattachine likely stepped away for practical reasons. By May 1966, the organization successfully pushed Mayor Lindsay to issue an executive order banning entrapment, and, by conducting a “sip-in” at a bar that refused to serve homosexuals, forced the State Liquor Authority to pull back its policy of closing gay bars.<sup>204</sup> At the same time, there are no records of disagreements between the Mattachine and other members of the coalition, and the organization’s telephone and leaflet campaigns suggest that it was still invested in civilian review. Thus, it is probable that the Mattachine made a pragmatic decision to redirect its energy because the other campaigns more directly addressed anti-gay policing—and eventually proved to be successful. This contrasts with Timothy Stewart-Winter’s study of early Black-gay coalitions in Chicago, which argues that, “as gay bars with predominantly white, middle-class patrons came under less scrutiny and suffered much less harassment—its activists largely withdrew from the fight against the growing police state.”<sup>205</sup> The Mattachine’s departure began in January, before the organization obtained significant victories in its anti-entrapment and anti-bar raid campaigns; it did not demonstrate the Society’s privilege, but the pragmatic tradeoffs it had to make as a small organization with limited time and resources.

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<sup>203</sup> John Timmons to Mayor Lindsay, October 11, 1966, Box 1, Folder 12, MSNY Records.

<sup>204</sup> John Timmons to John Ralston, March 8, 1967, Box 45, Folder 1, DL Papers.

<sup>205</sup> Stewart-Winter, “Queer Law and Order,” 62.

But regardless of the reason, the Mattachine did not see itself as withdrawing. In a September letter to the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis, Leitsch urged the organization to follow the Mattachine in “[o]rganiz[ing] and work[ing] towards a police review board,” and to “[b]e prepared for a large fight...because the cops make this an emotional issue.”<sup>206</sup> The description of a “large fight” with the “cops” indicates that Leitsch is referencing the PBA battle, not the conference—which had never been in direct confrontation with the police. Intentional or not, to the Society’s West Coast correspondents, it probably seemed as though the New York Mattachine had stayed active in the anti-referendum campaign. Similarly in December 1966, the National League for Social Understanding (NLSU) lamented the “voters destroying [sic] the efforts that your organization had went to in establishing [the board],” suggesting that the Mattachine had played up its participation in the review board campaign in previous letters to the NLSU.<sup>207</sup>

It is also unusual that, while the Mattachine frequently mentioned the review board in external correspondence—such as Timmons’s letter to the mayor—there are no internal documents in the archives to corroborate that they were involved after January 1966. Though it is hard to draw conclusions from an absence in the archives, the lack of Mattachine Society publications, organizational documents, and internal correspondence suggests that the review board had become a much lower priority. Thus, the organization may have intentionally overstated its participation in the 1966 campaign.

More strikingly, the Mattachine saw the review board campaign in positive terms. In his speech to the Mattachine Forum that May, Leitsch named the civilian review board campaign as

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<sup>206</sup> Dick Leitsch to the San Francisco Daughters of Bilitis, September 6, 1966, Box 1, Folder 12, MSNY Records.

<sup>207</sup> Al De Labior to Dick Leitsch, December 6, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

the first example of the post-1965 leadership's "great strides."<sup>208</sup> Of course, Leitsch's December correspondence with the NLSU acknowledged the unfortunate reality of the referendum vote. But in his response, he also described the "short-lived civilian review board" as one of the many "success and positive changes in community attitudes" the Mattachine achieved that year.<sup>209</sup>

It is possible to dismiss the Mattachine's account of the campaign as dishonest or misinformed. But both inconsistencies can be explained by the fact that the Mattachine *had* found success in the New York Review Board Conference, at least by its own metrics: it built enduring relationships with civil rights groups in the city while making itself known as a homosexual rights organization.

*"Everything fell into place": Victories in 1966*

From its election in 1965, the Mattachine's new leadership sought to legitimize the organization as an advocacy group that would push for legal reforms and political change. But in the 1960s, the stigmas surrounding homosexuality made it difficult for homophile groups to claim they were advocating on behalf of a rights-deserving minority. Most people believed in the medical model—which contended that homosexuals should be cured, not given equal rights—and the threat of social ostracism kept most gay men and lesbians from openly declaring their sexuality and joining the homophile movement.<sup>210</sup> Thus, the Mattachine not only had to prove its legitimacy as an organization, but also the validity of its cause: that homosexuals were a minority that deserved equal civil rights.

