

Assignment 5: LGBTQ Struggles and Equality in the United States

The discrimination historically faced by the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) population in the United States primarily manifests itself in the attempted erasure of the community from public view and consciousness. LGBTQ people have been characterized as broken, degenerate and corrosive to decent society.

To defuse the impact of these negative influences, the government and greater society developed mechanisms to hide, stop or punish these behaviors and the people who practiced them.

In the 1950s and 1960s, people were subjected to the “lavender scare” that restricted their employment opportunities. Until the Stonewall Riots in New York in 1969, gay social clubs were frequently raided by police. In the 1980s, the U.S. military enacted the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. This was seen as somewhat progressive at the time. LGBTQ people were allowed to serve their country - as long as they kept their sexuality to themselves.

In addition to institutional oppression, members of the LGBTQ community were openly harassed and assaulted, sometimes publicly and occasionally to death. It was so common that the new term - “gay-bashing” - became part of the vernacular.

This treatment denied them the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness claimed in the Declaration of Independence and violated such constitutional rights as freedom of assembly and equal protection.

In recent years, the LGBTQ community has won court battles and turned the tide of public opinion in their favor. It has been a struggle, but that has not always been the case.

In “A Brief History of Western Homosexuality”, the writer Gayle Zive wrote, “Homosexuality has been documented in Western society as far back as the Ancient Greeks. Virtually every civilization since has had some record of the presence of homosexuality”.

In the same article, it was noted that Plato wrote, “Homosexuality is regarded as shameful by barbarians any by those who live under despotic governments just as philosophy is regarded as shameful by them”.

Zive noted that “the introduction of Christianity into the Roman world brought the old Hebrew prejudice against homosexuality into the empire”.

Homosexuality was first criminalized in the 13th century. In 1533, The Buggery Act made sodomy punishable by death. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1967.

The impact of religions on the acceptance of homosexuality was not limited to Europe. India was influenced. In India, Pre-Islam and Christianity widely tolerated homosexuality, but became criminal under colonial rule. Homosexuality in India was decriminalized in 2018.

Homosexuality is illegal in most Muslim countries, but punishment is not always enforced. There is a school of thought that homosexuality is not explicitly condemned in Islam. In a rebuke to this, on 3/10/18, the Australian National Imams counsel issued a statement which said, “from the Islamic standpoints, homosexuality is a forbidden action: a major sin and anyone who partakes in it is considered a disobedient servant to Allah that will acquire his displeasure and disapproval” .

The primary objection to homosexuality is that it is unnatural. Studies have shown that same sex coupling occurs in the natural animal in species from bison to dolphins to penguins.

The knowledge gained in this research will enable me to help LGBTQ students know that they ARE “normal” and that society’s perceptions of them and their right to be who they are is not finite, and that society is evolving and that there is a place for them in it.