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Black Manifesto to QuEST Manifesto

WGS 340: Archival Project



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Throughout my college career, identity politics have been at the forefront of my trials and tribulations. I am a **QUEER, BLACK WOMAN** from New York City. Identity markers were not of my concern prior to becoming a student at Lafayette College. I was aware of the identity groups I belonged to but in the communities I was a part of prior to Lafayette, I had the option to stay silent and the luxury of deviating from the gender norm without questioning. There was enough diversity to overshadow the “masculine” clothes I chose to wear as a potential signifier of my sexual orientation. There were enough Black people present in the room so I was not expected to know everything about Black history month or “Black” hair. There were angry women of all ethnic groups present so when I expressed my concerns, I was not labeled the “angry black woman.” Lafayette categorized me and I prepared to embark one of the most important journeys of my life. This particular journey was about balancing both the outward and my inward journey of sexuality at Lafayette College.

I have eaten and slept gender and sexuality issues and programs for the duration of my college career and I do not regret it. I have watched Lafayette work towards improving racial and ethnic diversity among its student body and consequently, Lafayette’s climate around homosexuality has changed for the better. At first glance, “sexuality” seems to be removed from the institution of Lafayette but my archival research suggests that sexuality has been a point of interest for many decades. Similar to the political and social movements of the 1960s, the queer movement at Lafayette was propelled by another social inequity. My argument is that Lafayette’s efforts towards ethnic and racial diversity were instrumental in Lafayette moving forward on understanding and accepting homosexuality and the needs of homosexual persons. To support my argument, I will use primary sources from the Archives at Lafayette College to gather information about history of sexuality at Lafayette. Then I will analyze my findings using the

repressive hypothesis of Michel Foucault and queer theory to rationalize how Lafayette has organized sexuality.

PART I: The Archival History

The documented history of sexuality at Lafayette begins in 1989 when the college established a faculty committee on Diversity. When I discovered that historical moment without the support of meeting agendas, I immediately became curious about what the college defined as diversity. Diversity is a multi-faceted presence of difference among all identity categories in a situation, institution, or group. Was Lafayette looking for visible or invisible diversity in 1989 and what strategies did they come up with to achieve their goals? These were important questions for me because I wanted to assess if their goals were met and if so, how long did it take? These are answers the institution of Lafayette failed to document and that reality explains why sexuality "seems" to be removed from the institution. Sexuality is different from race, class, and gender because it is private, invisible, and questions morality and legality. How could Lafayette work toward being inclusive of homosexuals without being invasive or assuming the narratives of homosexuals? On November 9th of 1994, five years after the Diversity Committee was created, Lafayette began taking strides forward by forming the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues. This group was formed to further promote and protect a diverse Lafayette Community by addressing issues that affect gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals at Lafayette. Whether or not this faculty group protected the "diverse" Lafayette Community is debated but they did promote the issues affects queer persons at Lafayette.

The role of the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues was to support gay, lesbian, and bisexual faculty, staff, and students. To fulfill its purpose, in a letter sent out to all faculty, staff, and administrators, this association stated that they would make

recommendations as to how to improve the situation on campus for gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons, research and address equity issues such as domestic partnership benefits, provide emotional support in the event that a gay, lesbian, or bisexual person on campus encounters discrimination and provide educational support to the Lafayette campus as a whole about gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. The mission of the Faculty and Staff Association was almost a mission impossible. It was well-intentional but the scope of the group was too wide. Change and progress was made as a result of the formation of this group but it also excluded sexual being at all outside of the defined boxes of homosexuality and bisexuality. The Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues did not directly offer support to people who engaged in same-sex behaviors but did not identify as gay, lesbian, and bisexual or to the people that were labeled a gay or lesbian because they did not conform to their gendered expectations. This group existed alongside Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FLAG), which was a student organization that emerged in 1993. While FLAG excluded bisexuals in its name, the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues overlooked the population of people that were questioning their sexuality.