The conference was the perfect opportunity. Because the panels grouped homosexuals

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<sup>208</sup> Dick Leitsch, "WE SHALL OVERCOME: The changing face of MATTACHINE, a report on the present trends in, and activities of, The Mattachine Society Inc. of New York," May 18, 1966, Box 44, Folder 13, DL Papers. While the speech was delivered before the PBA's triumph in the referendum, it was months after the Weiss Bill—which the Mattachine had clearly preferred over Lindsay's proposal—had become obsolete.

<sup>209</sup> Dick Leitsch to Al De Labior, December 12, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>210</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 15.



with Black and Puerto Rican New Yorkers under “The Minority and the Police,” the Mattachine could support its claim that it was a minority rights group that faced its own set of policing problems.<sup>211</sup> More importantly, Friedlander’s invitation allowed the homophile group to become integrated in the city’s existing fabric of civil rights activism. Leitsch later reflected: “Through [the review board] efforts, we have picked up the support of many individuals and groups who formerly believed the homosexual community to be an in-group which cared about nothing but itself...we gathered the support of many individuals who have proved very helpful to the society. This was inter-personal relations in action.”<sup>212</sup> Leitsch had even circled the last line and written, “HOW? EXPAND.”<sup>213</sup> His writings suggest that the civilian review board campaign was a turning point for gay visibility, at least in terms of other activist groups.

The Mattachine Society achieved a series of victories in the spring of 1966 with the support of its new allies. In February, when discussing concerns about anti-gay housing discrimination, Leitsch identified William H. Booth, Chairman of the City Commission on Human Rights and former member of the Review Board Conference, as a viable ally to help pressure difficult landlords.<sup>214</sup> Booth had been “receptive and quite interested in what Mattachine is doing” during the conference, and had even written to Leitsch, “assuring [him] that [the Mattachine] will always find an open door at the City Commission on Human Rights.”<sup>215</sup> Later that year, Booth led efforts to combat employment discrimination against homosexuals in city agencies.<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> For the homophile movement’s use of analogies between Black civil rights and gay rights, see Nikita Shepard, “‘The Second Largest Minority’: Analogies Between Race and Sexuality in the American Homophile Movement, 1944-1968,” (M.A., Middle Tennessee State University, 2018).

<sup>212</sup> Leitsch, “WE SHALL OVERCOME,” May 18, 1966, DL Papers.

<sup>213</sup> Leitsch, “WE SHALL OVERCOME,” May 18, 1966, DL Papers.

<sup>214</sup> Dick Leitsch to John V. P. Lasso, February 10, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>215</sup> Leitsch to Lasso, February 10, 1966, MSNY Records.

<sup>216</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

That March, after two massive anti-gay crackdowns in Times Square and Washington Square Park, the NYCLU protested the NYPD for “confusing deviant social behavior with criminal activity.”<sup>217</sup> In April, the NYCLU also took an appeals case for three men who were convicted of solicitation in a Greenwich Village bar, where it argued that “there must be evidence...to show that the illegal act would have been consummated without the intercession of police or governmental authorities” and that the three men had done nothing to warrant a disorderly conduct conviction.<sup>218</sup> The NYCLU not only challenged the legality of entrapment, but also a fundamental premise of the anti-gay laws that had been in place since the 1930s: that gay men and lesbians were inherently “disorderly.”<sup>219</sup> The NYCLU’s support gave teeth to the argument that the Mattachine had been making for years, and on May 11, 1966, Mayor Lindsay and Commissioner Leary finally issued an order banning the use of entrapment in homosexuality-related arrests.<sup>220</sup>

The strongest new relationship from the conference was with Friedlander, who had brought up anti-gay policing in civilian review board discussions as early as July 1965.<sup>221</sup> Friedlander and Leitsch, who stayed in close contact during the Review Board Conference, eventually became good friends. Even as Leitsch was scaling back his participation in the conference, he continued to meet with Friedlander privately—even if it was just for dinner—and regularly attended meetings at the Community Church of New York.<sup>222</sup> In May 1966, Friedlander was elected to a two-year term as a Mattachine board member. In his congratulatory message, Leitsch wrote: “It is you who have opened so many new doors for the Society and made it

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<sup>217</sup> Aryeh Neier, quoted in Eric Pace, “Times Sq. Cleanup Brings a Protest,” *New York Times*, March 18, 1966.

