

“We’re Here, We’re Queer, We’re Irish”: Excavating Transatlantic Queer Identity through the  
Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization

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## ABSTRACT

The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) campaigned between 1991 and 2001 to be included in the festivities under banners that proudly proclaimed the intersection of their Irish and queer identities. However, the organization is nearly absent from American queer histories and in accounts of the 1990s in New York. This thesis works to increase awareness of ILGO's movement and its ramifications in queer activist circles by analyzing how their efforts were received in queer New York, Irish-American, and queer Irish circles. In New York's queer activist circles, ILGO was initially supported, but faced controversy regarding the 1993 protest, and most groups eventually divested. However, placing ILGO's mission and actions within a queer tradition of direct action against the religious right and against state-sponsored homophobia centers ILGO in a queer history of New York in the 1990s, working against the demonstrated erasure. In Irish-America, a variety of responses existed instead of a unified condemnation, with ILGO's actions prompting a reconsideration of the purpose of the parade and of Irish identity itself. The *Irish Voice* newspaper effectively represented a younger contingent of Irish-American and immigrants who were accepting of ILGO's movement and message. The deliberate inclusion of queer Irish groups in St. Patrick's Day parades in Cork and Dublin as early as 1992 illuminates an Ireland more tolerant than its imagined status, and queer Irish activist circles and straight Irish organizations were motivated to demonstrate their modernity and inclusion. Solidarity movements were formed across national borders, sectarian violence, and a transnational movement was with ILGO Ireland's founding. Ultimately, such a focus on ILGO illuminates a resilient and transatlantic concept of queer Irishness that transcends multivariate insistence on their incompatibility.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACT UP	AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power
AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
DCLA	Dublin City Library Archive
ILGO	Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization
GLIB	Boston's Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Group
GLEN	Gay and Lesbian Equality Network
LGBT CCNHA	LGBT Community Center National History Archive
NIGRA	Northern Irish Gay Rights Association
NLI	National Library of Ireland
NYU AIA	New York University Archive of Irish America
NYPD	New York Police Department

## **INTRODUCTION: Disappearing from the Record -- What is ILGO's Place in Queer Histories?**

In the lead-up to her 2008 presidential campaign, Hillary Clinton broke a decades-long Democratic Party boycott of the New York Saint Patrick's Day Parade, marching alongside the Ancient Order of Hibernians. She also marched in a parade in Queens alongside the Lavender and Green Alliance, a queer organization founded by Brendan Fay, giving her the ability to say she "marched with 'the gays' in Queens...[and] 'the Irish' on Fifth Avenue."<sup>1</sup> Many people are unaware of the controversies that surrounded the St. Patrick's Day Parade in New York, and by extension, the efforts of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) between 1991 and 2001 to be included in the festivities under banners that proudly proclaimed the intersection of their Irish and queer identities. This campaign made waves within queer activist circles in New York City and Dublin, as well as within the Irish-American communities in New York and beyond. The resulting legal battle also made national and international news, yet the campaign is nearly absent from American queer histories and in accounts of the 1990s in New York. I seek to increase awareness of ILGO's movement and its ramifications in queer activist circles by analyzing how their efforts were received in queer New York, Irish-American, and queer Irish circles. Such a focus illuminates a resilient and transatlantic concept of queer Irishness that transcends multivariate insistence on their incompatibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Anne Maguire, *Rock the Sham!: The Irish Lesbian & Gay Organization's Battle to March in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade* (New York, NY: Street Level Press, 2005), 194.

### *A Brief History and Timeline of ILGO*

In the context of this thesis, an understanding of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's founding and activist action is necessary. ILGO was founded in 1990 by a group of Irish immigrants to New York City including Anne Maguire, Marie Honan, and Paul O'Dwyer. It was founded based on the experiences of many Irish immigrants to New York at the time, who were forced to choose "[to be] Irish if we were closeted (which most of our members were) or we could be lesbians or gay men so long as we gave up the benefits offered by the Irish community to immigrants in this city."<sup>2</sup> The long history of Irish immigration to New York City has created specific architectures of support for new immigrants, including housing, employment assistance, and crucially, in visa and legal support. Institutional homophobia, primarily orchestrated by the Catholic Church, dominated the middle-class Irish-American community which generally provided those supports and thus required the closeted status of queer Irish immigrants. The founders understood the group's function to be inherently political, "we would not be a closeted group, and our focus would be on lesbians and gay men of Irish descent."<sup>3</sup>

The invisibility of the Irish queer in both communities prompted their actions. Initially, the group thought they would exist mainly in queer spaces in New York, creating an alternative to the homophobic establishment. However, their experience marching in the 1990 Pride Parade, where they were sectioned in "Political/Movement Groups," and met with joking incredulity from other queer marchers who did not know it was possible to be Irish and gay simultaneously, changed their mind. This motivated ILGO members to apply to participate in the New York St. Patrick's Day parade. In doing so, they challenged the "establishment attempt to force Irish lesbians and gays to

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<sup>2</sup> Maguire, *Rock the Sham!*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Maguire, 37.

remain in the closet” and “[asserted themselves] with as much vigor in the Irish community as [they] had been doing in the lesbian and gay community.”<sup>4</sup>

The Ancient Order of Hibernians denied ILGO’s application to march in the 1991 St. Patrick’s Day Parade on the pretense of a crowded waiting list. They were later invited to march with District 7 of the AOH, but only if they did not carry banners or other ornamentation. This action by District 7 was explicitly against the wishes of the New York County Board in charge of organizing the parade. New York Mayor David Dinkins marched alongside ILGO and District 7 and joined an ILGO celebration the following day. But in January of 1992, the AOH banned ILGO from marching in the parade under all circumstances. The same year Boston’s Irish-American Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual (GLIB) group, whose founding was directly inspired by ILGO, won the right to march in the Boston St. Patrick’s Day Parade, which ILGO received the news of on March 13. Simultaneously, queer groups were openly marching in the 1992 St. Patrick’s Day Parade in Cork, Ireland. The loudest and most public protest occurred in 1993, when the city filed an injunction against ILGO preventing them from marching in the parade and prohibiting any counter-protest they might attempt, making their fight an act of civil disobedience. A large counter-protest did occur, with many ILGO members arrested and jailed overnight.

From 1994 to 2001, a disappointing cycle reoccurred each year. Maguire wrote that, “ILGO and our supporters have been through much the same ritual on March 17 every year. Our arrests are followed by numerous court appearances. Often, the court cases are only resolved, if at all in any given year, a few months before the next St. Patrick’s Day protest.”<sup>5</sup> ILGO was never officially able to participate in the parade during this window. In 2001, ILGO Ireland, an offshoot in Dublin, planned a coordinated transatlantic campaign for the tenth anniversary of ILGO’s first attempts.

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<sup>4</sup> Maguire 41-42; 43.

<sup>5</sup> Maguire, 171.



Although the official ban was lifted in 2014, ILGO never marched in the New York City parade and other regional parades continue to deny queer Irish groups entry.

### *Questions and Sources*

I seek to answer the following questions: How are queerness and queer identity reconciled with Irishness, both in the queer American community, the Irish-American community, and the queer Irish community? Secondly, how can conceptions of immigrant and transnational identities shift and change with further in-queer-y? Third, how do queer communities in New York and in Dublin react to the actions of ILGO and why? Finally, can queerness and Irishness ever be reconciled, or will they always be intrinsically opposed? I answer these questions by investigating the actions and strategies of queer activist groups in New York City and in Dublin. I use my findings to better understand the perceived radicalism of ILGO's campaign and shifting perceptions of its incorporation into more extensive histories of queer activism. I also investigate the reaction from Irish-American community newspapers, using my findings to complicate the construction of Irish-American identity and illuminate the contradictions between the imagined Ireland of the past and the nuanced Ireland of reality. These questions and ILGO's campaign have been largely overlooked in the historical narrative of queer New York and Irish America. By focusing on how their campaign and subsequent reactions on both sides of the Atlantic served to complicate various modes of identity, this thesis provides a fresh perspective on the study of queer history and conceptions of Irish, queer, and American identity.

This thesis employs a broad spectrum of primary sources. First, it draws from the records of multiple activist groups in New York City, including Queer Nation, Heritage of Pride, and the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights. These collections include meeting notes, flyers, and other

ephemera. I utilize these documents to provide insight into the consideration of ILGO by other queer activist groups and actions of solidarity. I have accessed these materials from the LGBT Community Center's National History Archive in New York. Secondly, the records of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH), and issues of the *Irish Voice* and *Irish Echo* chronicle the varied reaction to ILGO's activism by the larger Irish-American community. This provides a window into the other actors in New York and from the Irish-American perspective more broadly. These sources are housed at the NYU Archive of Irish America and were made available to me for consultation at their archive. Third, records from various Irish queer groups, including the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), the Northern Irish Gay Rights Association (NIGRA), and ILGO Ireland provide insight into the actions and reactions of queer Irish activist networks, and have been accessed through the Dublin City Library Archives (DCLA) and the Dublin Queer Archive within the National Library of Ireland (NLI). Finally, the author will use oral history interviews with queer Irish activists to supplement accounts of Ireland's queer activist scene. By intertwining these sources, this thesis tracks the transatlantic and transnational reaction to ILGO's campaign in novel ways.

### *Historiography*

The existence of ILGO and its contributions to queer activism transnationally have been largely overlooked by historians. To remedy this is an important goal of this thesis. Moreover, this thesis also challenges the dissociation between queerness and Irishness present in many queer histories and in queer histories of New York. This stands in contrast to the historians, activists, and journalists that are directly and personally associated with ILGO who have written about their efforts. ILGO is also mentioned more often in contemporary accounts of queer Irish histories.

Anne Maguire, one of the founders of ILGO, published *Rock the Sham! The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization's Battle to March in New York City's St. Patrick's Day Parade* in 2004, and the work is the most detailed and personal account of the campaign. This profoundly personalized account functions as Maguire's memoir of her involvement in this grassroots movement. As a result, it provides tremendous detail into the everyday workings of ILGO, the decision-making processes regarding the campaign, and the thoughts of other activists who never intended to become involved in such a tangled web. However, this is not a historical monograph, nor does it contain larger arguments about ILGO's place in New York history or queer history more broadly.

Sarah Schulman, author and journalist, has mentioned ILGO in her histories of queer NYC in the 1990s. In *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993*, Schulman includes the 1993 barring of ILGO from the parade in her ACT UP New York timeline. Schulman also deliberately notes the ethnic and religious background of several of the interviewees as Irish and Catholic. She even dedicates part of a chapter to on the legal efforts of Paul O'Dwyer, another founding member of ILGO.<sup>6</sup> The edited collection, *My American History* includes of Schulman's personal from the 1980s and 1990s and works published in newspapers and magazines. Schulman mentions ILGO in her preface, stating, "'I got arrested with the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization on St. Patrick's Day when a court order took away their right to have a counterdemonstration against the St. Pat's parade that officially excluded them.'" <sup>7</sup> The text also includes an extensive analysis of ILGO's campaign in the commentary of her 1983 essay in *Womanews* about the protest of the Gay Rights Bill. Her personal connection to ILGO helps

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<sup>6</sup> Schulman Sarah, *Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT-UP New York, 1987-1993* (New York, NY: St Martin's Press, 2022), 454, 665.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Schulman, *My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), xix.

explain this inclusion. Anne Maguire and Marie Honan were also founding members of the Lesbian Avengers alongside Schulman. As such, the large section of the text focusing on the Avengers mentions ILGO and the queer Irish activists composing the founders of both groups. She details the assistance provided by the Lesbian Avengers in the 1993 St. Patrick's Day Parade counter-protest, and the impact this event had on the inaugural Dyke March later in the year, "We had so much good experience working together that we were able to bring an entire functioning structure to this very large and complex political event, a structure that was to be put to use again a few months later in Washington."<sup>8</sup> Once again, Schulman's multiple personal connections to ILGO and her experience in the protests explain her inclusion of this content in her queer histories. Unfortunately, most historians of the time pay little to no mind to ILGO.

One example of a legal history of ILGO was also authored by someone intimately connected with the movement – Katherine O'Donnell (alongside Sarah Hunt) wrote an article detailing the court cases ILGO fought and won and lost and how they functioned to legalize compulsory heterosexuality in both Boston and New York. O'Donnell traveled to New York multiple times in the 1990s to march in St. Patrick's Day parades and protests with ILGO. She was also on the board of ILGO Ireland and traveled again with the ten-year anniversary trip in 2001. This is perhaps the most comprehensive published article regarding the legal history of ILGO and argues for the fundamentality of their campaign to the development of both American and Irish nationalism. They argued that the contestation of urban space and the resulting legal battle was based on the assumption that queerness was antithetical to Irishness in the American context. This starkly contrasts the queer participation in St. Patrick's Day parades in Cork and Dublin, evidence

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<sup>8</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 285.

they argue of the Irish nation-state wishing to communicate modernity to its citizens.<sup>9</sup> The text focuses on ideas of nationalism, and Pride parades as spaces in which “the queer nation, and their full citizenship in it, seems to exist.”<sup>10</sup> This framing of ILGO’s campaign to be included in the St. Patrick’s Day parade makes it possible to see this as an extension of the larger fight for full American citizenship inherent to the Irish-American experience.

Finally, contemporary Irish historians have included ILGO in their texts. Brian Lacey includes a section discussing ILGO’s campaign alongside a discussion of the gay rights movement in Dublin, arguing that the activism fits into the larger context of queer radicalism in Ireland.<sup>11</sup> His inclusion of their actions in a history of homosexuality in Ireland marks ILGO as a group made up of primarily Irish citizens who had emigrated to New York. It also complicates the organization’s portrayal as an exclusively American movement. Lacey also connects the struggle with nationalism, describing the Ancient Order of Hibernians as the “Catholic version” of the Orange Order, a nationalist Protestant organization.<sup>12</sup> ILGO’s campaign also has made its way into other collections of queer Irish history. In Lucy McDiarmid’s essay regarding the posthumous life of Roger Casement in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, she mentions ILGO carrying posters with pictures of Irish homosexuals including Casement.<sup>13</sup> She articulates the national controversies regarding Casement and larger histories of homosexuality in Ireland as an “object lesson in many forms of patriotism for new, revisionist Ireland...in which patriotic reverence and homosexual

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<sup>9</sup> Sally R. Munt and Katherine O’Donnell, “Pride and Prejudice: Legalizing Compulsory Heterosexuality in New York’s Annual St. Patrick’s Day Parades,” *Space and Culture* 10, no. 1 (February 2007), 94.