In September of 1995, the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues held a meeting about developing a Gay and Lesbian Studies course, the update on Domestic Partnership Benefits, and drafted a memo to the Diversity Committee on the inclusion of sexual orientation within the scope their concerns. This memo implies that when the Diversity Committee was created in 1989 they were solely concerned with visible identity markers such as race and ethnicity. Even if that was the sole concern of the Diversity Committee at the time, encountering the intersection of other issues such as gender, class, religion, sexuality and ableism was inevitable. The Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues made a

very progressive and liberal statement when they asked the Diversity Committee to redefine diversity. In this same meeting gender, the Association changed the language around providing educational support to providing education opportunities and support because now the group was suggesting they would provide knowledge to the campus. Rather than solely tending the victims of discrimination, the group could now also tend to the victimizer by providing them with opportunities to learn about the appropriate vocabulary to talk about homosexuality.

Several months later FLAGB once called FLAG, initiated a Safe Zone program for the Lafayette. The program was designed to make the campus a safer and more accepting place for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals and included a series of workshops that informed the participants about issues facing gay, lesbian, and bisexual persons as well as tactics of being a good ally. In 1998, two years after the initiation of the Safe Zone program, same sex partner benefits were provided to Lafayette employees and FLABG changed its name to Gay Straight Alliance (GSA). 1998 signified a big milestone for the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues because they were fighting for this benefit upon creation of the group. They pushed for it tirelessly for four years and finally their voices were heard. Even though the same-sex partners were not legally married in the state of Pennsylvania, the same benefits provided to the spouses of the College's married employees were made available to eligible same-sex partners.

As things seem to be improving, the institution of Lafayette took a step backwards in its journey towards sexuality equity. When FLABG changed its name to GSA, it erased several queer categories as if its name was inclusive to begin with. In a newspaper article entitled "FLAGB no more GSA takes over," the co-president of GSA stated that "this name more explicitly defines the scope of the group...the new name has been adopted to make the group

more comfortable to heterosexuals who might have been intimidated by the former title,” (The Lafayette: 1998). The other co-president agreed and said that “he wanted the new name to clear up any misconceptions that the group was for gay students only,” (The Lafayette: 1998). The rationale behind changing the name makes sense from a business point of view because heterosexuals are the majority and society tells the innocent mind that heterosexuals should feel welcome in all spaces. However, the name itself seems to be making an effort to do the complete opposite. The name change seems to be making an effort to include gay persons because the name Friends of Lesbians, Gays, and Bisexuals suggests that the group was for allies. This fragmentation of language demonstrates how impact and intention can sometimes not be aligned with each other. The intention of the GSA was to be inclusive and welcoming of all people but the impact of the name only solidify the sexuality binary it was trying to break.

In the beginning of 2000, GSA renamed itself QuEST (Questioning Established Sexual Taboos) following a semester of being inactive. In February of 2000, the school newspaper published an article called “Gay Straight Alliance seeks to revalue gay awareness at Lafayette.” In this article a bunch of students acknowledged that “there are cold feelings towards gays at Lafayette, but questioned the usefulness of a student group. Most students spoken to said that homosexuality is generally not discussed on campus,” (The Lafayette: 2000). This excerpt is problematic because there is no historical account of the Faculty and Student Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues dismantling. History says that there was a group of Lafayette employees spreading awareness so why are students saying that homosexuality is not discussed on campus. If the Faculty and Staff Association did dissolve, then this news article shows that having supportive and open-minded staff and faculty members makes Lafayette a better place.

Not only does a good school need multi-culturally students, it needs multi-culturally competent educators.

Over the next six years, QuEST was able to gradually increase its programming budget and frequently revised its Constitution in effort to include all sexual minorities and functioned as a catalyst of all things pertaining to the queer community. QuEST was a support group, educational group, activist group, and social group and some of those responsibilities and expectations still linger around today. In the fall of 2009, Sexuality Studies (WGS 340) was proposed as a new course and approved by faculty in the same semester. Without much delay, WGS 340 was taught for the first time in the spring of 2010. One might accredit this milestone to the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues because they addressed developing a Lesbian and Gay Studies course in 1995 but I would disagree with that claim. Lesbian and Gay Studies is a course that would exclusively focus on queer identities where as Sexuality Studies is a course that challenges the notions of marking the category of sexuality as homosexuality. WGS 340 marks the beginning of Lafayette organizing sexuality an identity marker that impacts everybody because gender is something that all persons must perform. Power and privilege do exist but those of privilege work hard to maintain their privilege as those disadvantage fight to rise above their situations.

