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THE TOLERANCE TRAP

How God, Genes, and Good Intentions
Are Sabotaging Gay Equality

For my fabulous daughter, Emma
and in memory of my equally fabulous mother, Marianne

Introduction

That's So Gay! (Or Is It?)

Ain't nothin' wrong with bein' a little gay.
Everybody's a little gay.
—Honey Boo Boo

At first glance, tolerance seems like a good thing. Really, who doesn't applaud tolerance? What individual doesn't want to be seen as tolerant? It seems to herald openness to difference and a generally broad-minded disposition. Indeed, one of the primary definitions of "tolerance" concerns sympathy or indulgence for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one's own. But it is a word and a practice with a more complicated history and with real limitations. The late Middle English origins of the word indicate the ability to bear pain and hardship. In fact, some of the first uses of the word can be found in medieval pharmacology and toxicology, dealing with how much poison a body can "tolerate" before it succumbs to a foreign, poisonous substance.

In more contemporary times, we speak of a tolerance to something as the capacity to endure continued subjection to it (a plant, a drug, a minority group) without adverse reactions. We speak of people who have a high tolerance for pain or worry about a generation developing a tolerance for a certain type of antibiotic because of overuse. In more scientific usages, it refers to the allowable amount of variation of a specified quantity—the amount "let in" before the thing itself alters so fundamentally that it becomes something else and the experiment fails. So tolerance almost always implies or assumes something negative or undesired or even a variation contained and circumscribed.

It doesn't make sense to say that we tolerate something unless we think that it's wrong in some way. To say you "tolerate" homosexuality is to imply that homosexuality is bad or immoral or even just benignly icky, like that exotic food you just can't bring yourself to try. You are willing to put up with (to tolerate) this nastiness, but the toleration proves the thing (the person, the sexuality, the food) to be irredeemably nasty to begin with. But here's the rub: if there is nothing problematic about something (say, homosexuality), then there is really nothing to "tolerate." We don't speak of tolerating pleasure or a good book or a sunshine-filled day. We do, however, take pains to let others know how brave we are when we tolerate the discomfort of a bad back or a nasty cold. We tolerate the agony of a frustratingly banal movie that our partner insisted on watching and are thought the better for it. We tolerate, in other words, that which we would rather avoid. Tolerance is not an embrace but a resigned shrug or, worse, that air kiss of faux familiarity that barely covers up the shiver of disgust.

This book challenges received wisdom that asserts tolerance as the path to gay[1] rights. Most gays and their allies believe that access to marriage and the military are the brass ring of gay rights and that once we have achieved these goals we will have moved into a post-gay America. Most gays and their allies believe that gays are "born that way" and that proving biological immutability is the key to winning over reluctant heterosexuals and gaining civil rights. Most gays and their allies believe that the closet is largely a thing of the past and that we have entered a new era of sexual ease and fluidity. Most gays and their allies think that we have essentially won the culture wars and that gay visibility in popular culture is a sign of substantive gay progress. Most gays and their allies believe that gay is the new black: hip, happening, embraced. Most gays and their allies believe that if those who are anti-gay just got to know us as their PTA-going neighbors, they would love us. Most gays and their allies believe that we are almost there: we can see the end of the tunnel, where a rainbow world of warm inclusion awaits us. These people are wrong.

The Tolerance Trap challenges this fantasy of completion and takes a hard look at the ways of thinking that allow us all to imagine that inclusion is at hand and tolerance is the way to get it. The tolerance mindset offers up a liberal, "gay-positive" version of homosexuality that lets the mainstream tolerate gayness. Its chief tactic is the plea for acceptance. Acceptance is the handmaiden of tolerance, and both are inadequate and even dangerous modes for accessing real social inclusion and change, as I hope to demonstrate in this book. The "accept us" agenda shows up both in everyday forms of popular culture and in the broader national discourse on rights and belonging. "Accept us" themes run the gamut: accept us because we're just like you; accept us because we're all God's children; accept us because we're born with it; accept us because we're brave and bereft victims and you can rescue us; accept us because we're wild and wacky drag queens with hearts of gold who can provide homespun advice to floundering heterosexuals; accept us because we can be your best girlfriend; accept us because then you can save us from our own self-hatred and vanquish homophobia in the process; accept us because we make you look hip and tolerant. The "accept us" trope pushes outside the charmed circle of acceptance those gays and other gender and sexual minorities, such as transgendered folks and gays of color, who don't fit the poster-boy image of nonstraight people and who can't be—or don't want to be—assimilated.