<sup>10</sup> Munt and O’Donnell, 102.

<sup>11</sup> Brian Lacey, *Terrible Queer Creatures: Homosexuality in Irish History* (Dublin: Wordwell, 2015), 255.

<sup>12</sup> Lacey, 255.

<sup>13</sup> Lucy McDiarmid, “The Posthumous Life of Roger Casement,” in *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, eds. Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialnella Valiulis (University of Massachusetts Press, 1997), 151.

love were acknowledged to coexist.”<sup>14</sup> Irish historians, then, tend to incorporate discussions of ILGO into larger arguments surrounding queerness in Ireland and complicating nationalism through protest.

I seek to shift the narrative which discards ILGO from queer histories of America unless written by those personally affected by demonstrating how their campaign fits into a larger struggle against the religious right waged by queer activists. As a result, I deliberately incorporate ILGO into the queer history of New York and attempt to combat the fundamental opposition of queerness and Irishness which pervades many queer histories of the place. I also incorporate queerness into the account of Irish Americans in New York, highlighting a diverse reaction from New York communities which was not all negative. Furthermore, I add to the inclusion of ILGO in queer histories of Ireland by articulating the response of queer activist groups in Ireland and the truly transatlantic, transnational nature of the campaign. This illuminates the transience of the queer immigrant identity and allows me to interrogate the imagined Ireland which pervades the Irish-American imagination.

### *Roadmap and Thesis Statement*

This thesis shows that in their movement, ILGO embodied ideals of queer activism in New York through their fight against the religious right, despite claims that their actions were “not radical enough” or “too radical” from varying sources. Their struggle for inclusion and visibility in the Irish-American community contributed not only to the gay rights movement in America and Ireland. It created a queered Irish-American identity which denigrates the fundamental opposition of queerness and Irishness in American culture, while also complicating the Ireland of Irish-

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<sup>14</sup> McDiarmid, 152.

American identity formation by showing it to be queered as well. Chapter one of this thesis begins with an exploration of queer New York City, and of the reaction of various activist groups to ILGO's campaign. Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride both demonstrate literal and ideological support of ILGO in the early 1990s, but drop off around 1994, with the 1993 and 1994 parades garnering controversy for both "not being radical enough" with the CD Rebels counterdemonstration and also for being "too radical" with pressure from homocrats to drop their fight. It will discuss the perceived dissonance between queerness and Irishness as concurrent states of being, alongside discussions of ILGO's campaign as part of the larger movement against the conservative church or as a movement of ethnic infighting inherently disassociated from the gay rights movement. In the second chapter, I explore Irish-American identity formation and the reaction of the broader Irish-American community in New York to ILGO's campaign. Competing newspaper perspectives allow me to compare the conservative, middle-class view to that of the younger, modernized contingent. The shift from Ireland's conception as a place of origin to that of an ethnic heritage is examined alongside the centrality of the church to ethnic identity. The chapter demonstrates the incompatibility of conservative support for nationalist movements to those movement's support of ILGO and the gay rights movement, and shows the imagined Ireland of Irish-America. Finally, in the third chapter, I move to Ireland to examine the response of queer activist groups to ILGO's campaign and queerness in Ireland more broadly, covering the shift of conception of queerness and its entanglement with nationalist ideas. Solidarity was expressed both transnationally and transatlantically, in the face of sectarian conflict. The inclusion of queers in St. Patrick's Day parades in Cork and Dublin as early as 1993 demonstrates the intertwined nature of queerness and Irishness. Finally, an examination of the ILGO Ireland tenth-anniversary trip

cements ILGO's actions as historic and fundamentally transnational, intrinsically radical, and immensely important to queer histories of both places.



## **CHAPTER 1: “A March for the Irish, not Gays”: ILGO Direct Action, LGBT Organizing, and Being Queer and Irish in New York City**

Many histories of the gay rights movement pinpoint its development to New York City, with the epicenter as the Stonewall Riots in June 1969. This view has been challenged by many historians, arguing that this characterization dismisses the pre-Stonewall homophile movement and characterize it as the culmination of a long history of “community-based resistance practices” in LGBT cultures.<sup>15</sup> Regardless, Stonewall exists in many popular understandings of the gay rights movement as the progenitor. New York was also one of the epicenters of the AIDS Crisis, both in infections and in related activism. The city was home to ACT UP, and many of the radical traditions of the queer liberation movements were pioneered in the city’s streets. As a result, a network of established activist organizations had varied reactions to ILGO’s campaign. Records from Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride are mainly considered, alongside accounts from Anne Maguire and Sarah Schulman. Through an analysis of these records and of personal accounts of the movement, this chapter seeks to understand how queer New York reacted to ILGO and also why ILGO is often ignored in queer histories of New York City despite the prominence and cultural significance of the campaign at the time.

### *Historiography*

Before attempting to understand ILGO’s place in the queer history of New York, it must first be understood how that history has been constructed, with queerness often explicitly or implicitly placed in opposition to Irishness. George Chauncey’s *Gay New York* made visible the expansive and diverse gay networks of New York City in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that

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<sup>15</sup> Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2023), 99.

was very much “a working-class world, centered in African-American and Irish and Italian immigrant neighborhoods and along the city’s busy waterfronts.”<sup>16</sup> Chauncey explicitly acknowledges the participation of Irish men in homosexual activity, although centered in the working-class bachelor subculture, which was more open to the advances of “fairies” before marriage, confirming their masculinity through the subordination of ‘she-men’ or ‘fairies.’<sup>17</sup> Chauncey references the population of Irish immigrants as having high rates of lifelong bachelorhood, which contributed to their participation in the working class world and suggested that “Irish...immigrants interacted with ‘fairies’...[while] many...gay men thought that ‘straight’ Italian and Irish men were more likely to respond to their sexual advances.”<sup>18</sup> Chauncey maps a queer New York as explicitly based in working-class social networks and populated by Irish men. However, he mainly references them as heterosexual men participating in sex acts with other men, and not as queer themselves.

In Mark W. Turner’s *Backward Glances*, he constructs a queered geography of New York through the mode of cruising. He locates lower Manhattan as queered space, focusing again on the Bowery as a locus, although he does not explicitly acknowledge the largely Irish population. He uses Earl Lind’s *Autobiography of an Androgyne* to explore an autobiography of cruising, with Lind mentioning “a large sprinkling of Irish immigrants” in the neighborhoods he patrolled and the “youthful policemen [who] went skylarking with [them] on the back streets...Most of the police on the Bowery knew me as a faerie, but most were always friendly.”<sup>19</sup> This mention of police officers at a time when Irish men primarily populated police forces suggests another level

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<sup>16</sup> George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1994), 10.

<sup>17</sup> Chauncey, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Chauncey, 72.

<sup>19</sup> Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion, 2003), 132-134.

of familiarity with and participation in gay culture from Irish men. Chauncey and Turner both intimate this, but again, both do not conflate any sense of queerness with Irishness. They both stress that the role of Irish working-class men was that of the dominant, penetrative participant, emphasizing how at the time, participation in such acts did not necessitate a queer identity at the time. It is worth noting that both Chauncey and Turner root their constructions of queer New York geography in neighborhoods populated by Irish immigrants and specifically mention them as participants in the gay culture of the time.

Later histories including Hugh Ryan's *When Brooklyn Was Queer*, which attempts to create a queer geography of Brooklyn as opposed to the usual focus on Manhattan, position Irishness as context to queer development and participate in acts of erasure. Ryan uses the neighborhood of Vinegar Hill in the first chapter, setting up a heterosexual spatial understanding from which to base the rest of his construction of a queered Brooklyn, describing it as a "working-class, dockside neighborhood with a large Irish population."<sup>20</sup> Aside from discussing how Irish workers worked to lock out Black workers on the waterfront, the significant Irish population in Brooklyn is never again mentioned. There is no discussion of Irish participants in queer culture besides the occasional reference to ethnicity. Perhaps most egregiously, Ryan refers to "gay British authors Noël Coward and Oscar Wilde," completely erasing the Irishness of Oscar Wilde.<sup>21</sup> As Oscar Wilde is generally considered to be one of the most famous gay figures in history and also as specifically Irish, the lack of care afforded to representations of queer Irishness demonstrates its lack of visibility and prominence in the creation of queer histories of New York and queer histories more broadly.

Ultimately, the only inclusion of ILGO in queer histories of New York City exists in those authored by those intimately connected to the movement, like Sarah Schulman, who mentions

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<sup>20</sup> Hugh Ryan, *When Brooklyn Was Queer* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 2020), 19.

<sup>21</sup> Ryan, 186.

ILGO in both *Let the Record Show* and also in *My American History*. As these queer histories of New York are both grounded in Irishness and also fundamentally dissociated from it, ILGO's direct confrontation of the confluence between the two identities prompted engagement from queer activist groups at the time. The common dismissing of ILGO from queer histories can be understood within the context of these responses, starting with engagement and support, mired in controversy, and then eventually discarded except by a transnational movement.

### *Roadmap and Ties to Larger Thesis*

First, the chapter will review early responses and displays of support from the physical records of Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride, alongside the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights, to focus on how organization-wide support was often linked to the actions of one individual within the group. Then, I will examine controversies about the radicalism of ILGO's campaign, taking the 1993 counter-protest of the CD Rebels alongside accounts from Maguire about pressure from assimilationist organizations that their actions were detracting from larger goals of the gay rights movement. Finally, I will return to an analysis of Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride records to attempt to explain the drop-off of support for ILGO after 1994. Ultimately, queer groups in New York stopped providing material support for ILGO as the decade continued, with the personal connection removed after the supportive individuals stopped organizing with the group. Contributing to the dismissal of ILGO was whether or not the group perceived ILGO's actions to be part of the larger LGBT movement or simply as interethnic fighting, a view supplemented by the demonstrated dissociation between queerness and Irishness. In this way, ILGO's treatment by queer groups in New York City mirrors its treatment historically, pointing ultimately to the significance of transnational, queered Irish identity.

### *Initial Fervor and Data-Gathering*

Two queer activist groups in New York City in the 1990s were Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride. Queer Nation described themselves as a “direct-action organization” with the goal of “the elimination of homophobia, and the increase of gay and lesbian visibility through a variety of tactics,” founded in 1990.<sup>22</sup> They organized protests, including “Nights Out,” where queers would invade straight bars to “make clear to patrons that queers will not be restricted to gay bars for socializing.”<sup>23</sup> Notably, they chose McSorley’s Irish Pub in the East Village for their second Nights Out action, demonstrating a further association between heterosexuality and Irishness and queerness with disrupting that. Queer Nation was also closely associated with ACT UP New York, particularly its anti-church action. One flyer theirs criticizes Mayor Dinkins for his lack of action against anti-gay violence as part of his anti-crime legislation, explicitly calling out how he:

should have talked about the violence during his major crime address at St. Patrick’s...where anti-gay/lesbian crime was pointedly omitted...ask yourself...WHY ISN’T HE SAYING THESE THINGS IN SPEECHES AT UNION HALLS, CHURCHES, AND SCHOOLS?<sup>24</sup>

Queer Nation, then, understood institutional homophobia and the actions of city officials to be motivated partially by religious homophobia and the Church, and their efforts as part of a radical movement against the religious Right. In a 1991 flyer, Queer Nation also had a “Stop the Church” working group, indicating their assistance with ACT UP New York’s famous action involving

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<sup>22</sup> LGBT Community Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, “Queer Nation Chronology,” 1.

<sup>23</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, “Queer Nation Chronology,” 1.

<sup>24</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, “Queer Nation, Mayor Dinkins is Using You,” 2.

protest during mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral, also demonstrating their participation in activism against Cardinal O'Connor's church.<sup>25</sup>

In Volume 1 No. 1 of "The Queer National," Queer Nation's newsletter, published in March 1991, the organization included an account of ILGO's first parade attempt entitled "St. Patrick's Day Prejudice." The article reported that "about 15 to 20 Queer Nationalists turned out to fill the ranks of ILGO and were impressed by the attention the media continued to give to the issue."<sup>26</sup> Much of the article also focused on the press coverage of ILGO's exclusion, noting the "newly queer-conscious New York Post" and how the "media continued to high-light the day by focusing on the Lesbian and Gay participants."<sup>27</sup> Although Queer Nation members supported ILGO's actions and recognized the prejudice and homophobia that excluded them, the tone of the article and the emphasis on how much media attention was paid to ILGO indicates a level of resentment or at least light annoyance. Especially with the context of previous pamphlets lamenting the lack of attention paid to anti-gay violence by Mayor Dinkins and other frustration with his actions, the seemingly immediate attention and assistance given to ILGO does mark them as abnormal within the queer activist space.

Queer Nation provided material support to ILGO and continued to incorporate the St. Patrick's Day issue into their agendas and programming. A flyer from 1991 included messaging such as "Gay Irish Under Attack, Gay and Lesbian Irish Americans Fight Back!" and that "Gays and Lesbians in the Irish community are proud of who we are as both Irish and Gay. We demand our right to be represented, to be visible in the parade, to be recognized and respected for who we

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<sup>25</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "Queer Nation Contact Sheet 9/5/91."

<sup>26</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "The Queer National Vol 1 No. 1 March 1991."

<sup>27</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "The Queer National Vol 1 No. 1 March 1991."

are...Help make it a gay day for the Irish...All Queers are Irish on St. Patrick's Day."<sup>28</sup> The prominence of ILGO's messaging made an impact within the queer community. The incredulity of ILGO's experience in March 1990 pride, that led some to joke: "I didn't know you could be Irish and queer!" was replaced with an understanding of the existence of Irish queers who demanded visibility and inclusion. The "St. Patrick Day Parade Working Group of Queer Nation" is credited with the poster, but it also states that "GLIA is not affiliated with the ILGO- the group that was barred from the parade."<sup>29</sup> Therefore, despite Queer Nation providing material support to ILGO's cause, they were required to disaffiliate them to participate the "illegal participation in the march...an act of civil disobedience." Despite the repudiation of ILGO, Queer Nation did participate in the 1991 parade alongside them and provided internal coverage and support of St. Patrick's Day.