The tale of sexuality at Lafayette after WGS 340 gets added to the potential courses a student can take is quite remarkable. With the first openly gay individual on Lafayette's Board of Trustees, Lafayette graduates its first openly trans* student in 2010 and in 2011, the QuEST executive board is comprised on only persons of the African Diaspora with the exception of one. Additionally, QuEST continues to move forward with its equality rallies and Lafayette Theater presents the Laramie Project and Rent in the same semester. During that same academic year, in

2012, QuEST elects its first female, Black President and Lafayette hires its first Associate Dean of Intercultural Development and Director of Gender & Sexuality Programs. In the following academic year, Lafayette celebrates its first LGBTQ History Month and hosts its first Queer Prom for all colleges and universities in the Lehigh Valley Area. In the years before QuEST picked up a ton of momentum, it published a Manifesto. In this Manifesto, they asked for twelve things and at this moment in time only seven of those requests have been fulfilled. Despite, the drastic change in the campus climate, QuEST changed its name to Quest last semester in hopes of making the campus community understand that homosexuality is not a sexual taboo.

Several years after the construction of the QuEST Manifesto, the college approved three gender and sexuality programming house, which served as a place for allies and member of the queer community to live without fear of discrimination or prejudiced comments. This year Quest won the student organization of the year award at the Intercultural Awards and Hoff Awards, which symbolizes how far Lafayette has come in regards to tolerating and accepting homosexuality. In the next section I was use the repressive hypothesis of Michel Foucault and Annemarie Jagose's perception of queer theory to analyze how Lafayette organized sexuality over time.

Part II: The Analysis

Michel Foucault was a French historian and philosopher, associated with the structuralist and post-structuralist movements. He has had a strong influence not only in philosophy but also in a wide range of humanistic and social scientific disciplines. Foucault's history of sexuality presents the idea that the various modern bodies of knowledge about sexuality have an intimate association with the power structures of modern society. In Foucault's opinion, modern control of sexuality parallels modern control of criminality by making sex an object of allegedly

scientific disciplines. There is controlled exercised over others' knowledge of individuals and control over individuals' knowledge of themselves. People internalize the norms laid down by the sciences of sexuality and monitor themselves in an effort to conform to these norms. The theory being described is what Foucault calls the "repressive hypothesis." His hypothesis suggests that since the Victorian era, any energy used for solely pleasurable activities is frowned upon. As a result of the Victorian era, sex has been treated as a private affair that can only properly take place between a husband and wife. Sex outside of marriage is not only prohibited but repressed by different institutions. In Part I of the book, Foucault talks about the outlets of "confession" and why people feel the need to share their "improper" sexual feeling and activities. The repressive theory is not so much concerned with sexuality itself but instead is concerned with the discourse around sexuality.

There are many institutions that organize dialogue. Some of those institutions include religion, medicine, and law. To analyze how sexuality is organized, Foucault draws out the parallel between confessions and religion. Sexually "deviant" people were confessing to God and asking for forgiveness because they not yet understood what identity formation entailed. Identity formation needs discourse structures and as people chose to remain silent, they get placed into an identity group. Similar to how sexuality was organized at Lafayette between 1993 and 2000, questioning and exploring was not an option. One was heterosexual or homosexual, pure or deviant. Foucault's repressive hypothesis says that there two columns that people fall into. One is the good column and the other is the bad column. The hypothesis works to get everyone is good and "straight" side but the hypothesis only represses people and makes them vanish. It does not change the structure; it only silences the people on the bad side and moves on to another group to talk about. I agree with Foucault because a new category and marginalized group seems to

emerge every day. The repressive hypothesis was at work during many movements including abolition, feminism, and anti-war and is still true today. Slavery in America was abolished but blacks still face racism and women still earn less pay for doing the same job her male counterpart is doing. When the Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues and FLAG were formed, pansexuals, asexuals, demisexuals, along with many others were not yet socially constructed. They may have been experimentally real but they are not yet under the societal microscope.