<sup>218</sup> “NYCLU Urges Court To See Entrapment as Defense Ground,” *Civil Liberties in New York* (NYCLU Newsletter), April 1966, Box 715, Folder 9, ACLU Records.

<sup>219</sup> Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 172

<sup>220</sup> Eric Pace, “Policemen Forbidden to Entrap Homosexuals to Make Arrests,” *New York Times*, May 11, 1966.

<sup>221</sup> Testimony by the Social Action Committee, July 13, 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>222</sup> Dick Leitsch’s journal, 1966, DL Papers.

possible for us to participate in the general community to such a great extent.”<sup>223</sup> The language in his letter suggests that Friedlander’s board position was a culmination of their work together on the review board campaign—especially her role as a key liaison between the homophile organization and its new civil rights allies..

Through the review board coalition, the Mattachine also demonstrated that the homosexual organization shared legitimate concerns with other minority groups, and, crucially, that it was willing to work alongside civil rights organizations to advance a collective goal. “We must stop considering the homosexual’s battle as an isolated one,” reaffirmed Leitsch at a homophile meeting in San Francisco that year, “and recognize it for what it is — part of the larger battle for civil rights and self-determination. We must work with other groups, and for other groups, and demand that they then support our demonstrations and our activities.”<sup>224</sup>

Leitsch’s statement was significant. While previous homophile activists had collaborated with non-gay organizations, such as Kameny with the National Capital ACLU, they were narrowly focused on advancing specific gains for homosexuals. Eric Cervini argues that Kameny and other Washington Mattachine members supported the NCACLU with the “cunning” intention to “infiltrat[e]” the organization and influence it into taking homosexuality-related cases.<sup>225</sup> Leitsch, on the other hand, saw intersectional coalition-building as intrinsically valuable; it was not only important to change anti-gay laws and policies, but also to have good relationships with reliable allies that had extensive experience with fighting discrimination.

Indeed, the conference would be remembered as “the first time that people of this calibre

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<sup>223</sup> Dick Leitsch to Marjorie M. Friedlander, May 27, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>224</sup> Dick Leitsch, “Concrete Steps that Must be Taken if the Homophile Movement is to be Successful,” August 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>225</sup> Cervini, *The Deviant’s War*, chap. 7.

and of proven accomplishment had taken an interest in the homosexual organization.”<sup>226</sup> The Mattachine believed these “unimpeachable”<sup>227</sup> and “leading citizens”<sup>228</sup> organizations would lend further credibility to its cause.<sup>229</sup> Ironically, this strategy somewhat resembled the old leadership’s reliance on medical and legal professionals. In both cases, the organization hoped that external heterosexual validation would help destigmatize homosexual existence—and consequently, homosexual rights.<sup>230</sup> But, unlike the deferential relationship that the old Mattachine had with medical and legal professionals, the Mattachine emphasized their “equal standing with the NAACP, CORE, the Civil Liberties Union, the Urban League, B’nai B’irth, etc.”<sup>231</sup> According to Timmons, “we work with them, and...[i]n return, they help us.”<sup>232</sup> Moreover, by serving on the amendment and steering committees, Leitsch and the other Mattachine representatives had visibly asserted themselves as leaders of the campaign.

The Mattachine was not the only early gay organization to rely on such tactics. In the 1970s, the Gay Latino Alliance (GALA) in San Francisco supported Latina feminists in campaigning against gender-based violence and engaged with efforts to elect a straight Latino to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.<sup>233</sup> By integrating itself into existing Latino community organizing, Eduardo Contreras argues, GALA intended to “foster greater interaction and garner support from straight Latinos.”<sup>234</sup> GALA worked to destigmatize gay rights activism while positioning itself as a legitimate ally for Latino civil rights; to do so, it provided practical support

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<sup>226</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>227</sup> Dick Leitsch to Henry Disuervo, December 3, 1965, Box 1, Folder 11, MSNY Records.