In several Queer Nation Contact Sheets from February and March 1992, a "Saint Patrick's Day Parade WG" is listed among their collection of working groups.<sup>30</sup> In early February, Bobby Considine headed it, but the position opened in mid-February and passed to Dave Fleck in March. Fleck also ran various other working groups and was in charge of the Queer National newsletter. In addition to the existence of the working group, Queer Nation also provided the "ILGO St. Pat's Information Line" with the phone number "(212) 967-7711 ext. 3078" on their contact sheets from February 27 and March 5.<sup>31</sup> This demonstrates that in addition to providing their own support and organizing for the parade as an important issue, they were also working alongside and coordinating with ILGO. This marks a shift from the 1991 disaffiliation of ILGO and indicates ILGO's

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<sup>28</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "March in Pride."

<sup>29</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "March in Pride."

<sup>30</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "Queer Nation Contact Sheet 2/13/92."

<sup>31</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "Queer Nation Contact Sheet 2/27/92." And "Queer Nation Contact Sheet 3/5/92."

enmeshment in the New York activist scene. ILGO also began holding meetings at the Center, where Queer Nation had theirs and many other groups did as well. In this stretch of contact sheets, Queer Nation also listed St. Patrick's Day in their "Important Dates" section.<sup>32</sup> They also listed "The Saint Patrick's Day Parade" as one of the "major issues [they] need to deal with now" alongside the N.Y. Gay Civil Rights Bill and the Rainbow Curriculum.<sup>33</sup> Queer Nation's incorporation of the parade as an issue on par with significant issues in the queer rights movement demonstrates the prominence and relevance of ILGO's movement. After the initial furor surrounding the 1991 parade, Queer Nation's provision of their own support and activism for the St. Patrick's issue alongside their uplifting of ILGO's meetings and resources indicates a level of participation in queer activist networks from ILGO and a degree of acceptance into those networks by other queer groups.

Heritage of Pride was the group that organized the New York City Pride Parade in addition to Pridefest and the weekend's other festivities, with their 1993 March Order celebrating the "24<sup>th</sup> Annual Lesbian & Gay Pride March."<sup>34</sup> They welcomed "participation in [their] events to all groups and individuals who support the struggle for lesbian and gay liberation."<sup>35</sup> As such, they were interested in ILGO not only from a position of support for their campaign, but also for research and data-gathering purposes. Meeting notes from early March 1992 (undated) with Arthur Finn reporting state, "St Patricks Parade is tomorrow. We need people to monitor their event, so we can negotiate more for us."<sup>36</sup> The March Committee Meeting notes from February 19, 1992 mention that "ILGO needs marshals for St Patricks" with a handwritten annotation

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<sup>32</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "Queer Nation Contact Sheet 3/19/92."

<sup>33</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "Queer Nation Flyer."

<sup>34</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, "Heritage of Pride 1993 March Order."

<sup>35</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, "Heritage of Pride 1993 March Order."

<sup>36</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, "Heritage of Pride March 1992 Meeting Notes."



drawing through “ILGO” with the word “permit” written next to it.<sup>37</sup> Meeting notes of the Executive Committee from March 2, 1992, have a separate section for ILGO, that reiterated the “Need [for] marshals on St. Patrick’s day.” They also explained that “HOP needs observers on the same day. It will be very helpful and interesting to see how St. Patrick’s parade is managed to compare to ours.”<sup>38</sup>

Like Queer Nation, Heritage of Pride supported ILGO by training marshals and sending members to attend the parades and protests. However, Heritage of Pride took a more explicitly practical and research-based approach to ILGO’s actions. Their assistance also aimed to maximize their own interaction with police and city authorities. Heritage of Pride’s need to interact with city and state officials regarding permits, legality, and the literal organization of the Pride Parade makes their interaction with ILGO more formal. Handwritten notes from the HOP General Membership meeting on April 13, 1992, have a section boxed off for “NYPD” which mentions St. Patrick’s Day, with questions including: “What will NYPD do to speed march similar to 3/17?”<sup>39</sup> In 1992, Heritage of Pride clearly viewed their support for ILGO as an opportunity to observe the NYPD’s potential differential treatment of ILGO and as an opportunity to advocate for different treatment for the Pride Parade.

With the 1993 parade controversy and protest, Heritage of Pride also considered ILGO’s parade and actions. Notes from the General Membership meeting on January 11, 1993, contain a report from Arthur Flynn and the March Committee, “[suggesting] that HOP members monitor interactions at the St. Patrick’s Day Parade with stop watches and video cameras, and demand the

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<sup>37</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride March Committee February 19, 1992 Agenda.”

<sup>38</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride Executive Committee, March 2, 1992.”

<sup>39</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride, Inc. General Membership Mtg. 4/13/92 Agenda.”

same treatment from the police.”<sup>40</sup> This is more explicit in their desire to monitor and use ILGO’s actions to benefit the Pride parade. It seems to insinuate that ILGO received better or preferential treatment from the NYPD. Arthur Finn’s report from the Executive Board Meeting on March 3, 1993, states that “ILGO needs St. Pat’s marshals, and HOP needs observers there (cops per block, formation area, etc.) Judy to help ILGO, Tom B. to observe.”<sup>41</sup> Again, this demonstrates the dual purpose of Heritage of Pride’s support of ILGO: assistance and observation, visibility and utility. It is worth noting that ILGO was consistently grouped in the “Political & Movement” section of Heritage of Pride’s parade as early as 1991, with HOP understanding their purpose as a group to be explicitly political, not ethnic as other groups were classified.<sup>42</sup> The Co-Coordinator’s report from March 8, 1993, has a large section regarding ILGO:

There was a minor flurry of activity around the St Patricks Day Parade. Just before the court decision permitting the Hibernians to bar us from marching in the ~~Irish~~ Roman Catholic Parade, Orthodox Rabbi Yehuda Levin announced that if the Gays/Lesbians were allowed to march he would march in our event with his band of mary men. Upon the announcement of the court decision this brouhaha died down. No need to get concerned.”<sup>43</sup>

Using “us” to describe those that would be marching in the parade indicates a level of identification with ILGO. It validates the material support that Heritage of Pride had been planning to provide ILGO through marshals and also potentially through members marching alongside the Irish organization. However, the handwritten crossing-out of Irish in the “Irish Roman Catholic Parade” description demonstrates the impossibility of the queer, Irish, and Catholic identities all existing simultaneously in the understanding of ILGO in the New York activist space. The centrality of the

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<sup>40</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride General Membership 1/11/93.”

<sup>41</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride Executive Board Meeting March 3, 1992.”

<sup>42</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride 1991 March Order.”

<sup>43</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride Co Coordinators Report March 8, 1993.”

court decision to Heritage of Pride's discussion of ILGO also contributes to the research-based approach to their support of ILGO, with the legal decisions being made surrounding queer groups and parades crucial to Heritage of Pride's ability to operate as an organization.

This difference separates the responses of both Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride to ILGO's campaign. Queer Nation was an explicitly radical group based on direct action and protest. At the same time, Heritage of Pride was a group focused on organizing Pride which had to operate within the confines of permits, city mandates, and the whims of the NYPD. Both understood ILGO's actions, at least in the early 1990s, as fitting within a tradition of action against the Catholic Church, and against institutional religious and state homophobia. The issue of queer Irish visibility and representation resonated especially with Queer Nation, who more enthusiastically embraced the cause of ILGO in their support of the parades and protests. Other queer groups, though not mentioning ILGO specifically within their meeting notes, did support ILGO, especially as they became involved in the activist networks more directly through the Center. The files of the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights contained a paper copy of an ILGO "Song Sheet," containing the lyrics to protest chants to the tune of popular Irish songs including "Wild Rover":

We've been gay, proud and Irish for many long years / and we're sick and we're tired of youse putting down queers / but now we're returning to settle the score / and we never will stay in the closet no more... When we asked for to march in St. Patrick's Parade / the Hibernian boys and O'Connor, they said / It's a march for the Irish not gays can't you see / but we're as Irish as any have come o'er the sea.<sup>44</sup>

Including a document within the contents of another queer organization at the Center demonstrates the interconnectedness of queer activist groups in New York, primarily through the locus of the Center, and a general sense of support for ILGO's message and movement. When understood to embody the tradition of mobilization against the religious right, and increase the visibility and

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<sup>44</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 61, Box 4, "Song Sheet."

representation of Irish queers, activist groups in New York rallied around ILGO, providing support and helping to promote their actions.

### *The 1993 Protest: Too Radical and Not Radical Enough*

However, ILGO did garner backlash from many parts of the activist scene in New York, ranging from prominent activists to splinter groups, who perceived their actions as either too radical and therefore detracting from the larger gay rights movement, or not radical enough and too concerned with assimilation and belonging. Both groups understood ILGO's actions to be more on the side of inter-ethnic fighting rather than direct action. Both were dissatisfied with ILGO's insistence on the St. Patrick's Day Parade as a locus of queer resistance. These dissenting opinions centered around the 1993 parade and protest. In 1993, an alternative group to the Ancient Order of Hibernians, but mainly composed of similar members, the Hynes group, was awarded the permit for the parade by the Dinkins administration and the NYPD. The AOH sued in Federal Court for the return of the permit, with the city losing and the Hynes group having to return the permit. A newly incorporated Parade Committee was formed (mainly of AOH members) and awarded the permit, publicly vowing never to allow ILGO to march. Cardinal O'Connor told Catholics not to march if ILGO was included by court order.<sup>45</sup> In addition to hostility from the Irish-American community, Mayor Dinkins and the NYPD took out an injunction against ILGO's scheduled parade protest, making any marchers guilty of criminal contempt and making their march an act of civil disobedience.<sup>46</sup> The controversy surrounding this legal battle prompted criticism from many groups in the queer activist networks of New York, with ILGO's actions now threatening to compromise protest more broadly. It is the association with Irishness and its assumed

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<sup>45</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 60.

<sup>46</sup> Maguire, 203.

incompatibility with queerness, I argue, that caused this backlash from both sides, with assimilation an impossibility to less radical queer activists and the desire for inclusion considered too tame to the more radical. ILGO, then, existed unmoored from the activist networks, their ethnicity inherently political and their status in New York City tremulous.

ILGO faced criticism from their inception regarding its place in the queer community of New York and the larger gay rights movement. They were “fully aware of the anxiety this particular whirlwind caused in certain spheres of the gay community -- our group was inexperienced, ignorant on so many levels, and barely out of the closet. From the beginning we felt the strain of the huge responsibility we had to the lesbian and gay community in New York.”<sup>47</sup> With their initial application to join the St. Patrick’s Day Parade not intended to cause national and community-wide havoc, ILGO was not prepared to be a political group in any other sense than the assertion of queerness in the Irish community, and the assertion of Irishness in the queer community. Initial opinions on marching in the parade had been varied, and it was not considered high on ILGO’s agenda in 1991.<sup>48</sup> In 1991, Bill Dobbs, a prominent queer lawyer and ACT UP activist told Maguire and O’Dwyer that ILGO was making a huge mistake with their attempt, but that ACT UP New York had not discussed the parade within their official structures.<sup>49</sup> In 1992, Dobbs went to Arthur Finn of Heritage of Pride asking HoP to support the Hibernians in excluding ILGO, as reported in their Executive Board meeting notes from February 3.<sup>50</sup> With this, prominent activists in New York disapproved of ILGO and actively strategized against them in order to protect a larger activist movement.

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<sup>47</sup> Maguire, 56.

<sup>48</sup> Maguire, 43.

<sup>49</sup> Maguire, 60.

<sup>50</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride Executive Board Meeting February 3, 1992.”

ILGO's actions were said to threaten larger goals, such as the New York Gay Civil Rights Bill. Sarah Schulman reported that "Straight and gay mayoral aides and gay men with ties to the Democratic Party... personally pressured ILGO, claiming their counterdemonstration would cause the defeat of Dinkins's reelection bid, the failure to pass a bias crime bill, and the collapse of domestic partnership rights."<sup>51</sup> What began with a simple desire to assert belonging in the Irish-American community had morphed into a polarizing issue that placed ILGO at the axis of the queer rights movement and an immigrant community attempting to create new lives in America. ILGO had become a dangerous interloper. The director of the Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence project called to ask ILGO to reconsider their planned protest march, and they received other calls from "gay male leadership." ILGO would thus be held responsible for "screwing up any hope the lesbian and gay community had for winning domestic partnership rights, the state-wide Gay Rights Bill, and acceptance of gays in the military...the blame for the failure to implement these policies would lie at our feet...ILGO was supposed to give up now to make New York City's mayor look good and possibly, not to split the gay vote."<sup>52</sup> Others, including the mainstream media, played along, with Jim Dwyer's 1992 *New York Newsday* column covering the parade "[pitting] ILGO, the 'good days' (victims) against the 'bad' (empowered and angry) New York lesbian and gay activists."<sup>53</sup> Some queer activists seemed somewhat resentful that ILGO had received seemingly instantaneous and overwhelming press coverage for such an inexperienced group.

In the lead-up to the city's passing of the injunction against ILGO, the city asked ILGO to sign a statement disavowing the ACT UP New York Stop the Church action, a famous protest against Cardinal O'Connor and the Catholic Church from 1989. Maguire wrote

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<sup>51</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 61.

<sup>52</sup> Maguire, 153, 154.

<sup>53</sup> Maguire, 121.

We were being asked to say that ILGO and the entire lesbian and gay community were immoral perverts. We were being asked to be divisive and to betray the only people who supported us. We were being instructed to agree with inhumane and unethical teachings and tenets that sometimes killed us, and to top it all, we were supposed to give up the bit of power we had – the power of anger that enabled us to act against this type of institutional annihilation.<sup>54</sup>

The existence of a queer community in New York with enough to manifest a powerful electoral force to rival the Irish vote was significant, but both votes were jeopardized. Much of the pressure on ILGO rested on the potential reelection of Mayor Dinkins, who had been elected with the help of the gay vote. The portrayal of ILGO's actions as too radical by assimilationist gay activists, journalists, and city officials demonstrates the impossibility of their message, and the degree to which attempting to assert queerness threatened the successful assimilation of Irish-Americans.