This book takes on the illusion of progress that is rooted in a watered-down goal of tolerance and acceptance rather than a deep claim for full civil rights. The leap to claim we are "almost there" prevents all of us (gay and straight alike) from fully including lesbians and gays into American society in a way that embraces—rather than merely tolerates—the rich traditions and differences they bring to the table. A too-soon declaration of victory hurts both gays and straights; it short-circuits the march toward full equality and deprives us all of the transformative possibilities of full integration.

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Here is the conventional story of gay rights: We start with the Stonewall Riots. As most Americans know, and as President Obama spoke

of in his inaugural address in 2013, Stonewall is a triumphant story of gay citizens—long stigmatized and unfairly persecuted—standing up for themselves and fighting back. It is now more than forty years since the hot summer night of those riots. That auspicious event—when lesbians, gays, transsexuals, and queers erupted in street protests—seems like ancient history, feels like the turbulent storm before the calm of a newly tolerant America. While at the time these Stonewall icons were pilloried in the press as pansies run amok, now they are lionized and heralded as the shot across the bow of straight America, even as their righteous anger looks as dated as the clothes they were wearing. American politics and culture were indisputably altered from that signal moment of frustration when those who were denied even the right to freely associate, much less share in the fullness of American life, engaged in open defiance, voicing the rage that became a full-throated yell of social rebellion. Now, mainstream films like *Brokeback Mountain* and *The Kids Are All Right* entertain moviegoers with their forthright gay themes and scenes. Obligatory (if still tokenized) gay characters dot the cultural landscape: the surprisingly gay character in a tedious romcom, the coyly queer older man in a star-studded indie hit, the incidentally gay sister of the lead in a serious drama. Where once a gay kiss on TV prompted religious groups to boycott and advertisers to pull out, now even the resolutely heterosexual *Desperate Housewives* indulges in an occasional Sapphic evening with barely a whisper of public opprobrium.

There are many ways to map this complicated and contradiction-filled history of gays in American society, but it wouldn't be totally inaccurate to say that there has been an enormous shift in the past fifteen years or so from a place of either invisibility or coded and brutally stereotyped images to a new place of an attenuated but nevertheless expansive new gay presence. When same-sex wedding announcements sit next to their hetero counterparts, gay *American Idols* are the toast of the town, and an openly gay TV anchor (Rachel Maddow) is the darling of the airwaves—inducing girl crushes from straight women and men alike, not to mention her adoring lesbian fans—we do get a sense that the times are a-changing. It is hard to

pick up a newspaper, thumb through *People*, or click on a reality-TV spectacle without encountering some version (however limited, circumscribed, tarted up, or dumbed down) of "gayness," a minor note still within the cacophony that is heterosexuality but no longer just the sad triangle tinkling alone in the back of the high school band.

It is not just popular culture that has been touched by the fairy dust of gay inclusion. There is concrete social and policy change as well. Thousands of middle and high schools now have gay-straight alliances. Cities and states across the country prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and most of our major corporations and universities include gays in their anti-discrimination rules and have in-house support and outreach groups. While full-on marriage is still limited to a few states, many more allow civil unions or some version of partner protections, and the Supreme Court decisions of June 2013, forty-four years after Stonewall, look set to eventually make same-sex marriage the law of the land. There are more out gay politicians in state and local government—we even have had our first openly lesbian senator elected in 2012!—and gays are assuredly a voting bloc[2] courted by at least one of our political parties.