New categories queer communities arose as queer individuals realized that the rights being granted were not tending to their needs. Queer is a broad category but its purpose to include everyone. It is a fluid label that does not have to be an indication of sexual orientation but is perceived as a sexuality marker. In an article called *Queer Theory: An Introduction* by Annamarie Jagose she says, "Broadly speaking, queer describes those gestures or analytical models which dramatize incoherence in the allegedly stable relations between chromosomal sex, gender and sexual desire. Resisting that model of stability – which claims heterosexuality as its origin, when it is more properly its effect – queer focuses on mismatches between sex, gender, and desire," (3). The repressive hypothesis highlights the resistance of stability and the changing face and mission of Quest over the years illustrate instability. Identity politics are about negotiation and the change of faces. Since 2009, the awareness and acceptance of homosexuality and queer individuals has increased dramatically and so the number of enrolled students of color. Lafayette has been working on ethnic diversity for forty-five years and that hard work is just now becoming evident. Riley Temple is a person of color, the first out trans* student to graduate was a person of color, and the last to equality rallies at Lafayette were led by persons of color. This is should not be alarming or surprising. The facts presented by the archives, Jagose, and Foucault is

just intersectionality at its finest. No one has pulled themselves up by their own bootstraps and all institutions organize sexuality different. Here at Lafayette, sexuality is organized narratives and political climate of the time. I am a **QUEER, BLACK WOMAN** from New York City. Identity markers were not of my concern prior to becoming a student at Lafayette College but now they are and will always be because identity defined my Lafayette experience.

LGBTQ Dates in Lafayette College History (A Work in Progress)

- 1989 College establishes a faculty committee on Diversity
- 1993 Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FLAG) has its first meeting in response to the Princeton Review's naming Lafayette one of the most homophobic schools in the country
- 1994 Riley Temple '71 is the first openly gay individual to be elected to the Lafayette Board of Trustees
- Faculty and Staff Association on Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues is formed
- Lesbian activist speaker
- 1995 FLAGB won outstanding service organization
- 1996 Initiation of Safe Zone training
- 1998 FLAGB changes its name to Gay Straight Alliance (GSA)
- Same sex partner benefits provided to Lafayette College employees
- 2000 GSA renames itself QuEST (Questioning Established Sexual Taboos)
- 2006 More than 300 students participate in the "Gay? Fine by Me" rally on campus, sponsored by QuEST
- 2009 Sexuality Studies (WGS 340) is proposed as a new course in the fall and approved by faculty in the same semester
- 2010 WGS 340 is taught for the first time in the spring
- Lafayette's first out Trans* student graduates
- 2011 The QuEST executive board is comprised of only persons of the African Diaspora with the exception of one person; among this board is the first Latino President
- Gay, Str8 Love Not H8 Rally (*modified "Gay? Fine by Me" rally)
- Lafayette Theater presents the Laramie Project and Rent
- 2012 QuEST has its first female, Black President
- Posse Plus Retreat topic is Gender & Sexuality

Lafayette hires its first Associate Dean of Intercultural Development and Director of Gender & Sexuality Programs

Lafayette celebrates LGBTQ History Month for the first time and features Keith Boykin was keynote speaker

2013 LGBTQ Equality Rally (*modified "Gay? Fine by Me" rally)

Lafayette holds its first Queer Prom for all colleges and universities in the Lehigh Valley Area

QuEST changes its name to Quest

(Why? The previous name suggests that homosexuality is a sexual taboo and that is not the message the group wants to send to the campus community or prospective students)

First Gender & Sexuality Programming houses called Crossroads (3 houses total)

2014 Quest wins student organization of the year at Intercultural Awards and Hoff Awards