Conversely, ILGO faced accusations that their actions were not radical enough, with the group Civil Disobedience Rebels (CD Rebels) lodging the complaints and organizing a counter-protest of ILGO's 1993 protest march. They planned another action for St. Patrick's Day, with Maguire turned away at the door of the planning meeting and CD Rebel members intentionally causing discord at ILGO meetings. Maguire wrote that "In [CD Rebel's] opinion, ILGO was not radical enough....[they] undermined ILGO's right to act in a way we believed appropriate, thus making it clear their beef was with ILGO and not any of the institutions ILGO was standing up to."<sup>55</sup> Instead of the planned march protest, which was scheduled to occur before the actual St. Patrick's Day Parade but following the same route, the CD Rebels wanted ILGO to confront the parade directly. ILGO rejected this strategy "for fear of provoking violence and because their goal was to be included in the parade—not cause a riot."<sup>56</sup> The Rebels did mount an alternative action on the day of the parade, "[trying] to run into the street ahead of ILGO, to get in the front of the

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<sup>54</sup> Maguire, 139.

<sup>55</sup> Maguire, 151.

<sup>56</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 59.

parade. Then, as two hundred ILGO supporters were being arrested, they ran up ahead, marched for four blocks with their banner and were arrested to.”<sup>57</sup> With this counterdemonstration, it was clear that the CD Rebels were more interested in protesting ILGO themselves than in joining ILGO’s efforts to “directly [confront] the state,” Church, and Irish-American conservatives.<sup>58</sup>

Sarah Schulman wrote of the CD Rebels protest in her account of the 1993 protest, framing ILGO’s actions as politically radical and those of the “Rebels” (a punctuation choice Schulman employs throughout) as divisive and pointless. She mentions specifically that “the gay and lesbian community proved to be overwhelmingly supportive of ILGO,” with “fifteen hundred people [showing] up on Saint Patrick’s Day to violate a court order and illegally count demonstrate on ILGO’s behalf.”<sup>59</sup> Schulman frames the actions of the CD Rebels against this demonstrated support, and explicitly frames ILGO’s actions as radical, anti-state measures asserting queerness in hostile spaces. As someone who was involved intimately with ILGO’s founders through the Lesbian Avengers and also someone involved with the direct action of ACT-UP New York, Schulman’s assessment of IGLO’s mission and movement as slotting into the queer liberation movement is more meaningful and accurate than those of the Rebels. Schulman also frames the conflict between the groups as a political question:

When gay people make a stand within their own hostile ethnic, religious, or racial community, do they have the right to determine their own positioning and strategy? I believe that they do. And this right must be clearly asserted to assure all gay people a place of self-determination within the larger gay community.<sup>60</sup>

Schulman places ILGO within a longer tradition of self-determination within the gay community and larger, heterosexual society. ILGO also exists within a tradition of assertion of queerness

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<sup>57</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 60.

<sup>58</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 60.

<sup>60</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 61.



within ethnic communities in New York and beyond. Maguire writes of solidarity between ILGO and New York's Black community as early as 1992, with Candice Boyce of African Ancestral Lesbians United for Social Change saying, "Marching in the Black African-American Day Parade has been quite an experience. It's a hard thing that we're doing. But every year that I have to go, I go. And every year that you have to go, you have to go."<sup>61</sup> The assertion of queerness within an ethnic community was part of the gay liberation movement, essential especially in New York City with its diverse immigrant population. Although Irish immigrants had been coming to America for centuries, the fact that their queer reckoning happened as late as the 1990s speaks to the entrenchment of heterosexuality in the Irish-American identity, which will be examined fully in Chapter 2. The Rebels even attempted to argue that they should not be charged with criminal contempt in the City's trial of ILGO defendants. However, the city did not even acknowledge them, and they were exempted from the trial.<sup>62</sup> Ideologically muddled and more concerned with sowing discord within the community, the Rebel's claim that ILGO was not radical enough in their actions was dismissed.

With Schulman's placing of ILGO within the activist tradition of ACT UP, especially within the tradition of action against the conservative Catholic church and Cardinal O'Connor, ILGO's actions can also be understood to be part of a leftist tradition. A Queer Nation working group, QUASH, or Queers United Against Socialist Heterosexism, places ILGO's mission squarely within a queer, leftist vision. The flyer questions the Socialist Scholars Conference's exclusion of lesbian and gay men from its program and concerns, asking "Where is the straight left...when politicians, religious leaders, and the media regularly drum up hatred against us? When

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<sup>61</sup> Maguire, 112.

<sup>62</sup> Schulman, *My American History*, 61.

courageous Irish lesbians and gays marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade?"<sup>63</sup> The question of the radicality of ILGO's actions is answered by the grouping of their mission among other leftist issues by queer leftist groups. Despite criticisms and pressure from more assimilationist gay activists ensconced in the state apparatus in addition to dissident counter-protesters from within the movement, the actions of ILGO can be understood within the context of the larger gay rights movement and in a radical tradition of protest against the religious right.

### *Dropoff of Support and ILGO Alone*

Although there was fervent support for ILGO from 1991 to 1993, after the 1993 protest march and subsequent arrests ILGO was primarily discarded by queer activist networks. Maguire wrote extensively about the repetitiveness of their efforts, with the slog of court cases, injunctions, banning, protest, arrests, and trial becoming an unpleasant cycle. ILGO never anticipated the protest to become such a prolonged, draining campaign. Perhaps because of this excessive repetition and perceived lack of progress, many groups stopped their explicit support of ILGO, even as individual members may have continued to attend the protests. The support from these groups was also often prompted by individuals, and with their departure from the relevant organizations, the support waned.

For Queer Nation, the activist in charge of the St. Patrick's Day working group, Bobby Considine, left in February 1992. David Bolen wrote an article in response to Duncan Osborne's article regarding the departure of Considine and others, a controversy within the group about whether or not Queer Nation "had the right to *control* individual members of the group...to be

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<sup>63</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, "We're Here We're Queer We're Leftist!"

exerted over both the speech and actions of individual members.”<sup>64</sup> Bolen groups Considine in with what he dubs the “Control Faction,” who made a public departure with five other members at the February 13 meeting. This intragroup controversy was common within queer groups at the time, with individual actions and preferences clashing as to the purpose and operation of the groups. Although leadership of the St. Patrick’s Day working group was passed to Dave Fleck, the working group stopped being listed on flyers after 1993 and disappeared from any meeting notes or discussion. Once the individual responsible for bringing ILGO’s issues to the table disassociated from the group, Queer Nation stopped centering ILGO and the St. Patrick’s Day Parade within their sphere of activism.

Similarly, ILGO disappeared from the records of Heritage of Pride after 1993. Judy Lindquist, who took many of the handwritten notes in the archive, mentioned “comparing St. Patrick’s to Gay Pride re police cooperation” in her resignation letter from both the executive board and general membership of the organization.<sup>65</sup> Even as prominent members were departing the organization, the utility of ILGO’s efforts to HoP was still emphasized, not the provision of material support or support of ILGO’s mission. Furthermore, where St. Patrick’s Day had previously been included in meeting notes and calendars, that was true no longer. Notes from an Outreach committee meeting on March 16, 1994, dangerously close to the parade, have no mention of ILGO.<sup>66</sup> General membership meeting notes from March 13, 1995, have the same absence.<sup>67</sup> A calendar for March 1996 also does not mark St. Patrick’s Day as an auspicious or significant date.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 167, Box 1, “David Bolen.”

<sup>65</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Judy Lindquist Resignation Letter.”

<sup>66</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride General Membership Meeting March 16, 1994.”

<sup>67</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride General membership Meeting March 13, 1995.”

<sup>68</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, “Heritage of Pride March 1996.”

Arthur Finn's name, previously associated with outreach to ILGO, also disappears from the record concurrently. As individual connections to ILGO's efforts waned and intragroup makeup shifted, ILGO dropped off the radar of many organizations.

Although individual attrition may be part of the reason Heritage of Pride divested from their association with ILGO, the necessity of their interactions with city and state infrastructure may also have contributed. Rudolph Giuliani replaced David Dinkins as mayor in 1994. In a letter to Giuliani, Heritage of Pride expressed their "profound disappointment with the city of New York for its refusal to grant a permit...Dare we say that homophobia may perhaps be coming into play?"<sup>69</sup> Although the city justified their decision to refuse based on fiscal grounds and an inability to grant multi-day permits, this marked a shift in the city's treatment of Heritage of Pride. As an official event and the largest Pride parade in New York City, the nature of the organization required involvement with state apparatuses and city permits. With the many court cases of ILGO involving parade permits in the mid to late 1990s, any utility they may have been providing Heritage of Pride with information regarding NYPD interactions turned to potentially jeopardizing Pride itself, potentially influencing Heritage of Pride's disassociation from ILGO. This also reinforces ILGO's actions as firmly against the state and religious structures, while other queer activist groups worked within legal structures. Queer historians have emphasized that the Dyke March as "still takes place without a permit the day before Pride," complicating the picture of Heritage of Pride and ILGO's battles for parade permits and the necessity of city and state compliance to some degree.<sup>70</sup>

Nevertheless, Heritage of Pride's drop-off support of ILGO mirrors the broader trend within queer activist networks in New York – that of initial support, some controversy, and

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<sup>69</sup> LGBT Center National History Archive, Collection 86, Box 5, "Heritage of Pride Open Letter to Mayor Rudolf Giuliani."

<sup>70</sup> Jen Jack Giesecking, *A Queer New York Geographies of Lesbians, Dykes, and Queers* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2020), xvii.

eventual divestment. Placing ILGO's mission and actions within a queer tradition of direct action against the religious right and against state-sponsored homophobia centers ILGO in a queer history of New York in the 1990s marked by such protest. This works against the erasure or forgetting of ILGO by many queer histories of New York, and deliberately centers the actions of an Irish immigrant group against a large, established community. The dropping of ILGO as an issue by many queer groups in New York opened the opportunity for transnational, transatlantic support provided by queer activist groups in Ireland. It is the explicit transitory, immigrant identity of ILGO which makes them unique, and in the response from queer groups in Ireland, including the movement of activists and queers across the Atlantic to support the protests, which will be examined in Chapter 3. However, first, the formation of Irish-American identity will be examined, as well as the response to ILGO by the larger Irish-American community in New York, to contextualize the actual response of Ireland to these issues of queerness and identity.

## **CHAPTER 2: The “Hyphenated Irish-American”: Ancient Order of Hibernians, Newspaper Coverage, and Challenging Irish-American Identity Formation and Celebration**

While historical coverage of ILGO’s efforts is limited, much of what exists does focus somewhat on the extreme homophobia the group faced from the institution of the Ancient Order of Hibernians and also at the sites of each parade and protest. However, scholarship has not addressed whether the vehement denial of the Irishness of ILGO reflects the opinion of a wider Irish-American community. New York was one of the epicenters of Irish immigration to America, with Ellis Island serving as the gateway to the country for many immigrants for much of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. These extensive histories of Irish immigrants, especially that of the New York Irish, do not mention queerness in any way. The “bachelor subculture” mentioned by George Chauncy, although sometimes incorporated in discussions of family migration patterns, is rarely associated explicitly with participation in non-heterosexual sex acts.<sup>71</sup> Much historical analysis has been conducted of the development of the Irish-American community and identity, but these histories do not acknowledge queerness. Internal records from the Ancient Order of Hibernians are considered alongside extensive newspaper coverage of ILGO from the *Irish Echo* and the *Irish Voice*. Through an analysis of these records, this chapter seeks to understand Irish-American identity formation and how ILGO’s campaign challenged the conception, definition, and celebration of that identity.

### *Historiography*

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<sup>71</sup> Chauncey, 77.

The history of the Irish immigrant to America is perhaps one of the most detailed of American immigration histories, from colonial-era indentured servants to the 1840s and 1850s waves fleeing the famine, to the machines of Tammany Hall and their overrepresentation in New York police forces and political offices, to the establishment and bolstering of the Roman Catholic church. These histories also chart the development of a specifically Irish-American identity, the construction of which must be understood to properly analyze the response of the New York Irish to ILGO's controversial assertion that queerness and Irishness can coexist proudly. Leonard R. Rifogatio argues in a collection of essays, *Immigration to New York*, that many Irish immigrants considered themselves involuntary exiles, especially those fleeing starvation, and "carried their hostility to British oppression to the New World, reacting with equal hostility to an American culture they saw as both English and Protestant and retaining a profound nationalism."<sup>72</sup> Upon their arrival to the States, Irish immigrants were specifically racialized as non-white and other, a "a distinctly different race from both African Americans and the 'white' mainstream."<sup>73</sup> Despite this discrimination, Irish immigrants achieved significant success and influence in New York City and beyond, primarily through their emphasis on building and bolstering the Roman Catholic church.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan argued in *Beyond the Melting Pot* that the reason that large numbers of Irish-Americans have not achieved extreme upward class mobility is this investment in the Catholic Church:

This is incomparably the most important thing they have done in America. But they have done it at a price. In secular terms, it has cost them dearly in men and money.

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<sup>72</sup> Leonard R Rifogatio, "Bishop John Timon, Archbishop John Hughes, and Irish Colonization: A Clash of Episcopal Views on the Future of the Irish and the Catholic Church in America," essay, in *Immigration to New York* eds. William Penack, Selma Berrol, and Randall M. Miller (Philadelphia: Balch Inst. Press u.a., 1992), 30.

<sup>73</sup> James R. Barrett, *The Irish Way: Becoming American in the Multiethnic City* (London: Viking, 2012), 4.

A good part of the surplus that might have gone into family property has gone to building the church. This has almost certainly inhibited the development of the solid middle-class dynamics that produce so many of the important people in America.<sup>74</sup>

The Catholic Church and the Irish identity in America became irrevocably intertwined, with the majority of the clergy, especially in New York, populated by the Irish. Historians have extensively covered the ways in which the Irish-American identity was constructed alongside the solidification of the Catholic church as a cultural force in America. Especially with the poverty that early Irish immigrants were fleeing, often created by British Protestant discrimination against Catholics, Irish immigrants deliberately sought to “isolate themselves and create a parallel culture in which their faith, which personified their nationalism, would remain pure and unadulterated by contaminating Protestant or secular influences. In a real sense, they deliberately sought to “ghettoize” the American Catholic Church.”<sup>75</sup>

With this understanding, the St. Patrick’s Day Parade as a cultural event must be examined. Mary C. Kelly’s *The Shamrock and the Lily* analyzes the creation of Irish identity, focusing on the New York community, covering the St. Patrick’s Day Parade as a memorable nexus of that. She summarizes an account of the 1879 parade by visiting Irishwoman Sophie Hall, who described the parade as an:

extravaganza that wound its way past multitudes of rain-soaked onlookers for hours. The energy of the music and the marchers infused the street with an infectious air in a colorful tribute to her native culture...Hall judged the celebration of ethnic identity the predominant image of Irish New York Life...Dignified by an officially sanctioned Catholic commemoration, the interest in honoring the national saint and the immigrant culture responsible for transplanting a by-now ubiquitous symbol represented a successful assimilation process.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City* (S.I.: Mit Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>75</sup> Rifogatio, 30.