Truth be told, this has all happened pretty damn quickly. Some observers argue, with no small amount of evidence, that "gays may have the fastest of all civil rights movements."[3] Recent polls bolster this claim, detailing dramatic shifts in public attitudes in just twenty years, while earlier polls indicate a much longer trajectory for, say, attitudes related to racial integration. Some change has moved so quickly that folks of my generation really do experience a "before and after" of gay life. Growing up as a gay kid in Philadelphia in the 1970s, I knew not one other gay youth my age, nor did I expect to. I was terrified and isolated, and I imagined this secret to be the nuclear detonation that would evaporate my family's love. And I come from a family of progressive Jews for whom religious antagonism toward sexuality was nonexistent! I can't stress enough the enormity of the shift, a shift evidenced in popular culture and political life but also in the self-understandings of gays themselves and the perceptions of gays held by heterosexuals. For those from even earlier generations,

this new reality of visibility and inclusion seems truly miraculous. These changes are just the tip of the pink iceberg.

For many social analysts, this moment is surely a harbinger of a new era when sexual orientation matters little in how one lives one's life. As longtime gay activist and sociologist Jeffrey Weeks argues, "The sharp binary schism . . . that has structured, defined and distorted our sexual regime for the past couple of centuries . . . is now profoundly undermined as millions of gays and lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people have not so much subverted the established order as lived as if their sexual difference did not, in the end, matter." While many dismiss these changes as mere begrudging acceptance or, worse, a kind of normalizing of radical gay identity, Weeks reminds us that we should "never underestimate the importance of being ordinary."[4]

While I am perhaps more skeptical than Weeks and more ambivalent about the depth of the change, I would be the last person to see these huge shifts in American culture as "homo lite" window dressing on an essentially unchanged body politic. Changes have been real and substantial; I would, without question, have preferred to emerge as gay in this day and age rather than my own. This is dramatically evident when the gains for American gays are situated in the broader international context, where in many countries movements for sexual equality are still largely nascent, openly gay anythings (activists, mayors, artists, campaigns) are rare, out queers are the victims of vigilante violence, and homosexuals are imprisoned and brutalized by regimes that officially declare them either nonexistent or criminal.

And yet despite all the undeniable progress, the fact is it's far too early to declare the end of *American* homophobia.[5] In recent years, two thirteen-year-olds hanged themselves after anti-gay harassment at school. A college freshman jumped off the George Washington Bridge after his roommate surreptitiously filmed him making out with another man and streamed it over the Internet.[6] Three Bronx men were abducted and tortured by a youth "gang" whose only apparent motivation was "punishment" for their perceived homosexuality.[7] A man was shot to death in the heart of gay New York—Greenwich Village—by a gunman shouting homophobic bile. A young trans woman was brutally beaten in a Maryland McDonald's as she tried to use the female restroom. This is a drop in the bucket. The stories of violence to self and others are myriad.

There may be gay-wedding announcements and the Supreme Court may have gone a long way toward marriage equality in repealing key provisions of the Defense of Marriage Act, but same-sex marriage is still illegal and unpopular in the vast majority of states. President Obama moved to repeal "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" but took it painfully slowly, commissioning studies that dragged on for a year or more, keeping discriminatory hiring in the military the law of the land. Violence continues to flourish (2011 was a record year for anti-gay hate crimes), and gay youth are still disproportionately suicidal and homeless.[8]

Even the new visibility of gays in our public square of popular culture is limited in numbers and delimited in terms of race and class. Too often, in our film and TV images, gays are narrowly depicted as either desexualized or oversexualized, making of gay sexuality either the sum total of a character's identity or, alternately, the unspoken absence. Gay characters are squeezed into these and other simple oppositions, shown as nonthreatening and campy "others" or equally comforting and familiar boys (and they usually are boys, not girls) next door. Needless to say, this new gay visibility is largely white, monied, and male.

