

Qs, Rs and gays like me

Qs say they dominate gay politics because the Rs are too closeted to do anything; the Rs stay home and mutter about a Q-ish liberal conspiracy

BY ALLEN SMALLING

Regardless of how one feels about the message of *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen — which has harsh words for both straights and gays — the authors have introduced a useful new way for us gay men to identify ourselves. In the future, it wouldn't surprise me if we find ourselves asking each other the introductory question: "Are you a Q or an R?"

Kirk and Madsen never really define what the abbreviations "Q" and "R" stand for, but from the way they use those two letters it's easy enough to guess "R" could mean "regular" or "respectable" and "Q" — well... Perhaps it's best to take a look at these two groups in action.

Qs are the gayest gays, including the most flamboyant gays. (Though not all Qs are necessarily flamboyant.) Rs are the regular guys, including the worst closet cases. (Though not all Rs are necessarily closeted.) In *The Boys in the Band*, Donald is an R and Emory, who couldn't hide it even if he wanted to, is a Q.

There are probably several times more Rs than Qs in America. However, the Qs are more noticeable because they are much more visible as gays. The leather-and-feather contingent in your local gay pride parade is made up of Qs. The Rs either watch from the sidelines or stay at home.

The desire to live in the gay ghetto or "be at the center of things" is very Q. Suburbia is very R. The opera is a hotbed of unreconstructed Q-dom. Rs watch NFL events on television.

Qs tend to be involved in politics, while Rs tend to be silent-majority types. Qs say they dominate gay politics because the Rs are too closeted to do anything. The Rs stay at home and mutter about a Q-ish liberal conspiracy.

Certain statements are Q and R giveaways. When you hear a straight-faced reference to the "gay sensibility," or hear buzzwords like "politically correct," you're in the presence of

a Q. The classic R statement is, "I'm just like other men except that I prefer to [expletive] men."

Contemporary literature has more Qs than Rs, probably because the high anxiety of life as an American Q leads to more compelling drama. In *Dancer from the Dance*, lead character Anthony Malone is a Q. There are a few Rs in other books, though. Kirk and Madsen identify *The Best Little Boy in the World* as the quintessential R story. The hero of Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* is R and has some of their worst hangups — he hates nelly gays and is happy to "pass" for straight when it gets him what he wants.

Cities tend to have either Q or R personalities, at least for gays. Obviously the New York of *Dancer from the Dance* is Q. San Francisco is Q, too, but in a more lighthearted way. In Chicago, where the personal ads are filled with demands for "straight acting/appearing," the tone is much more R. Los Angeles, with its laid back air and pockets of beach-blanket narcissism, at first seems very Q. But since the straights are that way, too, perhaps it's R in context.

Rs can be pretty silly. No one but an R could be 38 years old, not having dated a woman since the Nixon administration, yet be afraid to come out to his parents because "it would devastate them." But Qs have their distinctive follies too. Gay newspapers prominently feature Q columnists who, with their "to the barricades" political radicalism, seem to have confused themselves with Spartacus or John Brown.

I can find things to admire in both Qs and Rs, and things to be ashamed of too. I'm not even sure if I myself am a Q or an R. But one thing I do know — and I'm sure Kirk and Madsen will agree with me — is that we'd all better learn to get together and show America what we can do when united. ▼

Allen Smalling keeps an eye on the gay community from his home in Chicago. His book reviews and observations appear in newspapers nationwide.



A Reminder From
YOUR NATIONAL
GAY AND LESBIAN
COMMUNITY

ADOLF HITLER

MADMAN.
MURDERER.
HOMOPHOBE.

THE OTHER HOLOCAUST:
When Hitler seized power in 1933,
he immediately launched a campaign to
persecute gay people.

Every year for ten years, Hitler sent
thousands to wear the pink triangle
in Nazi concentration camps.

Young gay people were beaten to death.
Starved to death. Worked to death.
Frozen to death.

At one camp, SS guards forced gay
prisoners to construct an earthwork
firing range, and then used them as
living targets.

TODAY, GAYS ARE STILL TARGETS FOR BIGOTRY.
BY ATTACKERS WHO FEEL NO SHAME.

Gay revolution succeeding

Gay liberation got nowhere until gay men and lesbians moved out of the mainstream

BY MICHAEL A. LOMBARDI, PH.D.
AND PAUL J. NASH

Time Magazine reporters recently asked "Is the Gay Revolution a Flop?", responding to a new book, *After the Ball: How America will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* by Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen.

The authors think so. They recommend that gays, to make strides in society, blend in with the "mainstream." Why any gay person would want to join the "mainstream" with all its inherent pressures to stay in line, not to rock the boat, is beyond us. What do they want? A nation of zombies?

It is better to ask, is the "mainstream" a flop? We think so, because gay rights got nowhere until gay men and lesbians moved out of the stagnant mainstream (read closet) and into the turbulence of the stream itself.

The gay revolution flowed along well before the Stonewall Rebellion in 1969, which only gave the movement much needed impetus. Gay scholar and openly gay lawyer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (1825-1895), whose birthday gay people celebrate August 28, began this open revolution in the 1860s. He publicly (for the first time) urged gay people to stand up for their inalienable rights and to work for reform of oppressive, muddy laws. He was the first to come out of the closet and call for others to follow his lead. The task

was no easier, or more difficult, for him in 1860s Germany than it is for us today.

His was one lonely voice, a trickle in the stream as it were. Because he dared to speak and write about homosexuality, others were emboldened to enter the river of dialogue that has continued its rush to the present. Today, you can hear hundreds of thousands of gay voices. Beginning with Ulrichs, they look at their roots and realize homosexuality always exists everywhere. They are pushing the revolution onward. It would be a mistake to silence or even lower those voices until the revolution is truly over and gay men and lesbians can live in peace.

No, the revolution is not a "flop." People read in Ulrichs' books that homosexuality is no crime, sin or shame, nor a physical or psychological ailment. His news was that gay people are not sick heterosexuals — a revolutionary thought a century ago. And since he first wrote that, the revolution has proceeded, gaining strength each year as more and more gay men and women reach that same conclusion. The battles Ulrichs began will continue until there are no more closets, until the river runs freely for all gay people. ▼

For more information concerning Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, write to Urania Manuscripts, 6858 Arthur Court, Jacksonville, FL 32211.

**HOW AMERICA WILL
CONQUER ITS FEAR
& HATRED OF GAYS
IN THE 90s**

MARSHALL KIRK AND HUNTER MADSEN