<sup>76</sup> Mary C. Kelly, *The Shamrock and the Lily: The New York Irish and the Creation of a Transatlantic Identity, 1845-1921* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 27-28.



Kelly (and Hall by extension) identifies an early St. Patrick's Day parade as both an ethnic and religious celebration, with the publicly sanctioned and enthusiastically attended event marking the Irish's successful assimilation into American culture. She argues that an understanding of a post-famine Irish-American identity was a transatlantic process mostly occurring between 1840 and 1921, characterized by the enmeshment of the Catholic church and Irish communities and the employment of Irish-Americans in places like the NYPD and political machines. It is worth noting that the definition of success for the Irish-American community was not that of complete assimilation, but a demonstration of the successful incorporation of Irishness into the American identity. With the context of initial discriminatory attitudes directed to the Catholic, working-class Irish, the popularity and vivacity of the parade marked successful integration.

In *After the Flood*, James Silas Rogers and Matthew J. O'Brien argue that Irish-American identity was radically changed by the aftereffects of World War II, solidifying into its most familiar form between 1945 and 1960. They argue that the estimation of the prototypical American as Irish-American occurred after World War II, bolstered partially by Irish-American military service. Additionally, the Cold War allowed Irish-American communities, including the Ancient Order of Hibernians, to associate themselves with anti-communist efforts, "[issuing] regular explanations that portrayed Irish Catholicism within the light of American Pluralism and...[acclaiming] the Hibernians as 'defenders of our free institutions and opponents of bigotry in all its insidious forms.'"<sup>77</sup>

This reinforcement of Irish-American identity as prototypically American aligns with James R. Barrett's analysis of Americanized Irishness in *The Irish Way*, which involved a

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<sup>77</sup> Matthew J. O'Brien and James Rogers, *After the Flood: Irish America, 1945-1960* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2009), 63.

“particularly formal and intense Catholicism fused with a modern Irish identity.”<sup>78</sup> He argues that the impulse of Irish-Americans to align themselves with the state in some way, once allowed, “[lent] their politics an idealism. They often embraced a hyperbolic brand of American patriotism, as if wrapping themselves in the flag might finally bring them acceptance.”<sup>79</sup> This solidification of the association with American and Irish identity led to the creation of the truly hyphenated Irish-American identity, with military service, anti-communism, and fealty to the state apparatus allowing them to advance socially and economically. As mentioned previously, a significant amount of Irish America remains in the working or middle classes, with the ideological outlook of Irish-Americans tilting moderate and conservative, “many [fearing] social radicalism and [becoming] intolerant...even as they resented the encroachment of newer immigrant groups, many of them opposed immigration restriction.”<sup>80</sup> This turn towards conservatism does not discount the work of leftist Irish-American organizers and nationalist radicals, whose actions were targeted by the 1917 Espionage Act.<sup>81</sup> Barrett argues that the development of Irish America took two tracks, “an ambitious, assimilationist, and more conservative path; and a pluralist, progressive path based on idealism.”<sup>82</sup> He characterizes Irish American politics as a “strange combination...of the parochial and the global, the progressive and the conservative.”<sup>83</sup> The establishment of Irish-American dominance and relevance politically, socially, and economically in America was aided by postwar acceptance of Catholicism as a pluralist American trait and also helped by engagement with anti-communist, pro-state conservative ideologies.

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<sup>78</sup> Barrett, 7.

<sup>79</sup> Barrett, 7.

<sup>80</sup> Barrett, 251.

<sup>81</sup> Barrett, 260.

<sup>82</sup> Barrett, 287.

<sup>83</sup> Barrett, 277.

Once Irish-American identity was considered acceptable, St. Patrick's Day Parades grew in stature and status, with Rogers and O'Brien highlighting its celebration in the upper-middle-class neighborhood of Beverly Hills, Chicago. They argue that the day's celebration "illustrated the merging of upper-class behavior with ethnic traditions, producing a unique celebration that emphasized both the ethnic affiliation and the respectability of the Irish-Catholic community."<sup>84</sup> This shift to acceptance and societal celebration of Irishness coincided with Rogers and O'Brien's key argument about the shift in Irish-American identity – that "by 1960 Irish Catholicism in America was far more palatable for its host society, as Ireland had gone from being a geographic point of origin to an ethnic point of reference."<sup>85</sup> Due to the long history of Irish immigration to America, those partaking in ethnic celebrations and living in Irish enclaves were not always freshly arrived but part of generations of Irish-Americans. This shift to Ireland as an ethnic point of reference aligns with the subsuming of Irishness into whiteness and the deradicalization of much of Irish-American politics and American Irish nationalism itself. However, Irish Americans did cling to their identification with Irishness, a phenomenon which will be examined thoroughly in Chapter 3. Celebrations of the St. Patrick's Day Parade as both a religious and ethnic event, then, mark the construction of an Irish-American identity as quintessentially American and Irish simultaneously.

### *Roadmap and Ties to Larger Thesis*

First, this chapter will examine internal records from the Ancient Order of Hibernians, analyzing how they, and the Catholic church by extension, functioned as arbiters of Irish-American identity, especially during the recent waves and crisis of immigration in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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<sup>84</sup> O'Brien and Rogers, 79.

<sup>85</sup> O'Brien and Rogers, 69.

Their response to ILGO's movement will be extracted from these records. Their pattern of honoring members associated with the St. Patrick's Day parade at dinner dances and conferences demonstrates the threat that ILGO posed to their claimed "moral obligations and legal responsibility" in organizing the parade each year. Their actions exemplify a conservative Irish-American identity in line with prominent historical narratives of Irish-American immigrants. The chapter will then explore the *Irish Echo*'s coverage of ILGO, concentrated from 1991 to 1993. An analysis of their journalistic coverage of the parade controversy, alongside editorial pieces and a pattern of dual-opinion letters to the editor, reveals that the audience and authors of the *Echo* skew older and more conservative, but still accurately represents a broad swath of opinions among the Irish-American community. It will also be revealed that the association of ILGO with ACT-UP and other prominent queer direct action groups, which was beneficial for acceptance into queer New York communities, proved highly detrimental to any hopes of acceptance into the Irish-American community. Finally, the coverage of ILGO by the *Irish Voice* from 1990 to 1992 will be considered, with their measured editorial pieces and inclusion of ILGO in event calendars and unrelated columns demonstrating a measure of acceptance with the Irish-American community, especially among younger generations. Overall, ILGO's campaign prompted a reexamination of the purpose and significance of the St. Patrick's Day parade to Irish-American identity and exposed the extent to which the Irish-American identity is based on an imagined Irishness moreso than the complicated reality of Ireland. ILGO is essential to any understanding of Irish-American identity from 1990 onward and must be included in histories of the Irish in America, which this chapter rectifies.

*The Ancient Order of Hibernians, the Catholic Church, and Conservative Identity*

The Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) is an Irish Catholic brotherhood founded in 1836 in New York as an offshoot of an organization which had existed in Ireland for hundreds of years.<sup>86</sup> In both places, the AOH was founded to shore up Irish identity and defend Catholicism against prejudice and discrimination. This emphasis on defense is crucial, as the of Irish-American identity associated with the AOH was constructed to be constantly on the defensive, and ILGO then incorporated into a long list of attacks on the Catholic Church. Members were “required ‘to be Irish by birth or descent and Roman Catholics,’ and naturally, to be ‘of good and moral character.’”<sup>87</sup> Their membership application form has several questions regarding religious participation, including “Are you a Roman Catholic? Have you complied with your religious duties within the past twelve months?” and “Do you belong to any society to which the Catholic Church is opposed?”<sup>88</sup> This demonstrated the nature of the AOH as an explicitly Catholic organization which also requires its members to be Irish by “either birth or descent.” The application form also included the preamble to their constitution, including pledges to,

Uphold and sustain loyalty to the government of the United States of America...to aid and advance by all legitimate means the aspirations and endeavors of the Irish people for complete and absolute independence...and to foster the ideals and cultivate the history and traditions of the Irish race throughout the world. Its membership is confined exclusively to practical Catholics of Irish blood or descent, who are citizens of the United States or who have declared their intentions to become citizens of the United States.<sup>89</sup>

With this declaration, it is clear that the AOH emphasized fealty to the state as a method of achieving successful assimilation and considered that crucial to advancing the status of the Irish

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<sup>86</sup> NYU Archive of Irish America (Hereafter, NYU AIA) 046, Box 2, “1994 New York County Board Dinner Dance Program.”

<sup>87</sup> Kelly, 147.

<sup>88</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 3, “Ancient Order of Hibernians in America Application for Membership.”

<sup>89</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 3, “Ancient Order of Hibernians in America Application for Membership.”

within that apparatus. This emphasis on loyalty and structure also aligned with the Catholic church itself, and the degree to which hierarchy and patriarchy play a role in Catholic prescriptions and mandates.

The AOH, then, framed itself as one of the arbiters of Irish-American identity through these methods of inclusion and exclusion, creating an identity thoroughly intertwined with Catholicism and requiring adherence to Catholic tenets in order to access the support and resources of the brotherhood. One of the methods of demonstrating their authority over Irish-American identity was the New York County board's organization of the annual St. Patrick's Day parade. A pamphlet celebrating the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Brooklyn division of the AOH in 1973 had a section dedicated entirely to the parade. It emphasized many instances of threats to or attacks on the parade as crucial to its history, stating, "The one day in the year which the Irish held most dear, St. Patrick's Day, often furnished an opportunity for those who sought to distort the meaning of the great feast."<sup>90</sup> They mentioned disturbances to the 1867 parade, with "Nativist hostility and the appearance of the Orange Order, a society composed of Irish Protestants of generally anti-Catholic sentiment, [keeping] the AOH constantly on guard."<sup>91</sup> The constant emphasis on the threat posed to the parade by anti-Catholics provides helpful context for the AOH's outsized reaction to ILGO's campaign, especially with the involvement of City authorities. The AOH-authored historical context of the parade specifically framed the event as something to defend, interpreting any action against the parade as anti-Catholic and therefore in line with the historical discrimination against Irish Catholics. While the demonstrations against the parade throughout history may have actually

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<sup>90</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 1, "Ancient Order of Hibernians 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Brooklyn History and Souvenir Journal, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1973."

<sup>91</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 1, "Ancient Order of Hibernians 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in Brooklyn History and Souvenir Journal, March 30<sup>th</sup>, 1973."

been anti-Catholic in nature, the likelihood of their eventual framing of ILGO's actions as such is evident even in documents decades before ILGO's founding.

One of the functions of the AOH was to provide material support to incoming immigrants from Ireland, including assistance in finding housing and employment in New York City. Their insistence on active Catholicism for membership, however, disqualified some immigrants from accessing these services. The process of immigration, including the status of undocumented Irish immigrants, was a central issue for the AOH and was reflected in its recurrent mentions in AOH documents. Immigration crises of the late 1980s and early 1990s were of great concern to the AOH, with Volume One No. 2 of "The Rockaway Hibernian," a 1987 edition of an AOH newsletter saying, "The Church has been cited as being a leader in providing this kind of legal assistance to all the immigrants including the many thousands of Irish men and women who have settled in the New York City area," and extensively covering recent immigration legislation passed by Congress.<sup>92</sup>

In addition to supporting the logistics of immigration, the AOH was also concerned with disseminating and maintaining a correct version of Irish-American culture and identity for new immigrants from Ireland and subsequent generations of Irish-Americans. A note from the President and Recording Secretary mentioned that "In order for us to pass on to the next generation the Irish Culture, we must assist in this area of Immigration."<sup>93</sup> With the 1990s as a fraught time for immigration, this pressure increased substantially, with a letter from the Ambassador of Ireland to the United States, Padraic MacKernan, in honor of the AOH 85<sup>th</sup> convention in 1990 stating that "the recent arrival of a new generation of Irish emigrants to the United States provides an opportunity to an established generation of Irish Americans to reinvigorate itself with new people

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<sup>92</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 1, "The Rockaway Hibernian Vol 1 No. 2, 1987."

<sup>93</sup> NYU AIA 046. Box 1, "Procedures."

and new ideas. It is a challenge which I know concerns the AOH.”<sup>94</sup> The founders and members of ILGO were included in this new generation of Irish immigrants to the states, making their assertion of queerness in the Irish-American community even more significant in the context of increased pressure on the AOH from a variety of internal and external sources to foster a version of Irish-American identity which was Catholic, deferent, and focused on assimilation through fealty to the state and church apparatuses. These pressures in the inherent defensive posture regarding the St. Patrick’s Day parade and the onus to represent a specific version of Irish-American identity, are crucial to understanding subsequent AOH response to ILGO’s disruption and direct action.

Since the AOH was one of the main actors in the rejection and persistent disavowal of ILGO’s application to join the St. Patrick’s Day Parade, examining of their internal records is crucial to understanding their motivations and response to the event. Despite the absence of a wealth of evidence directly referencing the controversy, the increased attention of the AOH to honoring those associated with the parade functioned as a method of shoring up their perceived responsibility for the event. In doing so, the AOH emphasized a correct and moral form of Irishness that reflected a conservative view of Irish-American identity concerned with enmeshment with the American state and a rigid brand of Catholicism. A March 1992 edition of “The Flatbush Hibernian,” a newsletter that included a ‘Hibernian News’ section distributed by Division 35, reported that by Niall O’Dowd ‘s *New York Times* op-ed had “brutally attacked” the AOH. He “came up with the remarkable viewpoint that recent immigrants are coming to this country not for economic benefit but to escape the moral conservatism in Ireland,” explained the unnamed

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<sup>94</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “AOH 85<sup>th</sup> Convention Letter, Padraic MacKernan, 29 June 1990.”



author.<sup>95</sup> Describing criticism of towards the AOH (multiple times) as an attack multiple times in the blurb, illustrates the organization's defensive posture.