So which is the real America? Is it *Modern Family* (beloved by both 2012 presidential candidates) and blissfully united gay couples surrounded by loving kith and kin? Or is it kids jumping off bridges, pushed to the brink by a callous culture? Or, yet again, is gayness now so "post-" that it has morphed into that ultimate sign of hipness: mockery? Now pro-gay comedians such as Jon Stewart can say "that's so gay" on *The Daily Show*, and his hip audience laughs knowingly because homophobia is seen as firmly rooted in the past, as archaic as those angry queers resisting arrest at the Stonewall bar in 1969.

The answer is all of the above. Would that it was clear-cut and simple, but the trajectory of gay visibility (and gay rights more

broadly) is not a singular and linear narrative of progress and victory. Nor is it a depressing story of no movement at all. As the late British literary theorist Raymond Williams wrote, the new or the current always maintains "residual" traces of the past, not simply as "the past" but reformulated and refigured through the structures of the new.[9] In other words, it's a complicated story.

So perhaps we can broadly characterize it like this: the first stage of gay visibility (really up until the explosions of the late 1960s) was marked either by absence, coded and subterranean images, or the pathos of abject stereotypes. The second phase, in the late '80s and early '90s—spurred by social movements, Hollywood niche marketing, commodification, and disease—irrevocably brought gays out of the closet but into the problematic space of public spectacle, a space to finally be *seen* but not necessarily to be *known* in any meaningful way. And now, it might be that we are in a third phase: a phase of banal inclusion, normalization, assimilation, and everyday unremarkable queerness in which tolerance seems finally achieved. But is a tolerant America what we—that is, gay and straight alike—really want? Or, put another way, is it *all* that we want? Is mainstreaming—acceptance and tolerance—the beginning of the march toward true inclusion? Or might tolerance be its premature end? And what does tolerance mean? Does inclusion mean the end of "gay culture" itself? Is tolerance not the benign endgame of liberal societies but instead the trap that keeps those same societies from becoming more deeply liberal and more truly inclusive?

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Americans are uniquely hasty to assert a "post-" right before we approach the finish line, effectively shutting off the real and substantive public debate needed for that final push. We did it with women's rights, declaring an era "post-feminist" while women remained lower-paid, sexually vulnerable adjuncts to a still male-dominant culture. We're doing it now with racial equality, depicting the election of our first black president as an indication that the long struggle for civil rights is essentially over (apparently over enough to nullify the need for the Voting Rights Act), even as poverty and incarceration rates disproportionately climb in African American communities. This idea of "post-" (racial, feminist, gay, whatever) depends on painting bigotry as the aberrant acts of isolated monsters. As Ta-Nehisi Coates cogently puts it, commenting on the invasive frisking of black actor Forest Whitaker in a New York deli in 2013, "In modern America we believe racism to be the property of the uniquely villainous and morally deformed, the ideology of trolls, gorgons and orcs. We believe this even when we are being racist."[10] Similarly, we increasingly paint homophobia as "external" to our everyday lives, even as it flourishes in public spaces and discreet corners alike.

Surely, one significant marker in the march toward social justice for gays has been irrevocably passed: silence and invisibility. The days of homosexuals as unspeakable and unseeable, as easy and acceptable targets for violence and denigration, are gone forever. But just because the openly gay genie is out of the bottle—and sashaying down the gay pride runway—doesn't mean that we've reached "post-gay" liberation or that real and dangerous retrenchments could not easily occur. The historical precedents for retrenchments following a period of new inclusion are legion—from the persecution of assimilated Jews in Weimar Germany to the "backlash" attacks on women throughout the '80s and '90s or the viciousness of anti-gay activism during the early days of the AIDS crisis. We have seen gains lost, communities come under stepped-up attack, identities reimagined as dangerous and evil.

We Americans tend to look at the road ahead and see not where it continues to branch off and divide but rather where it ends, where it comes to a full stop. Like a mirage of shimmering water on a hot and barren desert, we imagine we have found the source that will quench our national thirst for justice even as it continues to be just beyond our reach. We get part of the way there, and instead of doing that last hard work of pushing through to the end, we prematurely declare victory. When it comes to matters of homegrown injustice, we get to the shores of Normandy and turn around and go back, comfortable in our conviction that we already know the outcome.