<sup>228</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, March 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>229</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, March 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>230</sup> The coalition members’ reputation was also significant because, even before it was elected to the board, Mattachine’s new leadership had envisioned that its work would be modeled off successful civil rights groups.

<sup>231</sup> Dick Leitsch to James K. Mazurek, November 18, 1967, Box 1, Folder 15, MSNY Records.

<sup>232</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>233</sup> Eduardo A. Contreras, *Latinos and the Liberal City: Politics and Protest in San Francisco*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 211.

<sup>234</sup> Contreras, *Latinos and the Liberal City*, 211.

on campaigns that were not immediately relevant to homosexuals. The review board campaign, by contrast, was an even better opportunity, as the Mattachine was already invested in the goal of reducing police misconduct.

By re-defining success to include “inter-personal relations in action,” the Mattachine could view the review board campaign as a success while simultaneously acknowledging that it failed to achieve its original policy goals. Moreover, if the Mattachine almost immediately benefitted from the practical support of its new allies, it is understandable why it withdrew from the campaign: it no longer needed the review board to collaborate with other organizations. The Mattachine’s specific metrics for success are succinctly summarized in a draft of its 1966 Annual Report, which lists the Civilian Complaint Review Board as an accomplishment under both “Police Problems” and “Public and Community Relations,” with the latter elaborated as “[n]ew contacts in other organizations.”<sup>235</sup>

*“Lavender power” or “the NAACP of our movement”?*

That same year, Stokely Carmichael of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) gave his first “Black Power” speech, foreshadowing the Black freedom struggle’s eventual split into civil rights and militant factions.<sup>236</sup> Leitsch was well-aware of this break: when SNCC asked the Mattachine to draft a statement of sympathy in September 1966, Leitsch denied the request “because of the controversy over ‘black power’...in the Negro movement.”<sup>237</sup> “[A] statement such as you recommend,” he wrote, “might endanger the liaisons we have made with civil-rights organizations who disagree with Mr. Carmichael’s philosophy.”<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> Untitled Administrative Material for Annual Report, 1966, Box 44, Folder 11, DL Papers.

<sup>236</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 224.

<sup>237</sup> Philip Paris to Dick Leitsch, September 21, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records; Dick Leitsch to Philip Paris, September 22, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>238</sup> Leitsch to Paris, September 22, 1966, MSNY Records.

While Leitsch framed his decision as a practical one—he was concerned about alienating his contacts at the NAACP—it is still significant that the Mattachine explicitly took a side in the civil rights-Black power divide. It is likely that the SNCC would have been as effective of an ally as the NAACP, especially since the Mattachine’s sip-in campaign was inspired by SNCC’s successful 1960 lunch counter sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, Philip Paris’s letter marked one of the few times a non-gay organization proactively reached out to the Mattachine. Yet Leitsch responded: “Believe me, the homosexual has enough to fight without trying to justify ‘lavendar [sic] power’!”<sup>240</sup>

In the years following the conference, the Mattachine found itself toeing the line between militant and moderate as it worked to maintain its relationships with its new political allies. This is especially evident in the highly variable (even contradictory) labels the Mattachine used to describe its post-1965 organizational strategies, ranging from “militant”<sup>241</sup> (May 1965) and “radical”<sup>242</sup> (August 1966) to “‘respectable’ and nearly establishment”<sup>243</sup> (November 1967). By emphasizing its militancy, the Mattachine’s new leadership aimed to distinguish the organization from homophile groups that were more aligned with its pre-1965 leadership—which it viewed as ineffective and passive. At the same time, the Mattachine sought to appear respectable to city officials and the public, especially because it was working against the prejudice that homosexuals were “disorderly” by nature.<sup>244</sup> Above all, the organization wanted to maintain its strong relationship with civil rights groups.

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<sup>239</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 150, 223.

<sup>240</sup> Leitsch to Paris, September 22, 1966, MSNY Records..

<sup>241</sup> *Eastern Mattachine Magazine*, May 1965, ACLU Records.

<sup>242</sup> Leitsch, “Concrete Steps,” August 1966, MSNY Records.