In a 1992 Ladies AOH testimonial dinner pamphlet struck an equally defensive tone. Intended to honor Dolores Voelker, this letter from the Queens County LAOH President Bridge Kearney explained that "Ever mindful of the fact that the LAOH is an Irish-Catholic Organization, she [Voelker] speaks out vociferously whenever our Faith is attacked...in this era of Catholic bashing."<sup>96</sup> Kearney then names Voelker as a member of the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee. It is difficult not to see the influence of ILGO's queer Irish activism in the description of the early 1990s as an era of Catholic-bashing, aligning with the interpretation consistently put forth by the AOH that asserted that ILGO's affirmation of a queer *and* Irish identity was a direct attack on the morals and mores of the Catholic church and the established Irish American community.

The AOH also made its long history with the St. Patrick's Day Parade explicit. The 1994 New York County Board's Annual Dinner Dance program drew attention to the decades of work the AOH put into organizing the parade, claiming it as their own, "The first St. Patrick's Day Parade held under the auspices of the Ancient Order of Hibernians took place on March 17, 1838. Since 1863 the New York County Board of the Ancient Order of Hibernians in America has carried the moral obligations and the legal responsibility to conduct the St. Patrick's Day Parade on March 17<sup>th</sup> in the Borough of Manhattan," began the program.<sup>97</sup> It then linked the night in 1994 to 1863, reminding guests, "Tonight we still gather to preserve our tradition, to support our Parade, and support our cultural events."<sup>98</sup> The *our* here leaves unsaid that the ST. Patrick's Day Parade was

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<sup>95</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "The Flatbush Hibernian, March 1992, Division 35."

<sup>96</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians Testimonial Dinner Program, April 4, 1992."

<sup>97</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "1994 New York County Board Dinner Dance Program."

<sup>98</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "1994 New York County Board Dinner Dance Program."

not for queer Irish people. Moreover, this phrasing of “moral obligation and legal responsibility” appeared throughout AOH documents from the 1990s, regarding morality of Catholicism and the legality of the parade permit in response to the controversy. It seems likely that the *still* in the excerpt above references the New York County Board’s loss of the permit to other organizations like the Hynes Committee at the time. This phrasing is representative of the pattern of tacit or implicit acknowledgement of ILGO without explicit mention, appropriate for internal documents and celebratory programs in which surely everyone involved is aware of the campaign.

In 1994, the New York County Board released a statement regarding the “St. Patrick’s Day Parade of New York,” that addressed the parade’s history and the Board’s holding of the permit. They argue that their “legal responsibility and moral obligation to carry out the St. Patrick’s Day Parade each year in New York city,” is justified by the longevity of the AOH’s tenure, stating that the “State Courts of New York at once recognized the legal right of the New York County Board to organize and to conduct the parade” after the AOH’s incorporation as an Organization by the state legislature in 1853.<sup>99</sup> By mentioning the historical legacy of the AOH, the statement implied that the relative newness of ILGO as an organization disqualified them from any influence over the Parade itself, and also disparaged the newness of other claimants to the permit such as the Hynes group and the Parade Committee.

That the statement also included a long section about other Irish associations invited to participate in the parade (and the process of granting them access to do so) only draws further attention to the anti-gay politics of the AOH. They claim that the New York County Board would “issue invitations to other Irish Organizations which have Marching Units” which were considered qualified under Parade Rules.<sup>100</sup> Without an invitation, “there [was] no way that any organization

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<sup>99</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “St. Patrick’s Day Parade of New York, 1994.”

<sup>100</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “St. Patrick’s Day Parade of New York, 1994.”

can march,” and a new invitation “must be sent out each year to each Marching Unit which marched in the Parade of the previous year before it can enter the Parade for the following year.”<sup>101</sup> This purported system, vastly different from previous public justifications for denying ILGO’s application, “eliminates from marching any Marching Unit which broke the Rules of the Parade during their last Parade.”<sup>102</sup> This statement served as an attempt by the AOH to frame their initial rejection ILGO as within the logic of *tradition* rather than homophobia directed at the organization. Not mentioning the “waiting list” or “physical and municipal restrictions,” which were previous justifications used to legitimize the AOH’s decision, and instead grounding their decision within bureaucratic and logistical guidelines allowed the AOH to reject ILGO in the defense of history and tradition.

Subsequent event programs and pamphlets followed a similar pattern. They honored those associated with the St. Patrick’s Day Parade and used subtle language that reified the claim of the AOH to the parade and their gatekeeping of the Irish-American identity. In a 1995 Queens Div. 4 Dinner Dance program, they honored Martin Kearns, head of the Parade Committee, with a letter from Thomas Manton, a House Representative for New York saying, “I salute Mr. Kearns and the Ancient Order of Hibernians for successfully preserving and advancing our faith and culture into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>103</sup> That same year the New York County Board’s Dinner Dance program repeated this rhetoric of responsibility and obligation, urging “all our members and everyone here tonight to encourage their sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters to become active in the Ancient Order of Hibernians and to support the St. Patrick’s Day Parade on Fifth Avenue.”<sup>104</sup> This

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<sup>101</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “St. Patrick’s Day Parade of New York, 1994.”

<sup>102</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “St. Patrick’s Day Parade of New York, 1994.”

<sup>103</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 3, “Division 4 Annual Dinner Dance Program, November 10, 1995.”

<sup>104</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 3, “New York County Board Annual Cocktail Party & Dinner Dance Program, October 29, 1995.”

emphasis on the duty of future generations of Irish-Americans to uphold a particular cultural legacy through the Parade was new. It was language not included in previous iterations of Dinner Dance Programs, and points to the impact of ILGO on the AOH's actions and rhetoric.

Repeatedly in AOH sources, Irish-Americanness was an identity that was strictly Catholic. In 1996, the County Board's Dinner Dance program also included a letter from Cardinal O'Connor honoring a different John O'Connor, describing his "dedication to both church and civic organizations" as "[reflecting] the great tradition of the Irish immigrants and their descendants as a people who drew strength from their Catholic faith and tirelessly gave of themselves to build a better America."<sup>105</sup> Such articulations the Irish-American as strictly Catholic repeats long-held associations between the Catholic Church and the bolstering of the American state apparatus. The Cardinal praised most of all "[his] vocation as a husband and father" and explained that "As we approach the next millennium the Church will boldly proclaim the Gospel of Life through the witness and example of strong, Christian families."<sup>106</sup>). This emphasis on the Christian family and on the proliferation of Catholic ideas through the family is in direct opposition to what the AOH believed ILGO stood for and flaunts the institutional belief that homosexuality caused the destruction of the family. This increased emphasis on family and religion in the AOH's programs corresponds with ILGO's challenge to the nature of the parade and Irish-American identity.

The AOH and others also feared that ILGO's challenge would lead to the end of a hyphenated Irish-American identity. For example, a feasibility study for the Irish Heritage Education Program in 1996 identified a key problem for the Irish-American in the United States. The study reported that "the current and future generations will be deprived of learning about their rich Irish heritage...such that the hyphenated Irish-American could become an endangered species

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<sup>105</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "New York County Board Annual Dinner Dance Program, 1996."

<sup>106</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, "New York County Board Annual Dinner Dance Program, 1996."

in America.”<sup>107</sup> The emphasis on the “hyphenated Irish-American” as the goal of immigration and assimilationist policies—to remain ethnically Irish while also enjoying the full privileges of white American citizenship and identity—provides useful context to understand the concerns expressed by the AOH over the correct sort of Irish-Americanness. The rest of the document centers on remembrance days and other methods of passing on Irish history to younger generations, focusing mainly on the Famine and Irish America from 1845-1900.<sup>108</sup> This cemented the legacy of Irish-Americans as individuals who came from devastation and succeeded by immersing themselves in American cultural practices reinforces the defensive position of the AOH and their version of Irish-American identity.

That position continues to be reinforced throughout the 1990s. The 1998 New York County AOH and LAOH Dinner Dance pamphlet contained yet another letter from Cardinal O’Connor that thanked the members for “[their] courageous defense of Irish tradition and our Catholic faith.”<sup>109</sup> Though ILGO and their queer activism are unnamed as the attacking force, it is clear that the AOH’s steadfast defense of Catholicism was a defensive move. A more explicit reference to ILGO was also made in the 2000 Queens Div. 9 Dinner Dance pamphlet that honored Cardinal O’Connor, “The Division is very proud of our association with this great defender of the unborn and traditional Catholicism. On numerous occasions, we and others were called to St. Patrick’s Cathedral to assist him in defending the church against various radical groups.”<sup>110</sup> Here ILGO was associated with other queer groups organizing against the Church, most notably ACT UP’s “Stop the Church” action. While associations with the tradition of activism against the religious right

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<sup>107</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “Irish Heritage Education Program: Feasibility Study.”

<sup>108</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “Irish Heritage Education Program: Feasibility Study.”

<sup>109</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 2, “Ancient Order of Hibernians and Ladies Ancient Order of Hibernians New York County Anniversary Dinner, May 16, 1998.”

<sup>110</sup> NYU AIA 046, Box 3, “Division 9 Ancient Order of Hibernians in America 51<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner Dance Program, October 21, 2000.”

bolstered ILGO's reputation in the queer networks of New York, any such association with more radical activist groups in the eyes of some Irish Americans marked IGLO as anti-Catholic and anti-Irish.

The actions of the AOH in response to ILGO's movement aligns with the dominant narrative, partially constructed by the organization itself, that Irish-American immigrants' assimilation into American culture and prioritization of the Catholic church and its values led to their success in the United States. Although the AOH rarely addressed ILGO by name, the many implicit references, their assumption of a defensive posture, and the frequent assertions of Catholicism demonstrate the impact of ILGO's actions within the larger Irish-American community. Ultimately, in emphasizing their the "moral obligation and legal responsibility" over the St. Patrick's Day Parade, the AOH offers historians a view of the Irish-American community held by older, more middle-class, and more conservative members of the Irish community in New York City.

### *The Irish Echo and Conservative Irish America*

The *Irish Echo*, established in 1928, bills itself as the "Oldest Irish American Newspaper in the USA." It harnessed a wide readership. Though it published letters to the editor from all over America, it concentrated on the East Coast, where larger numbers of Irish migrants had resettled. A close examination of the paper from 1990 to 1993 reveals its representation of a swath of Irish-American opinions. Yet, editorials were conservative in their treatment of ILGO, with the audience and contributors also skewing to older demographics. Their near-constant coverage of the controversy over the St. Patrick's Day Parade demonstrates the extent to which ILGO's movement was a significant force in the Irish American community, one that prompted an examination of the

purpose of the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Was it either a religious or ethnic holiday? Regardless, the homophobia platformed by the *Echo* validated the original mission of ILGO and legitimized their campaign.

ILGO was not the first queer activist group or direct-action campaign reported in the *Echo*. There was extensive reporting of ACT-UP's "Stop the Church" action and subsequent protests that warranted front-page coverage. An article from December 12, 1990 marked the one-year anniversary protests of the 1989 protest. The *Echo explained* that the AOH was tasked with "[recreating] a historic role for the organization" by defending the Church, with "about 1,000 of its members [turning] up for the Mass," filling space that couldn't be taken up by protestors.<sup>111</sup> This context helps us understand the attitudes of the Irish-American community towards queer activists. It also makes clear the collaborative efforts of the AOH and Cardinal O'Connor's Archdiocese to reinforce the defensive stance of both organizations. Although the *Echo* condemned the actions of the previous year's protest, they also interviewed ACT-UP's Paul Slater. "I am a practicing Catholic, but the cardinal uses the Mass as a weapon and to make political statements," explained Slater. "This is offensive, especially when people are dying of AIDS."<sup>112</sup> Even as queer activists and organizations are portrayed as anti-Catholic and their actions as Catholic-bashing, their representatives make it clear that they are against individuals abusing the structure of religious institutions to enact homophobia, not the Church itself. Although some may have actually been, the fact that the *Echo* platformed the voices of ACT-UP representatives is significant.

Unlike the records of the AOH, the *Echo* provides evidence that there was a debate among members of the Irish American community over the intersection of Irishness and queerness.

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<sup>111</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIII, No. 50," 1.

<sup>112</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIII, No. 50." 53.

Editions like the one above exemplify a common phenomenon in the *Echo*, which often published two letters to the editor that offered contrasting responses to the featured news in question. In response to the account of ACT UP one letter states:

You are to be applauded for your editorial...Whether or not your readers agree with the views expressed, the social and moral significance of the issues raised cannot be ignored. Because the article would seem to diverge from the standard Irish-American point of view it represents a courageous step on the part of the editorial board.<sup>113</sup>

This letter praised the *Echo* for platforming the voices of queer activists and demonstrates that more moderate voices in the Irish-American community did exist. Conversely, another letter included the statement:

Would that the coalition of gays and AIDS groups attacking the cardinal...would realize that they could far more effectively save lives by counseling against those homosexual practices which authorities agree are one of the major means of transmitting this tragic disease. Incredibly, they continue to defy the clear verdict of medical evidence and persist in advocating the very type of activity most likely to spread AIDS and cause the ultimate death of thousands, including their own members.<sup>114</sup>

Such a statement is more in line with the “standard Irish-American point of view” mentioned in the other letter, that understood AIDS mostly as a punishment for homosexual activity and characterized queer sex as something that merits infection and death. Though *Echo* editorials stated that “It is hard not to sympathize with [ACT-UP’s] cause.” and asserted that “They have a legitimate gripe with the church and John Cardinal O’Connor,” the homophobia platformed in this and other letters to the editor gave weight to and represented the opinions of a wide swath of their readers.<sup>115</sup>

The March 13-19, 1991 edition was the first to feature ILGO and the parade. It was aptly titled: “Parade in Crisis.” This coverage itself was written in the style of neutral journalistic

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<sup>113</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 1,” 9.

<sup>114</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 1,” 9.