By doing so, we pat ourselves on the back and avoid the deeper challenges. In declaring victory too early, we set the stage to get angry with those who still claim disenfranchisement and discrimination. We turn the tables and say we live in a "feminized" world in which boys and men are dealt a bad hand. We rail at "racial preferences" and claim minorities already have "too much" help from the government. We're doing this now with lesbians and gays, creating the fantasy that gayness isn't still an impediment to full participation and citizenship. We assert that gays already have too much political power and should back off. We claim that they want "special rights" and are pressing a "gay agenda" and that they have been tolerated just about enough. By declaring the end just in sight, we prevent ourselves from crossing the finish line and achieving real integration and inclusion. The framework of "tolerance," a framework that has come to dominate public discussion about gay and lesbian rights, enables this fantasy of completion. Because tolerance sets the bar so low (just don't hate us so much, just give us a modicum of "acceptance"), we imagine we have reached the pinnacle before we've even really started climbing the mountain.

Tolerance allows bigotry to stay in place and shores up irrational hatred even as it tries to corral it. Tolerance allows homosexuality to remain designated as "less than" heterosexuality, as a problem, as a dilemma, as a threat to the moral good. It allows the moral obfuscation "love the sinner and hate the sin" because it deliberately avoids reckoning with questions of value and belief. Part of creating a truly democratic, inclusive, and integrated society is recognizing each other as human, as amazingly different, as worthy of rights, and moving beyond mere recognition to a deeper embrace. Tolerance cannot do that work of deeper recognition because it is inevitably fixated on a (distancing) acceptance of the (intruding) other. The politics of recognition and belonging are of a different order than the politics of tolerance.

Of course, there are limits to tolerance—as there should be. Most of us are intolerant of brutal acts of random violence or equally brutal acts of state violence such as rape as a tool of war. Yet when we think of such heinous things, we don't use the language of tolerance. We *abhor* war, rape, or violence. We ethically *oppose* them (or should!). Tolerance is a language both too weak to address real evil and too vague to address real integration.

Further, tolerance finds strange common ground with the naturalization or biologization of homosexuality (discussed in more detail in part 2) and is often the default zone when inequality cannot be overcome but neither can complete exclusion be politically justified. Political philosopher Slavoj Žižek sees the move to tolerance as the aftereffect of the failures of progressive revolutions: "political differences, differences conditioned by political inequality, . . . are naturalized and neutralized into cultural differences, different ways of life, which are something given, something that cannot be overcome, but must be merely tolerated."[11] What he implies here is that tolerance is apolitical and individual, that mode a society falls back on to avoid deeper challenges to the social order. Political theorist Wendy Brown makes a similar argument in her book *Regulating Aversion*. Tolerance, in her view, signals a "retreat from more substantive visions of justice." Tolerance undercuts the potential for citizens to reckon with conflict productively and "be transformed by their participation."[12]

Tolerance allows for a temporary "multiculturalism" but also privatizes political debates by transforming social change into a tepid *personal* "acceptance" of (some) gays. If one "tolerates" homosexuality, one is not changed or challenged by its ways of life and love, ways that are sometimes quite similar to those of heterosexuals but often radically different. Tolerance is a trap precisely because it offers up a rosy *myth* in place of rough-hewn *history*. It cuts corners on liberation, producing a far shoddier and cheaper product than originally desired. And worse: we all think we got a bargain.

