

In the time of Edward II (1284-1327):

c.1231:

Pope Gregory IX begins the papal inquisition in Italy. The punishment for sodomy is banishment or amputation. The papal law specifies that a third-time offender will be burned to death.

1314:

In *The Inferno*, Dante Alighieri places sodomizers in the seventh circle of hell, considering the act a crime against nature as well as a crime against God himself.

1327:

Edward II, our subject, is murdered. One chronicle, from 1357, reports that the execution involved a red-hot poker shoved up Edward's rectum, but recently historians have begun to doubt the truthfulness of that account.

Marlowe's play Edward II is much more interested in the difference in class between characters than our adaptation is. Before he became King, Edward II had sworn himself to Piers Gaveston as a brother-in-arms, thereby entitling Gaveston to share in all of Edward's possessions. The fact that Edward II had chosen a man so far below his status to be his favorite was unthinkable to his father, Edward I, and his court. His sharing of the titles and treasury that were intended for him as king with a man as low-born as Gaveston enraged the nobility; the court and King's disapproval led to the first of Gaveston's exiles.

The church also held immense political power in this time, and was a higher authority than any European nobility. Their political position and views, along with their persecution of sodomy as sin, only added to the animosity towards Gaveston and the disapproval of Edward II within the court and country

Gender and Sexual Minorities (GSM) and the Government

February 1903:

Undercover policemen violently shut down a gay bathhouse in New York City. They arrest 26 men, 12 of whom they bring to trial on sodomy charges. Seven of these men are sentenced to 4 to 20 years in prison.

March 1952:

Manchester police arrest Alan Turing, famous and influential computer scientist, for homosexual acts. The courts give him the choice of either a prison sentence or a year of hormonal injections designed to neutralize his libido. On June 8, 1954, after having undergone the treatment, Turing commits suicide by cyanide poisoning.

January 1977:

Dade County, Florida passes a gay-rights ordinance forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation. Anita Bryant, founder of the anti-homosexual-rights organization "Save Our Children," resists the ordinance. Within six weeks the Florida court system overturns the ordinance, leading to a wave of repeals of gay-rights laws as well as new laws; one Oklahoma law banned gay and lesbian people from teaching in public schools. Anita Bryant and her campaign sparked the beginning of the Religious Right's blatant and active attack on the gay community.

July 1987:

Congress passes a bill that prohibits spending federal funding on AIDS prevention and campaigns that promote, "directly or indirectly, homosexual activities." This is in response to campaigns like the "Safe Sex is Hot Sex" campaign which promotes use of condoms in homosexual intercourse to prevent the spread of AIDS. Jesse Helms, Senator from North Carolina heads up this piece of legislation, saying, "the government should spend less money on people with AIDS because they got sick as a result of deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct."

January 1933:

Nazis begin rounding up homosexuals and placing them in concentration camps. On May 6th, a group of Nazi students break into the Institute for Sexual Science in Berlin. Four days later, they destroy the majority of the Institute's irreplaceable collection of books and images.

New Years Eve 1967:

Twelve plainclothes policemen raid The Black Cat, a gay bar in Silver Lake, a neighborhood in Los Angeles. The policemen beat and arrest employees and patrons kissing as they celebrate the New Year. They arrest fourteen patrons for "assault and public lewdness."

June 1981:

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) publish a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report describing the symptoms of what would be called "gay cancer," then later GRID (Gay-Related Immune Deficiency), and finally, in September of 1982, understood to be AIDS. By the end of 1981 there have been 270 reported cases of severe immune deficiency in gay men. By the end of 1982, AIDS has taken the lives of 618 people in the United States.

By the end of 1987, 40,849 people have died of AIDS, including not only gay men, but also women, infants, and recipients of blood transfusions. By 1990, nearly as many people have died of AIDS as died in the Vietnam War, and by 1991 the CDC has reported that one million Americans are infected. In 1995, the New York Times reports that AIDS is the leading cause of death in the United States in people aged 25 to 44, and deaths are at an all-time high – 319,849 deaths have been reported to date. By 2002, AIDS is the leading cause of death worldwide in people ages 15-59.

The history of GSM (gender and sexual minorities) has not been an easy one. Though historians have traced same sex love to hundreds of years BCE, noting that it was widely accepted as natural in ancient Greek society, many communities now use sexuality as a basis for persecution and hatred. Societal systems of law are the primary executors of this persecution, and this has led to a shared consciousness within the GSM community of their maltreatment, oppression, and discrimination, along with a rejection of the government and society as allies or as a solution.

As queer theorist Leo Bersani observed, “we might almost see here a Queer Nation poised for revolution.”¹ In the final decades of the 20th century, this “queer nation” formed its own sort of anti-community, borne out of a sense of unbelonging within “normal” society. The queer nation was an alternative society, composed of survivors of the AIDS epidemic who felt betrayed by their government and fellow-citizens, that intentionally rejected mainstream society’s “white-picket fence” ideality and chose to live outside of societal expectations. These were GSM who, for example, rejected the push for gay marriage, because marriage itself was an expectation of the “normal.” When left-wing progressives began to turn their attention to GSM around the beginning of the century, and fold GSM concerns in with other human rights, the GSM community responded with both negative and positive reactions. Some members of this queer nation, or “anti-society,” as it is referred to in “anti-social queer theory,” felt silenced. They felt a loss of their anti-community, which had reclaimed marginalization as a point of pride and had been strengthened by caring for itself during the AIDS epidemic. Others saw this development as an acceptance of their lifestyles, an embrace of their concerns, and a sharing of the burden of advocating for queer health, safety, and, in the case of the trans community, their very being. Due to this mainstream progressive embrace of the GSM in the late 90s legislation on behalf of the GSM community became an expectation, albeit fought for, of Generation X, and now most Millennials consider this kind of legislation to be a right.

Flash forward to 2017. The United States of America has just sworn in a new President and Vice President, two men who ought to lead by example and represent the opinions and values of this country. The past actions of these men, however, indicate contempt for the concerns of GSM. Donald Trump, in his presidential platform, promised to support the First Amendment Defense Act – a piece of legislation which would legalize anti-GSM discrimination by a business on the grounds of religious belief. As Governor of Indiana, Mike Pence supported a constitutional amendment that would ban same-sex marriage; opposed the passing of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which expands the definition of a hate crime to include one motivated by gender, gender identity, perceived sexual orientation, or disability; and signed a bill that would make it illegal for homosexual couples to apply for marriage licenses, allowing for these couples to be jailed if they tried.

The struggle between GSM and those in positions of governmental power is ongoing and difficult. GSM expect to be supported; the new administration does not seem prepared to provide that support, but rather to pull it out from under us.

The day this new administration came into power Trump’s team updated www.whitehouse.gov; all traces of GSM were wiped clean from the website of the highest office in our nation.

Our combat is ongoing.

“Ay, there it goes, but yet I will not yield...”

Edward II

Act I, Scene 4.2

¹ Bersani, Leo. *Homos*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995.