<sup>115</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 1,” 9.



coverage, especially in the early years of the conflict. The feature article covers ILGO's application process. It documented the confusion (or deception) of the AOH's waiting list excuse and printed an ILGO's reply that stated: "The suggestion that we could march anonymously with other groups defeats the purpose of our participation. It suggests it is alright to be Irish or it is alright to be a closeted gay but not to be Irish and openly gay."<sup>116</sup> A letter to the editor expressed support to ILGO, saying "This is a poor mask for plain old bigotry... This is not just a crime against gays and lesbians, but against everyone."<sup>117</sup> The edition also contains a long editorial about the controversy entitled "Parade of Distractions," in which some of the *Echo's* negative perceptions of and attitudes towards ILGO begin to emerge, despite some condemnation of the AOH's actions:

What is becoming, sadly, an annual distraction is depriving the Irish of the full stage from which we declare our sense of self and voice our concerns as a people... Indeed, we should be eager to reflect the diversity of our community... We should also recognize that the intransigence that has characterized the parade committee's public response is far from ideal... But what is most troubling of all is that a single group – one that is without deep roots in, and commitment to, this celebration – is able to command such political and media attention. Other groups realize, as this one apparently doesn't that the pursuit of a narrow agenda, which in this case is sexual preference, should never hinder the celebration of a culture.<sup>118</sup>

This editorial illustrates the collapsing of religious and ethnic identity made by many Irish-Americans, with the description of St. Patrick's Day as a stage from which to "declare [their] sense of self," that of ethnic identity, alongside a description of St. Patrick's Day as an explicitly religious holiday. Despite neutral and even favorable journalistic coverage of ILGO in the first instance of their appearance, the *Echo's* editorial voice condemned ILGO for not being committed to celebrating the parade and having a "narrow agenda" that does not align with Christian teachings. This edition marks the beginning of a trend of unfavorable editorial coverage of ILGO from the

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<sup>116</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 11," 3.

<sup>117</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 11," 11.

<sup>118</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 11," 8.

*Echo*, which can be understood to be representative of a significant part of the Irish-American community.

The March 20-26 edition from 1991, reported that year's 1991 parade/protest and extensively covered ILGO, capturing audience response to the previous editorial. An article written by Eileen Murphy detailed the response to ILGO's participation with Div. 7 of the AOH, the extensive media coverage, and the reactions of other marchers and spectators alongside quotes from ILGO spokespeople and the AOH:

Members of the other groups did not mix with the gay marchers. Few seemed willing to walk through the crowd of ILGO marchers, opting instead to squeeze through the police barricades to get from one end of the street to another... Then, a chorus of boos started, building up to shouts of 'This is our parade, go home,' and 'Go back to the Village.' People in the crowd held up signs that said 'Dinkins is a Catholic Basher' and 'Beware the AIDS of March,' ...Spectators started singling out gay marchers and making remarks about their appearances.<sup>119</sup>

This coverage aligns with the neutrality of much of the journalistic coverage of ILGO, remaining somewhat even-keeled, while the editorials and letters to the editor reflect more of the emotionality of the event. This detailing of the responses of the spectators, including those telling ILGO to 'Go Back to the Village' and equating homosexual acts with divine punishment in the form of AIDS, not only reflects the opinions of many Irish-Americans but also validates ILGO's purpose and mission statement. The responses represent the common insistence on the incompatibility of the two identities and the declaration that queerness is not part of Irishness.

Subsequent coverage of the drama of the parade permit and changes in AOH leadership, as well as ILGO's repeated application and rejection from the parade, followed the established patterns. The November 27 to December 3 1991 edition contained two letters to the editor of

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<sup>119</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 35, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV, No. 12," 3, 6.

drastically different viewpoints, placed alongside each other and representing the breadth of opinion present in the community:

Gays Stand Up for Their Rights. Editor...All my life I have hated bigots. The worst kind of bigot is one with a bit of power. I have to say I am saddened at this time in my life to watch the antics of this man and his friends. Whatever you think of the gays you have to give them credit for their great courage in standing up for their rights. This is a sad time for the Irish both here in New York and at home. I had great hope for the new Irish who have been coming here for the last few years, but the gays are the only ones who showing us how we were fighters and great lovers of freedom and peace. Jacinta Blake, Bronx.<sup>120</sup>

This letter commended ILGO for standing up for their rights, and explicitly linked their actions to both the tradition of Irish nationalism and political action alongside that of immigration to America. While the AOH and other conservative Irish American groups were preoccupied with transmitting a certain Irish-American culture to new Irish immigrants, this letter's emphasis on positive traits brought by the Irish immigrants that populate ILGO advocated for the development of a more tolerant Irish-American identity and represented a diversity of opinion. In stark contrast, the second letter reads:

The Threat of Homofascists. Editor: I was pleased to read the excellent letter by Mr. Charles Welch, deputy national Pro-Life chairman of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, in the *Echo* (Oct. 30-Nov. 5). Mr. Welch's letter brings attention to the fact that the homosexuals in our society are violently opposed to everything the AOH stands for. As we have seen on numerous occasions they have assaulted our Catholic faith, not only verbally but physically, The horrible episode staged by the homofascists in St. Patrick's Cathedral was not an isolated influence...The gays and lesbians—homofascists, to use a better term--- are mortal enemies of our Catholic faith and all that it teaches, make no mistake about that. Joseph P. Wall, Bridgeport, PA.<sup>121</sup>

This letter directly accused ILGO, ACT-UP, and other queer activist organizations of being fascists, also arguing that they are left alone by police due to their newfound political influence.

This exemplifies another aspect of the ILGO debate, that of the conflict over winning the “gay

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<sup>120</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 48,” 10.

<sup>121</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 48,” 10.

vote” or the “Irish vote,” which may have influenced Mayor Dinkins’ choice to initially support and then divest from ILGO around reelection time. The contrast between these two letters demonstrates the dilemma of the Irish-American understanding of ILGO, whether to place them within the tradition of Irish radical politics or to expel them as fascist traitors to the Catholic faith, and also aligns perfectly with the *Echo*’s tendency to publish letters of opposing viewpoints together.

Sometimes, the *Echo* did away with platforming multiple viewpoints and simply published multiple letters to the editor which illustrate the entrenchment of homophobia in the Irish-American community. One stated that, “[he] never thought [he] would live to see the day when a bunch of homosexuals from all over the United States would march defiantly up Fifth Avenue in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade...As we know, the Irish homosexuals were joined by other homosexual militants...This is not normal political opposition to Catholic policy on condoms, AIDS, and abortion. What’s going on is a hate campaign.”<sup>122</sup> This author placed ILGO’s actions in the tradition of queer action against the Church, regurgitating the anti-Catholic defensive posture of the Irish-American community and using it to justify homophobic statements and action. It is important to note that the vast majority of these letters to the editor were openly signed, demonstrating the degree to which homophobia was normalized in the Irish-American community and to which it lacked the capacity to jeopardize social and economic standing. This existed in contrast to the mission of ILGO, stating that access to Irish-American community supports for new immigrants necessitated a degree of anonymity and closeting, a diminishing of gay identity instead of the proud proclaiming of homophobia enabled by Church support.

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<sup>122</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 50,” 10.

ILGO's campaign prompted a questioning of the purpose of the St. Patrick's Day Parade itself within the Irish-American community, whether it is that of a Catholic holiday or a celebration of Irish ethnic heritage not contingent on religious affiliation. Charles Hynes, the Brooklyn District Attorney published an op-ed in response in the December 4-10 1991 edition. He argued that the Parade is not an exclusively Catholic celebration, but that of an ethnic celebration inclusive of non-Catholic Irish, asking the community "not to replicate the narrow, close-minded attitudes of that government whose leaders put our race in bondage" and celebrating America as a "land where diversity is a great strength."<sup>123</sup> He placed the AOH's discrimination against ILGO, not as many others have done, with the AOH taking a stand against anti-Catholicism, but with the AOH as aligning ideologically with those who have discriminated against Catholics. This editorial garnered extreme backlash represented in many letters to the editor across the next few months.

One response from December 18, 1991 read, "The parade will lose its meaning of being both Irish and Catholic...and those that make fun of either (Irish or Catholics) do not belong in the parade...Hynes is leaving his religion and his Irish heritage to advance his political future. His parade will degenerate into a meaningless march."<sup>124</sup> It also argued that the political influence "all the gays and lesbians in the city" on the Democratic Party was what motivated Hynes to pen the op-ed, with this letter embodying both the perceived opposition of Irish and queer identity and the preoccupation with gay and lesbian political influence seeming as devaluing the Irish vote in some way. Another letter from December 25 read,

Another statement by Mr. Hynes: 'Our community should not exclude but should make every effort to include.' I hope that Mr. Hynes is not referring to last year's parade, where a group of defiant, anti-clerical, anti-Catholic homosexuals were forced upon us, under the ill-advised leadership of Mayor Dinkins. It is alleged that it was some of this group who disrupted the Mass in St. Patrick's Cathedral and spat the Sacred Host on the cathedral floor. This despicable act alone brought upon

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<sup>123</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 49," 9.

<sup>124</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 51," 9.

them the well-deserved reception they received from viewers along the line of march. It is my opinion that their effort to obtain a permit to march in this parade was not to demonstrate their Irish heritage but their anti-Catholic bias.<sup>125</sup>

Once again, the placement of ILGO in the tradition of anti-church action was derogatory when done by members of the more conservative Irish-American community. Although the author did acknowledge the “Irish heritage” of the members of ILGO, he instead accused them of being anti-Catholic and therefore disqualified from Irish-American identity.

. A letter to the editor from January 8, 1992, exemplified the perspective of those who considered it to be a Catholic holiday:

St. Patrick’s Day, of its nature, is a religious occasion. And it is, predominantly, a Catholic celebration...Homosexual activity is objectively a grave moral wrong...But when homosexuals want to participate as part of a group which proclaims the message that homosexual activity is in itself an acceptable and legitimate option, then they challenge the integrity of the day itself. The parade is a Catholic as well as a cultural affair. It ought not to be used to promote the message that sodomy is acceptable conduct. The preservation of the Catholic character of the parade is a symbolic affirmation of the Catholic essence of the Irish heritage and culture...The defining essence of the Irish spirit springs from the Catholic faith. The maintenance of the integrity of the Irish family is essential to that solution. The legitimization of homosexual activity, however, is utterly hostile to the family and contrary to the duty of society and the state to promote it. If the Parade, even unwillingly, were to provide a forum for endorsement of that legitimization, it would contribute to the undermining of the family in Ireland as well as here.<sup>126</sup>

Many themes coalesced here – the equivalence of Irish-American identity with Catholicism, the proclamation that the parade was a strictly religious celebration, and the condemnation of homosexuality in defense of the idealized Irish family. This author, Charles Rice, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame, argued that ILGO posed a threat to not only Irish-American identity, but also Irish family identity itself. This preoccupation with family values can also be traced to the AOH’s concern with preserving and disseminating a certain version of Irishness to

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<sup>125</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXIV No. 52,” 10.

<sup>126</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 2,” 10.

subsequent generations, and with their increased emphasis on family values after the “challenge” of ILGO’s assertion of queerness in the Irish-American community.

However, some within the Irish-American community challenged this assertion that the parade was fully Catholic, with one letter to the editor reading:

The issue of the parade should not be whether Roman Catholics, aka the Ancient Order of Hibernians, should be allowed to discriminate and speak for the millions of Irish immigrants...Make this year’s parade a true reflection of Irish and Irish-American pride. Let us join together to fight bigotry and hatred. Our love for humanity and rights to all will be the foundation for heritage. Let Christianity guide us. The parade is a symbol of our Irish heritage. If the Roman Catholic Church wants to have a parade, let them have one where no one other than a Roman Catholic can participate.<sup>127</sup>

This letter made it clear that although a large portion of the Irish-American community may have shared the opinions of the AOH and Cardinal O’Connor, those opinions were not ubiquitous. Instead of pitting ILGO and religious values against each other, this author argued that the actual embodiment of the values of Christianity and of St. Patrick, as other letters have stated, would be to embrace ILGO and demonstrate tolerance.

An editorial about the state of the 1992 parade published on January 29, 1992, stated that “As long as the parade is run by the AOH and thus is defined as a Catholic event, there is little chance ILGO will ever march. What ILGO must face up to is that nothing less than the future of the parade is at stake. For all its religious trappings, it remains for many people an ethnic celebration.”<sup>128</sup> Although this acknowledged the dual purpose of the parade and admitted that to many it is simply an ethnic celebration, the editor placed the burden on ILGO to stop their efforts, instead of on the AOH to reform their bigotry. He later wrote “But to continue [ILGO’s] crusade would be to hurt and risk alienating thousands of Irish-Americans, including many within the AOH

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<sup>127</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 4,” 10.

<sup>128</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 5,” 8.

itself, who might otherwise be supportive of its cause.”<sup>129</sup> The editorial stressed that the AOH would not change its opinions or behavior, but instead of advocating for less stubbornness and hypocrisy, it called for ILGO to drop their application attempts to save the parade. This was an example of the less-than-favorable editorial coverage of ILGO by the *Echo*, even as it did criticize the actions of the AOH.

This editorial elicited both criticism and condemnation from the Irish-American community, with some agreeing with its criticism of the AOH and others disagreeing with its burdening ILGO with the responsibility for action. The national president of the AOH, George J. Clough Jr., wrote in, stating that “[he] wished to take exception to recent editorial comments,”:

The AOH has for over 150 years stood for its principles to promote Irish culture, protect and defend our faith and to secure a united Ireland. As long as we remain sponsors of the parade we will make sure that it honors St. Patrick and our Irish heritage. It will not become a forum for any group to display an agenda on Fifth Avenue on March 17.<sup>130</sup>

It is worth noting that the *Echo*, despite sometimes advocating loosely on behalf of ILGO, regularly platformed the voices of representatives of the AOH through their letters to the editor section, as well as other prominent conservative Irish-Americans. Most of the letters that expressed support to ILGO were from individuals not affiliated with any large organizations or from representatives of the Mayor and other Democratic Party affiliates. The voices of ILGO members were largely absent, except when quoted in the neutral journalistic coverage of the events of the parade controversy. Allowing members of the AOH to have such a wide platform while disqualifying ILGO members from the same opportunity displays the true tilt of the *Echo* to that of the conservative Irish-American perspective.

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<sup>129</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 5,” 8.

<sup>130</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 7,” 10.



Another letter to the editor regarding the January 29 editorial criticized the conclusion that the ball was in ILGO's court:

But when it comes down to the sundry factions of the AOH you throw up your hands like the weary parent of an incorrigible child...All the ILGO asks is the opportunity to participate in this country's greatest celebration of Irish culture. They are a legitimate part of Irish-American culture, and they are a legitimate Irish-American organization. They have a right to join in the parade. NO, the ball is not in the court of Mayor Dinkins and the ILGO. It is in the court of the Hibernians. It is they who stubbornly cling to an unenlightened and bigoted position, and it is they who should act to save the parade and allow the ILGO to take its place among the rest of the proud marchers.<sup>131</sup>

This letter positioned the AOH as bigoted and exclusionary and lambasted the editor for his suggestion that ILGO should drop their efforts, demonstrating that support for ILGO did exist in the wider Irish-American community, especially as the author wrote in from Connecticut. The controversy and conversation surrounding the editorial detailed the wide range of opinions of the community on ILGO's actions, although many did largely agree with the principles of the AOH and the rationale of the *Echo*.