Tolerance is not active. Rather, most forms of tolerance are enacting what educational theorist Michalinos Zembylas calls a kind of "passive indifference," which is essentially a practice that advocates noninterference in the lives of others even though their "lifestyles" may be distasteful to those who are doing the tolerating.[13] But there can be a kind of tolerance that is deeper than mere charitable

forbearance and that verges on real respect and perhaps even substantive understanding. We see this sometimes when we practice tolerance for the beliefs that form, say, religious ideologies we do not share. Surely, documents such as UNESCO's Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and projects such as the Teaching Tolerance toolkits from the Southern Poverty Law Center are genuine calls for a more just and peaceful and respectful attitude toward minorities and marginalized communities.[14]

But can we imagine a tolerance that pushes those who are doing the tolerating to be themselves transformed? That insists we truly recognize and respect others *for* their differences rather than accept them in spite of perceived or real dissimilarities? Can there be, in other words, a *robust* tolerance? I would argue that tolerance is not up to the challenge of deep respect and social recognition. It is too weak, too attenuated, too limited, too easily turned into its opposite to do the work of vigorous and inclusive integration. The very fact that both "sides" use this word with such self-righteousness (straight allies pay homage to our newly tolerant society just as conservatives inveigh against "too much" tolerance) should point to its weakness as the bearer of real social change. Tolerance, like acceptance, is transient, dependent on circumstances and whims. It can turn on a dime.

Tolerance and acceptance are inevitably linked in American discussions of rights and difference. We tend to think there is an easy transition from tolerance of the despised minority to a broader and deeper acceptance of that same group. We learn to tolerate, and then we come to accept, maybe even to love. Or so the story goes. But who is this "we" that tolerates? Who has the right to "accept" another? No civil rights movement worthy of the name has banked its future on being tolerated or accepted. Women didn't demurely request tolerance; they demanded voting rights and pay equity. African Americans continue to struggle not for some bizarre "acceptance" of their skin tone but instead for an end to discrimination in work, in schools, in housing, in the judicial system. They want, as do all these groups, full and deep integration and inclusion in the American dream. Disabled Americans don't want to be tolerated; they want

streets made accessible to them and laws strong enough to protect them from discrimination.

Immigrants—Jews, Irish, Italians, Latinos—who arrived in this country by the millions and over the hundreds of years of US history—came often escaping persecution and discrimination. Many came with deep desires to be assimilated but just as often arrived with the pride of their difference worn proudly on their sleeves. My grandparents were among them, Russian and Polish Jews leaving a world of pogroms and second-class lives. They came wanting—and often demanding—not simply respite from the tyranny of the majority but an enthusiastic integration into this promising new land. Lady Liberty's message wasn't "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free . . . so we can begrudgingly tolerate them." I can't imagine that the word "tolerance" was central to that early immigrant vocabulary. The active presence of immigrant Jews (and many other impoverished others) in labor movements and social justice struggles in those early days is testament to a demand for rights and redress that makes the quest for tolerance look like a meek supplication. To live freely and fully is not to be "tolerated" but to be included, even sometimes celebrated. The ethical alternative to discrimination and bigotry is not tolerance but rational thought and a commitment to equality. Respect and recognition and belonging are the gold standard, not a tepid tolerance that shuts the door on deep freedom.

This is, I think, the core of what is meant in the overused and often misunderstood concept of integration. As a nation, we tend to work with a very weak notion of integration. For many Americans, integration is almost synonymous with assimilation, in which "others" are added into the social stew without fundamentally altering its flavor. For example, we often blur the important distinction between literal desegregation (the opening up of previously barricaded pathways and social spaces, such as the military) and thoroughgoing integration in which multiple identities and cultures structurally and substantively alter institutions of civil society and even ways of life more broadly construed. Most ethnic and racial minorities have

wrestled with this dilemma: to retain historically produced cultural specificities while at the same time demanding access to—and being part of—mainstream and dominant culture. Dominant cultures often resist this deeper inclusion, preferring instead to downgrade integration to simple desegregation and push an inclusion and assimilation (premised on tolerance) that is essentially a "one-way" street, leaving mainstream institutions and practices unaltered. Integration, then, has come to have a negative valence among radicals of all sorts, as "inclusion" becomes the code word for a kind of weak liberal tolerance that broaches no challenge to majority dominion even as it lets a few (even married) gays sit at the table.