<sup>243</sup> Leitsch to Mazurek, November 18, 1967, MSNY Records.

<sup>244</sup> As mentioned earlier in this thesis, the notion of inherent disorderliness or deviance were present in both the medical model, as well as legal codes and police practices, which often charged homosexuals with “disorderly conduct.”

The Mattachine's identity crisis began with the review board campaign, which Leitsch described as "all of the "liberal" reform organizations in New York work[ing] together to get a Civilian Review Board to hear allegations of police misconduct."<sup>245</sup> The NYCLU and NAACP were not just good allies because they were "better-known," but because they were "*acceptable* social-reform organizations [emphasis mine]."<sup>246</sup> Thus, when a correspondent asked Leitsch to describe the Mattachine's politics, he answered: "We are almost disgustingly 'respectable' and nearly establishment."<sup>247</sup>

Associating itself with "liberal" politics was also important to the Mattachine's relationship with city officials. While most progressive organizations only praised Lindsay before his election, the Mattachine was publicly supportive throughout his administration.<sup>248</sup> After Lindsay issued the anti-entrapment order in May, Leitsch was quoted by the *New York Times*: "[m]ost homosexuals like the Mayor and Mr. Leary—they're tremendous men."<sup>249</sup> He then wrote privately to Lindsay: "On behalf of New York City's estimated 500,000 homosexuals, I would like to thank you for your concern for us, and promise you our continued support."<sup>250</sup> It is unclear if the Mattachine's leadership actually supported the mayor, given his complicated track record on homosexuality. After all, it was the mayor who had initially approved the Greenwich Village and Times Square "cleanups," and, in June, Lindsay had forced his health services administrator to resign due to suspicions of homosexuality.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Leitsch to Mazurek, November 18, 1967, MSNY Records.

<sup>246</sup> Leitsch to Mazurek, November 18, 1967, MSNY Records.

<sup>247</sup> Leitsch to Mazurek, November 18, 1967, MSNY Records.

<sup>248</sup> Even in 1969, during Lindsay's re-election campaign, the Mattachine distributed materials to its membership that named Lindsay a pro-homosexual candidate, including lines such as: "Mayor Lindsay has proven to be a friend of the homosexual community." Mayoralty Candidates, 1969, Box 14, Folder 36, NYPD Intelligence Records.

<sup>249</sup> Eric Pace, "Policemen Forbidden to Entrap Homosexuals to Make Arrests," *New York Times*, May 11, 1966.

<sup>250</sup> Dick Leitsch to John V. Lindsay, May 13, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>251</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 209. Dr. Howard Brown, the health services administrator, is quoted as saying that the mayor "was not particularly sympathetic to homosexuals."

Indeed, the Mattachine had a clear strategic motivation for maintaining its relationship with the mayor. In a February letter to the Mattachine Midwest, Leitsch suggested that Lindsay might “use the Mattachine Society for his purpose” to “look more ‘liberal,’” but added that, “[i]f he needs us, we’ll certainly use the hell out of him!”<sup>252</sup> He envisioned a mutualistic relationship with the mayor: by presenting itself as a “liberal” organization that could galvanize gay support for the mayor, Lindsay would be more likely to make concessions to the Mattachine.<sup>253</sup> While more established organizations could afford to criticize the mayor, the Mattachine Society needed his support in order for its proposals to be successful. In this sense, Lindsay was the most important “new contact” the organization had gained through the review board campaign. This strategy might also explain Timmons’s letter to the mayor in October 1966; while the Mattachine did not feel the need to join FAIR, it was still important to maintain its relationship with the liberal Republican city administration.

At the same time, Leitsch deemed the New York Mattachine “[p]robably the most radical homophile organization in America today...[and] the group that has achieved the most in the past year.”<sup>254</sup> From his perspective, other homophile organizations were continuing the New York branch’s pre-1965 approach of providing social services and education; by contrast, the Mattachine *had* made a radical shift. In early 1965, the organization’s mission was solely to educate and provide resources, but by 1967, legal reform was the organization’s “primary” purpose, while “information about the homosexual community” was “secondary.”<sup>255</sup> The

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<sup>252</sup> Dick Leitsch to William B. Kelley (Secretary of Mattachine Midwest), February 28, 1966, Box 1, Folder 13, MSNY Records.

