

just out
since 1983

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Ad policy. No sexually exploitative advertising will be accepted. Compensation for errors in, or cancellation of, advertising will be made with credit toward future advertising.

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A copy of **just out** is available for \$1 and/or advertising rates are available on request.

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steppin' out

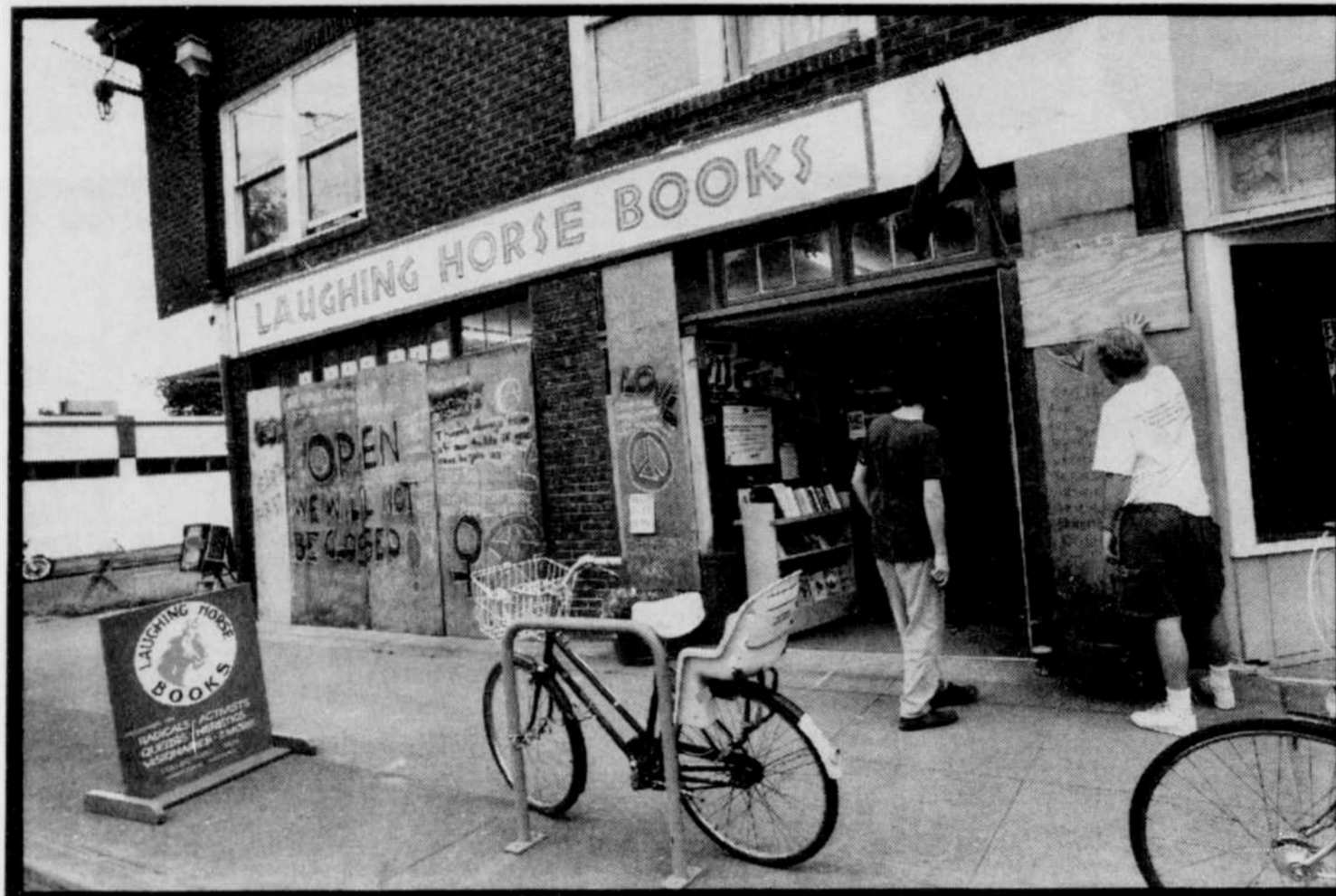


PHOTO BY LINDA KLEWER

Early in the morning on Monday, Aug. 7, the windows at Laughing Horse Books, 3652 SE Division St., were shot at and broken out. According to collective member Grace Grantham, no motivation for the attack is known. A woman living above the store, hearing gunshots, looked out her window and saw a 16- to 26-year-old male wearing a hooded shirt riding from the area on a bicycle. Shortly thereafter, the woman heard breaking glass and phoned police. Donations to repair the windows came in from customers and other neighborhood businesses and, on Aug. 17, the windows were replaced.

guest editorial

Front-line conflicts

Amid the crisis of family and community that people in this country are living through, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals become easy targets

by John D'Emilio

The Republican Party's Contract with America—and its younger sibling, the Contract with the American Family—have dominated political reporting for most of the year. Because both have chosen to sidestep a head-on discussion of homosexuality, lesbian and gay issues have slipped from the national media's radar screen. For many gay men, lesbians and bisexuals this must come as a welcome relief, a moment of respite in a hard political season. Who could enjoy being the target of the kind of rhetoric generated in the last few years—at the Republican convention in Houston, in the Senate hearings on the military's exclusion policies, or in the fight over the National Endowment for the Arts?

The lull, however, is more apparent than real. Congress is not the only body that legislates. At the state level there is no Contract with America to discipline local right-wing political leaders, while in many states there is an infrastructure of gay organizations eager to move forward for respect and equality. The result is that state capitols rather than Congress have become the battleground upon which the issue of equal rights for sexual minorities is being fought.

This strategy speaks both to the history of gay oppression and to the contemporary state of lesbian and gay concerns. In the past, medical, legal and religious discourse defined homosexuals in opposition to the heterosexual nuclear family. Inflammatory stereotypes defined queers, whether male or female, as predators seeking to invade the sanctum of the home and to steal the young.

For previous generations, the price of adopting a gay, lesbian or bisexual identity has often been to live outside the family. When a gay political agenda took shape after Stonewall, basic goals such as sodomy law repeal, civil rights protections,

and the removal of the stigma of mental illness took precedence. But now, the gay and lesbian community across the country is reclaiming family. Lesbians are choosing to have children, gay men are seeking to become foster parents, both men and women are insisting that their intimate partnerships be recognized by law. Lesbian, gay and bisexual parents want their children—and their children's peers—to be taught tolerance in school, while the parents and advocates of gay youth are insisting that the schools respond to the needs of their sexual minority students. In almost every area of public policy that impinges on family and youth, gay voices are being heard.

These voices are new, and not yet well organized. And so the radical right has rushed into the void, playing upon the emotional flash points that run through U.S. culture and fomenting fear. It is not hard to do. With the crisis of family and community that people in the U.S. are living through, gay men, lesbians and bisexuals are easier, simpler targets than a changing labor market with wage structures that compromise family stability, or school systems without the resources to educate.

This year's legislative record at the state level suggests that battles over family are likely to remain front-line conflicts. It also suggests that the sexual minority community needs to apply to the arena of family the lessons it has learned in its fight for health care and against hate-motivated violence: patient, deliberate and sustained organization; broad-based education of sympathetic allies; and the careful articulation of an agenda rooted in the real needs of its members.

Author and historian John D'Emilio is director of the Policy Institute at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force in Washington, D.C.

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