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Recognition Promotes Sodomy: Gay Lib Vs. The University of Missouri

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Gay Lib v. University of Missouri
What Motivated the University to Ban Homosexual Student Organizations in the 1970s?

Homosexuality Is a Mental Illness

“Applying for recognition is attempting to gain tacit approval of homosexuality by the University of Missouri. Homosexuality is generally treated in the State of Missouri as being a socially repugnant concept as is evidenced by the criminal statutes” - B. Ratchford

“Homosexual behavior is compulsive and that homosexuality is an illness and clearly abnormal... formal recognition of Gay Lib would tend to expand homosexual behavior and activity on campus and likely result in felonious acts of sodomy.” - Judge M. Reagan

Analysis

While their chief argument in court focused on a desire to not promote illegal activities, we can see from the archival materials that the University was primarily concerned with socio-political blowback. The majority of that social system viewed Homosexuality as an illness and young people as vulnerable to it.

Students are Easily Influenced

“Recognition of a formal group could conceivably exacerbate such [psychosexual] problems... for students who may be concerned about their sexual identity.” - Ed Hutchins

“What are potential or latent homosexuals... what happens to [him] from the standpoint of his environment can cause him to become or not to become a homosexual.” - Judge Cullen Coil

Archives Utilized

- American Archive of Public Broadcasting
- New York Times Digital Archive
- State Historical Society of Missouri
- University of Missouri Archives
- Washington University Archives

Timeline

Notable Figures

Larry Eggleston
Vietnam War veteran, openly homosexual, founder of Gay Lib.

Brice Ratchford
President of the University of Missouri.

Herbert W. Schooling
Chancellor at the University of Missouri.

Edwin Hutchins
Initial Dean of Students at Mizzou to veto Gay Lib’s recognition.

Edward Thelen
Subsequent Dean of Students at Mizzou who upheld Hutchinson’s veto.

Political Backlash

“We would like to avoid making martyrs out of the Gay Liberation” - H. Schooling

“The essence of Dr. Hutchins’s veto was concern for negative reactions from the larger social system within which the University exists,” - Edward Thelen

“Obviously, I am basing my decision upon public relations concern...You and I and the Board would be crucified if we recognize Gay Lib.”- Brice Ratchford