<sup>253</sup> While there are few records—beyond the pamphlet mentioned in footnote 77—of the Mattachine viewing its membership as a gay voting bloc, Leitsch’s May 13<sup>th</sup> letter to Lindsay suggests that it may have wanted the mayor to believe that was the case.

<sup>254</sup> Leitsch, “Concrete Steps,” August 1966, MSNY Records.

<sup>255</sup> “Re: Background of Organizations Belonging to the East Coast Homophile Organization,” 1965, Box 14, Folder 38, NYPD Intelligence Records; Leitsch to Mazurek, November 18, 1967, MSNY Records.



organization even briefly ceased publication of its newsletter and the *Eastern Mattachine Magazine* in 1966 because, in Leitsch's words, "we would be of more use to the homosexual community of New York is [sic] we expended our efforts and energies towards changing society."<sup>256</sup> These changes would have been unthinkable to the old guard leadership.

Beginning with the New York Review Board Conference, the Mattachine's new leadership used a range of tactics and alliances to legitimize itself as a homosexual rights organization and successfully advocate for meaningful pro-gay reforms. With its newfound visibility, the Mattachine Society actively constructed its own political identity—largely based on its new allies. It was more militant than the other homophile organizations, but liberal enough to be pro-Lindsay. It defined itself as an "action" group, but it was not calling for "lavender power." In short, the Society was a "a civil rights group for homosexuals similar in function to the NAACP."<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Leitsch to De Labior, December 12, 1966, MSNY Records.

<sup>257</sup> Renee Vera Cafiero (Program Chairman of the Mattachine Society of New York) to Stanley Kauffman, February 20, 1967, Box 1, Folder 12, MSNY Records.

## IV.

### Epilogue

By 1967, the Mattachine Society of New York was involved in over twenty court cases, appeared in a hundred local television and radio shows, and spoke in front of more than ninety school, religious, and civic groups.<sup>258</sup> Following the success of its 1966 campaign, the organization expanded its anti-entrapment lobbying efforts to Suffolk County and Newark. It continued to refer gay men to lawyers and doctors—a service that now encompassed New Jersey and Connecticut—and also started programs to support parents of homosexuals.<sup>259</sup> That March, John Timmons wrote that the organization “ha[d] ‘solved’ most of the problems of homosexuals in the city.”<sup>260</sup> Exaggeration or not, the Society was in its prime.

Through its participation in the review board campaign, the organization’s post-1965 leadership successfully shifted the organization’s focus from social services and education to political advocacy. Years before Stonewall—and decades before the Black-gay electoral coalitions in Chicago—the Mattachine Society of New York had found common ground for collaboration with organizations like the NAACP. According to the organization’s leadership, the Mattachine’s reach had expanded from its membership of barely 500 to all the homosexuals in New York who participated in cruising and gay nightlife—a number that Leitsch estimated to be 500,000.<sup>261</sup>

But the tide was turning once again, as 1968 brought a new wave of radicalism to American activism. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination that spring brought a newfound fervor

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<sup>258</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>259</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>260</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>261</sup> “The Mattachine Society, Inc.,” September 22, 1965, NYPD Intelligence Records; Leitsch to Lindsay, May 13, 1966, MSNY Records.

to Stokely Carmichael's militant call for "Black Power." Radical student protests from Columbia to Paris came to define the "New Left," which preferred revolution to gradualist political reform. And around 2 A.M. on June 27, 1969, two policemen arrived at the Stonewall Inn to conduct a routine bar raid, inadvertently sparking one of the most pivotal events in gay history.<sup>262</sup> The crowd outside the bar defiantly threw pennies, cans, and bricks at the police; by the following night, four hundred police battled a crowd of almost two thousand.<sup>263</sup> A month after the Stonewall Riots, the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) was formed: a "revolutionary group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished."<sup>264</sup> The GLF explicitly rejected political advocacy in favor of radical protest tactics. A new generation of gay activists had taken up the call for "lavender power" that Leitsch had dismissed in 1966.

