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Becoming Visible: An Illustrated History of Lesbian and Gay Life in Twentieth Century America. By MOLLY MCGARRY and FRED WASSERMAN; preface by MIMI BOWLING, New York Public Library. New York: Penguin Putnam, Inc., 1998. Pp. xvii+282. \$34.95. ISBN 0-670-86401-3.

In a community for which social masks always have possessed special ritualistic value (hence, "camp"), and for which personal subterfuge often has been synonymous with survival, only complete nakedness—physical, emotional, and symbolic—can denote visibility. The aptly titled exhibit "Becoming Visible: The Legacy of Stonewall" held at the New York Public Library (NYPL) from June 18 through September 1994 to commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the legendary Stonewall Riots on June 28, 1969, provided the occasion for not a little bit of ill-natured grumbling from area lesbigay curators, writers, and activists, not least of all from ethnic minorities who felt disfranchised in the "mainstream" gay movement—pace Latino lesbians—but also from librarians to whom NYPL's sudden self-representation as the major regional repository of lesbigay special collections seemed opportunistic. Yes, bickering and infighting constitute a part of the Stonewall legacy, too, one that the lesbigay community may eventually bare without shame, since such divisions characterize every major social movement of our time, including the Civil Rights and Women's movements—precursors, to some extent, of the modern lesbigay rights movement. The introduction to the present volume corrects any remaining impression of ingratitude to the many institutions and individuals who made the exhibit possible, although there will always be people who resent New York city's preeminence in the gay movement—second only to San Francisco—and NYPL's recent ascendancy as a lesbigay research repository: no good deed goes unpunished.

Molly McGarry and Fred Wasserman, assisted by NYPL manuscripts librarian Mimi Bowling, expand the range of images presented in the original exhibit and arrange them thematically within essays composed by Wasserman and McGarry, both jointly and separately. The authors note that they have tried to expand geographical coverage so as to better represent the entire American gay rights movement. While there is little indication that the Stonewall Riots, covered in great detail by Wasserman in the first chapter, were preceded by similar demonstrations and resistance at Los Angeles's Black Cat bar in 1967, he places the events at the Stonewall Inn well within larger historical currents. Certainly the Stonewall Riots, by any account, have become in the 1990s the catchword for lesbigay resistance to harassment, discrimination, and violence, even if there were more sequestered and less urban parts of gay America where the riots were quickly forgotten amid the daily unfolding of a larger social maelstrom the likes of which America had not witnessed since the Lincoln administration. Flower Power, Vietnam protests, Women's Liberation, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Students for a Democratic Society, Black Panthers, not to mention assassinations, routine police brutality, tear gas, and the occasional Weatherman bomb all reminded Americans of deep, festering social and political schisms, which subsequently had the effect of rendering labels such as "leftist," "conservative," "gay," and "straight" superficial and inadequate, if not meaningless, in light of the schizophrenic confusion of fin de siècle identity politics.

The story of the early homophile movement and gay liberation by now has been told many times, although perhaps never so cogently as here. Wasserman and McGarry write beautifully and have an eye for the unusual image and an ear for the telling anecdote. According to the authors, the majority of the photographs have never before been published. Of particular interest to librarians are the exhibit

of a written complaint of sexual harassment in the NYPL "tea room" in 1899, witnessed by librarian C. H. A. Bjerregaard and Business Superintendent J. Ferris Lockwood (p. 102), and reference to the story of the 1953 library sex scandal in Atlanta (p. 103). Yet the life of lesbians in the pre-Stonewall era, documented in two sections entitled "Sodomites, Perverts, and Queers" and "Social Worlds," is pieced together from admittedly fragmentary evidence. Since nearly half of the text (pp. 139-253) is devoted to the lesbian political movement in the post-Stonewall era, the scant discussion of the problems of historical documentation of early lesbian life and the relationship of this void to "invisibility" seems remarkable; the rarity of the photographs contained in the book's only entirely photographic chapter, "Friends and Lovers," depicting same-sex couples from the late nineteenth century to the present day, however, provides eloquent testimony to the loss of similar images and information in the hands of "protective" relatives and closeted homosexuals. Moreover, as Polly J. Thistlethwaite observed some time ago, repressed curators and librarians have consigned gay correspondence and images to flames or to ignominy, obscurity, and slow death under stifling denial, censorship, and the rubric of professional practice ("The Lesbian and Gay Past: An Interpretive Battleground," *Gay Community News* 2 [Winter 1995]: 10-11, 24).

Three of the most interesting chapters explore the male cruising scene (pp. 99-110), lesbian pulp fiction (pp. 111-16), and male physique pictorials (pp. 117-26). More exhaustive treatments of these topics can be found elsewhere, but nowhere are the subjects given more lucid treatment. The generous use of color illustrations throughout the volume adds immediacy to the torrid covers of the pulp novels, to a 1918 bathhouse figure study by artist Charles Demuth (p. 106), and to the lurid ads for early male porn movies (p. 101). Embarrassingly dated as some of these images may now seem, the authors rightly tout them as worthy icons. McGarry deftly describes the lesbian novels, for example, as signifying "imaginary links to a real gay world" (p. 113). These words may lack import to readers not eligible for membership in the American Association of Retired Persons, but certainly for lesbians who came of age at approximately the same time as the current president of the United States, their sting is fresh.

Wasserman, McGarry, and Bowling are to be commended for the stunning array of realia (buttons, dolls, bumper stickers), artwork, posters, placards, letters, diaries, and photographs that enhance nearly every page. Readers unfamiliar with the Day-Glo intensity of the output of the late 1960s and early 1970s gay press will find the periodical cover art truly "illuminating" and useful as a supplement to Rodger Streitmatter's exhaustive history on that subject (*Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America* [Boston: Faber & Faber, 1995]). While the current book lacks geographical breadth and the convenience of chronological arrangement found in the *Advocate* history of the gay movement (*Long Road to Freedom: The Advocate History of the Gay and Lesbian Movement* [New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994]), with which it shares a similar format, it more than compensates for its more limited focus with excellence of production quality. Chapter notes are extensive, the index is highly detailed, and illustration credits are complete. This is a superior although unconventional history of the gay and lesbian movement, one that would serve as an extremely fine introduction for the general public as well as a staple for the lesbian community. Moreover, at its relatively modest price, the volume represents an essential addition to most public, academic, and personal libraries.

James V. Carmichael, Jr., *Department of Library and Information Studies,
University of North Carolina at Greensboro*