I turn back to the notion of integration for a number of reasons. First, while it has often *implied* assimilation, integration in and of itself need not mean giving up unique cultural styles in the quest for equal treatment. But second, and more crucially, integration as a framework gets us away from the tired divisions that have too often torn apart social movements. Tolerance is a trap because it most assuredly comes down on one side of these divides: gays are tolerated as long as they buy into a supposedly universal idea of "rights" that takes as the default position an unquestioned heterosexual standard. Tolerance does sometimes tolerate difference, but it can never celebrate it; nor can it allow the difference of others to jolt its own certitudes.

These debates—over assimilation, over how to retain the uniqueness of a community while at the same time fully integrating, over multiculturalism and the melting pot, over the meaning of full citizenship—have been circulating for years in the gay community as in other minority communities. Earlier gay theorists and organizations (e.g., the Daughters of Bilitis, the Mattachine Society, and many others) debated these issues as they percolated in representation, culture, psychology, and the law. Radical queer movements (now and in the past) of course want full citizenship but don't really want to be "assimilated" if that means relinquishing the challenge to heterosexual rule. Activist and pioneer Harry Hay (one of the founders of the Mattachine Society and a longtime leader of left-wing gay liberation movements), for example, certainly wanted to be "tolerated" inasmuch as to be free from arrest and harassment, but he didn't particularly care about being "loved" by some putative "mainstream."[15] These concerns have been central to almost all major social movements of the 20th and early 21st century as minority populations (and majority ones, such as women) think through the complexity of demanding both rights and recognition with a majority culture that often wants them to have neither.

We are at a crossroads in the struggle for gay rights and, perhaps more importantly, for the ways in which sexual minorities are imagined in relationship to majority sexual identities. How is gay community or gay politics or even gay citizenship construed in this moment, a moment of such hope and possibility but also still chock full of such hatred and violence? What does it mean to emerge as gay—or queer—in an era when gayness is itself both a tool of marketing and an identity still in dispute? What is the path to full inclusion, and what would full inclusion look like?

What is even meant by "gay rights" is in question. The quest for equal treatment is often centered on a paradox. On the one hand, gays argue that gayness doesn't matter, that in making laws, taking a job, raising a family, it is irrelevant (as ethnic and racial minorities often similarly argue). It is, then, both singular and unimportant—a singular characteristic that has, or should have, little import in matters of law, employment, family formation, and so on. At the same time, these same minority groups have often embraced and articulated difference with a vengeance. The paradox is readily apparent in the history of ethnic and racial movements: the civil-rights-era "black is beautiful" symbolism, for example, is an immediate predecessor that defiantly signals an embrace of precisely that which has been deemed lesser by the majority culture.

Gay pride is part of that history, demanding rights *and* recognition, identity *and* inclusion. Are these two different goals—of both rights and recognition—reconcilable or intractably contradictory? Would "victory" be signaled by formal moves toward equality and equal access (e.g., marriage rights, equal-employment legislation), or is it a more abstract and elusive "liberation" that is being sought? Is

If a bullet should enter my brain, let that bullet destroy every closet door.

—Harvey Milk

The single most important thing you can do politically for gay rights is to come out. Not to write a letter to your congressman but to come out.

—Barney Frank

Tom Cruise, this is Park County police! Please come out of the closet. Everybody here just wants you to come out of the closet, Tom. Nobody's gonna be mad, everything's gonna be all right. Just come out of the closet.

—*South Park*

"tolerance" and "acceptance" all that can be hoped for? Or is a vivid "rainbow" of civic inclusion the golden ring? What would it mean for America to embrace a "robust integration" that eschews simple assimilation and instead values the challenges and rewards offered by social and sexual difference? It is to these questions that *The Tolerance Trap* is addressed. They are hard questions, no doubt, and ones that may seem blind to the new, gay-friendly world being claimed by politicians and popular culture. Yet we must insist on wrestling with these deeper debates, because garnering basic civil rights is not the same as making the world a more amenable place for sexual difference. And tolerance is not the same as freedom.