The Mattachine did not embrace the revolution. That same month, Leitsch wrote in the Mattachine Newsletter: "We're fighting for human decency and survival, and John Lindsay is our one hope."<sup>265</sup> For the Mattachine Society, the 1969 mayoral elections felt more pressing than the Stonewall Riots; it was effectively a political advocacy organization, and the mayor was a critical ally for implementing pro-gay reforms. During the organization's August 1969 meeting, Leitsch dismissed the GLF's approach as "an emotional rather than radical commitment" that relied on "slogans and catch phrases rather than issues."<sup>266</sup> The focus, he argued, should be on voting, financial pressure, and educational campaigns.<sup>267</sup>

It is this moment that has cemented the homophile movement's reputation as moderate

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<sup>262</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, August 1969, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) Periodical Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>263</sup> D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 232.

<sup>264</sup> GLF Statement of Purpose, July 31, 1969, quoted in D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 234.

<sup>265</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, July 1969, LGBT Periodical Collection.

<sup>266</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, September 1969, LGBT Periodical Collection.

<sup>267</sup> *New York Mattachine Newsletter*, September 1969, LGBT Periodical Collection.

and accommodationist. In the years that followed, the GLF and similar radical groups far surpassed the Mattachine in size and significance; D’Emilio describes Stonewall as the “critical divide” where a “small, thinly spread reform effort suddenly grew into a large, grassroots movement for liberation.”<sup>268</sup> But it is important to remember how, just four years prior, Leitch had led his own “militant” faction to advocate for gay New Yorkers in the City Council, which would have been unthinkable in the early 1960s.

To fully understand the success of gay liberation in the 1970s, it is necessary to recognize the symbolic and practical impacts of the Mattachine Society of New York’s coalition-building efforts. Not only did the Society advance tangible reforms against anti-gay policing, but it also legitimized the homosexual cause to other civil rights groups and to the city administration. Thus, while D’Emilio might be correct to characterize homophile activists as “detached from the rebellions that were rocking the nation” in the late 1960s, it was not because the Mattachine was out of touch, but rather because it believed that it was strategically impractical to abandon its new civil rights allies.<sup>269</sup> In a sense, the gay emancipation movement was grappling with the same tensions and contradictions as the Black freedom struggle, which was similarly split into gradualist and radical factions. Thus, the eventual success of GLF and other radical organizations does not undercut the significance of the Mattachine Society’s work during and after 1965.

Moreover, the Mattachine’s continued collaboration with members of the Review Board Conference—along with the fact that the SNCC proactively sought them out as an ally—challenges Christopher Hayes’s claim that the 1966 referendum ended interracial collaboration in New York City.<sup>270</sup> The Mattachine regularly sent its members to picket with civil rights groups,

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<sup>268</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 237-239.

<sup>269</sup> D’Emilio, *Sexual Politics*, 224.

<sup>270</sup> Hayes, *The Harlem Uprising*, 219.

and many became individually involved in these groups.<sup>271</sup> “In return,” John Timmons noted in March 1967, “they help us.”<sup>272</sup> While the broader question of white allies is outside the scope of this thesis, limited evidence of gay-Black coalition-building after 1966 suggests that white gay people continued to be invested in the Black freedom struggle, even if the end goal was to galvanize more support for their own movement. Moreover, the review board campaign demonstrated to Black activists that white homosexuals were negatively affected by police in a way that their heterosexual counterparts were not. Even though an independent Civilian Complaint Review Board would not exist until the 1990s, the conference itself was still a “prototype for the nation”<sup>273</sup>: it proved that that productive collaboration between Black and white gay activists was possible.

The Mattachine Society of New York was neither a militant trailblazer nor a passive accommodationist. But at a time when most Americans thought homosexuality was immoral or an illness, the organization boldly asserted that gay people were a rights-deserving minority by situating homosexual rights in the “larger battle for civil rights,”<sup>274</sup> whetting the city’s appetite for the more radical gay activism that would follow.

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<sup>271</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers. Timmons additionally noted that “MSNY is not mentioned: our members go as individuals.”

<sup>272</sup> Timmons to Ralston, March 8, 1967, DL Papers.

<sup>273</sup> Friedlander to Stringfellow and Patton, August 16, 1965, MSNY Records.

<sup>274</sup> Leitsch, “Concrete Steps,” August 1966, MSNY Records.

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