The *Echo* also published an article in their February 26, 1992 edition which excerpted an article written by Monsignor Howard Basler in *The Tablet*, the official diocesan publication in Brooklyn. The article summarized how "[Basler] argues the parade is civic and Irish and is not a religious event, stating 'The parade isn't a religious procession. There are no religious requirements for participants, nor should there be. There is no discernable religious purpose.'"<sup>132</sup> Basler's dissenting opinion contradicted the AOH's stance. His assertion about the agnostic nature of the parade carried significant weight when pronounced by a member of the clergy. The fact that there were no religious requirements to join the parade, and the fact that not all groups marching were religious, perforated the argument of the AOH. Basler later stated that, "ILGO is a

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<sup>131</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 8," 10.

<sup>132</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 9," 5.

legitimate, bona fide organization in the Irish-American community. It seeks to march as such, and its members seek to proclaim their Irish identity like anyone else.”<sup>133</sup> Basler demonstrated more compassion in his article than most of the *Echo*’s contributors. He did not disqualify their Irishness or refer to them as ‘the gays’ or ‘the homosexuals’ as many conservative writers had. Basler’s opinion represented dissonance even within the Catholic community regarding the purpose of the parade. Additionally, the *Echo*’s decision to platform such an opinion disseminated it to the rest of the Irish-American community and provoked continued thought about the dilemma.

Despite facing criticism for his stance that ILGO should back down, the *Echo*’s editor doubled down in an editorial from March 4, 1992, entitled “ILGO’s Unsuitable Answer” in response to ILGO’s refusal to back down. He wrote:

ILGO’s wish to march is understandable, and its claim that the parade is a civic event is not without merit. But so is the AOH’s claim that because it believes the parade is a Catholic event, and homosexuality is anathema to church teachings, there is no room for gays marching under a gay banner in a parade it sponsors...As long as the AOH holds the parade permit and continues to insist that the event reflect certain Catholic values, its right to run the parade as it sees fit is protected by the Constitution’s guarantee of peaceable assembly. To undermine this right would be to open parades to any and all groups...Were this to happen, the New York St. Patrick’s Day Parade could stand to lose not only its Catholic identity, but its Irish identity as well.<sup>134</sup>

Where the editor had previously advocated for the validity of ILGO’s message, clearly that message was not to be privileged above the proper conducting of the parade. Instead of advocating for the AOH to lose control of the permit, or for them to alter their guidelines, he once again placed the blame on ILGO and reinforced the characterization of ILGO as interlopers posing a threat to proper Irish-American identity. Crucially, ILGO was not arguing for the opening of the parade to all groups but attempting to march in the parade as an Irish-American group. The editor’s

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<sup>133</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 9,” 5.

<sup>134</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 10,” 8.

ignorance or deliberate erasure of such a fact, and the continual dismissing of ILGO's autonomy and message exemplified the attitude of the *Echo* towards ILGO, and explained partially the platforming of many homophobic letters.

As the AOH's claim to the permit and the future of the parade continued to be jeopardized, the *Echo*'s editorials began to have less and less favorable coverage of ILGO. In the past, the editor had acknowledged the misbehavior of the AOH and the validity of ILGO's attempt. In an editorial entitled "At What Cost?" from the January 13, 1993 edition, however, he wrote:

The fact is, the traditional sponsors are free to interpret Catholicism as they wish. The mayor is dead wrong to rebuff the traditional organizers of the event... The sad irony is that a parade that some say celebrates a saint, and others say a people, will in fact celebrate neither.<sup>135</sup>

Without taking a firm stance on the purpose of the parade, the editor still aligned himself with the AOH as rightful organizers of the parade. He argued that the parade's existence as a "private event enabled the AOH to exclude ILGO. The AOH called to boycott the 1993 parade to protest ILGO's potential exclusion. The *Echo* editor responded to this call in the next edition, returning to criticism of ILGO, "And if ILGO's members really are so eager to celebrate their Irishness, why won't they meet with the spiritual leader of that part of the Irish community that has traditionally run the parade?"<sup>136</sup> The initial incident of ILGO's exclusion eventually jeopardized the very existence of the parade. Concurrently, the *Echo*'s editor shifted from tentative ideological support of ILGO and condemnation of the actions of the AOH to supporting the AOH's claim to organizational responsibility and questioning the motivation and actions of ILGO.

One trend emerged from letters to the editor in the lead-up to the 1993 parade, complicating the pronounced incompatibility between queerness and Irishness. Conservative Irish-Americans

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<sup>135</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 3," 8.

<sup>136</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 4," 8.

claimed that the parade itself had always been inclusive of homosexuality as long as it was not openly proclaimed. One letter read “The fact that homosexuals and heterosexuals have marched side by side in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade for years under various organizational banners – possibly since 1762 – escapes attention in the current brouhaha. Why the breakdown on a sexual basis now?”<sup>137</sup> Another letter read, “Gays as individuals have marched in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade for over 100 years but have had the decency not to dishonor the saint of their forefathers by flaunting a sinful lifestyle.”<sup>138</sup> Both of these authors advocated for ILGO’s denial from the parade, problematizing turning the group’s outspokenness about sexual orientation. This concession of the existence of queer Irish people, however begrudging, marked a significant victory for ILGO’s purpose and actions. A later letter stated:

One further consideration: given the overt behavior demonstrated during Gay Pride parades, the sponsoring St. Patrick’s Day Committee is responsible for the decorum and conduct of the parade, participants and responses of onlookers alike, as reflecting the dignity and pride of the Irish race.<sup>139</sup>

The emphasis placed on the “overt behavior” displayed in pride parades as being offensive to the sensibilities of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade reinforced the homophobia which governed every negative response to ILGO. The insistence that any queer individual be closeted and unidentifiable to merit participation in the parade, and more broadly, the Irish-American community, once again validated ILGO’s initial message.

The parade controversy continued to be front-page news and have several feature articles dedicated per issue in the lead-up to the 1993 parade, illustrating the impact of ILGO on the Irish-American community. Most of the published letters to the editor during this window concerned ILGO and the parade, with the two diverging opinions both represented even as editorial coverage

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<sup>137</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 5,” 9.

<sup>138</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 5,” 9.

<sup>139</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 10,” 8.

turned firmly against ILGO. The debate over the purpose of the parade raged, with some claiming that “Ever since the very first parade in New York it has been a celebration in honor of St. Patrick,” while others mandated, “this event was generally accepted as being a celebration by our ethnic heritage,” and questioned “Why then do no clergy march in the parade? Why are there no religious slogans, religious icons, or religious hymns in the parade?”<sup>140</sup>

Others placed ILGO’s actions in the context of the history of Irish and Catholic persecution. One letter read “If you struck out some words, like ‘Catholic,’ ‘the AOH,’ and ‘New York City,’ I could swear the ad was penned by a bigoted Unionist of the Orange Order in Belfast,” in reference to George Clough Jr of the AOH’s letter previously referenced.<sup>141</sup> This author placed the AOH’s actions in line with that of the Protestant Orange Order’s hatred of Catholics, locating ILGO as the victims of discrimination and hatred. Other letters, however, referred to Catholic-bashing, “To instruct a traditionally religious celebration to forgo its legal and ethical responsibility is, to put it baldly, persecution. The mayor, the commissioner, and their homosexual constituents continue the pogroms against Irish Catholics begun in the 1600s by James I...”<sup>142</sup> This author victimized the AOH and portrayed ILGO as arbiters of anti-Catholic hatred and discrimination from city officials. These opinions also aligned with either side of the debate’s divide over the purpose of the parade – if the parade was a religious occasion, then city interference with the parade constituted discrimination, while if the parade was civic and ethnic, then AOH mistreatment against ILGO constituted discrimination. Regardless of the accuracy of either argument, the fact remained that ILGO’s actions were tremendously significant in the Irish-American community and provoked this debate about the purpose of the parade.

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<sup>140</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 6,” 8, 9.

<sup>141</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 7,” 10.

<sup>142</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, “*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 7,” 10.

A final editorial regarding the court ruling barring ILGO from the 1993 parade encapsulated the *Echo*'s coverage of the controversy. The editorial titled "And the Winner Is..." from March 3, 1993 stated:

Indeed, the parade, for so long a symbol of our accomplishments, has come to represent a single failure – our inability to get along.... Worse, the AOH-ILGO feud, far from ending in understanding and acceptance, remains a wedge driving the community. From the start the *Echo* urged reconciliation. From the parade organizers, we asked they find a way to make the event a true reflection of the diversity of the Irish community. From the members of ILGO, we asked that they continue to press their case to the organizers and to their supporters within the Irish community, and not to involve the city. From the mayor, we asked that he allow the Irish to work through the problem themselves...Now the Irish are left with a solution that solves nothing, that satisfies only the most rigid thinkers among us, that leaves our parade intact but our community in tatters.<sup>143</sup>

The editor claimed that he consistently advocated for ILGO's inclusion to the AOH. However not two months beforehand he had argued that the traditional organizers had the right to interpret Catholicism as they wished and therefore to exclude ILGO at their leisure. Additionally, the insistence that ILGO resolve the dispute within the Irish-American community reflected frustration with how this display of bigotry made the Irish-American community look bad on the national stage, but not a desire to change or reform institutional homophobia. This final editorial, then, represented the tone of the *Echo*'s editorials and regard for ILGO. The paper claimed neutrality while platforming and supporting homophobic remarks, ultimately disparaging the mission of ILGO.

The *Echo*'s generally negative editorial coverage of ILGO, despite their neutral journalistic coverage and publishing of some supportive letters, demonstrated their attitude towards ILGO and aligned them with the more conservative Irish-American perspective. Their platforming of many AOH members and other conservative Irish-Americans through features and op-eds, while only

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<sup>143</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 10," 8.

allowing ILGO's voice through the perspective of related politicians, demonstrated the position of the newspaper more broadly. The extensive coverage of ILGO and the parade controversy by the most prominent Irish-American newspaper demonstrated the impact of ILGO on the community, especially in the debate about the purpose of the parade itself. The acknowledgement of the historical existence of Irish gays marching, though closeted, in the parade marked the degree to which ILGO's actions prompted a confrontation of the incompatibility between Irishness and queerness, while also legitimizing the need for ILGO's existence. Ultimately, the *Echo* represented a significant portion of the Irish-American community, but not all of it, and younger immigrants and Irish-Americans did have varied opinions on ILGO better supported by newer newspapers.

#### *The Voice and an Indifferent and Inclusive Youth*

The *Irish Voice* was established in 1987, specifically to cater to new Irish immigrants to the United States. It positioned itself as a new perspective in the Irish-American community, and thus had a more moderate or liberal stance on many issues. The attitudes of the *Voice* and its coverage of ILGO were more representative of the younger generation of Irish-Americans and new immigrants from Ireland. They covered ILGO even before the parade controversy began and had consistent journalistic coverage and supportive editorials from 1990 to 1992. Although they did publish some letters to the editor against ILGO, often from the same contributor, they platformed many more in support and also from ILGO spokespeople themselves, giving them a voice in the community. Finally, their causal inclusion of ILGO in event calendars and in advice columns significantly normalized ILGO within the community and legitimized their message and purpose.

The October 20, 1990 edition of the *Voice* focused on ILGO. It was entitled "Irish Pride & Gay Identity," and written by Brian Rohan. Rohan's profile of ILGO included interviews with

various members about the founding and purpose of the organization and detailed the specific issues they faced as queer Irish Americans. A description of the dilemma of Martin, a queer Irish immigrant and one of ILGO's members, read as follows:

Many other Irish immigrants of Martin's generation faced the same predicament, and they found themselves lonely and confused...many of them joined support groups formed by the New York gay community which helped them 'come out,' or acknowledge their sexuality in public. However, when they did this, they realized that their newly-admitted lifestyles were distancing themselves from the Irish community in New York. 'We couldn't even celebrate St. Patrick's Day because we feared what the reaction of the 'straight' Irish community would be. Unless of course, on March 17, we went back to our old ways of hiding that part of ourselves.'"<sup>144</sup>

Rohan perfectly articulated the reason behind the founding of ILGO. He laid out in plain language the dilemma of claiming Irishness at the expense of being out and proud or claiming queerness and to leaving Irishness behind. Simply allowing ILGO the space to articulate their predicament on their own terms in the *Voice* was far more authentic than any representation of ILGO in the *Echo* or the records of the AOH. The article also details the challenges of being a queer immigrant in the United States more generally:

Officially this government can deny them entry or even deport them if they are known to be homosexual... 'On the application form they ask 'Are you sexually deviant?' which to them basically means that you're homosexual...But there is always this threat hanging over us that as immigrants, we may be deported because of who we are. So in addition to the usual worries of finding an apartment and getting steady work we had to deal with this immigration crap.'<sup>145</sup>

With this additional context to the intricacies of immigration, the disqualification faced by queer Irish immigrants from the support of the Irish-American community loomed even larger. Though the AOH lobbied for immigration reform to aid Irish immigrants, the issue of protecting queer immigrants from such dangerous questioning was of course nowhere in their agendas. In fact, the

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<sup>144</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42," 22.

<sup>145</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42," 22.



AOH actually “heavily lobbied the New York City Council to turn down any gay rights legislation” in 1989.<sup>146</sup> Even before the parade controversy, the *Voice* understood the fundamental opposition between the two groups and the incompatibility of their ideologies. Later in the article, the *Voice* provided information about ILGO’s meetings:

While many Irish organizations might prefer if ILGO was never founded, it does exist and is getting stronger all the time. They meet on the first Saturday of every month at 1pm in The Center at 208 West Village 13<sup>th</sup> Street, in the West Village. They act as a sort of support group, bridging the gap between New York’s gay community and that community’s Irish background. They are a social group, but they have their political side as well...They have grown by word-of-mouth as well as through notices posted in the *Irish Voice* (other Irish-American newspapers refuse to carry their notices).<sup>147</sup>

The *Voice* singled itself out as the only newspaper providing information about ILGO to the community, positioning itself directly in opposition to other newspapers and therefore as more liberal and inclusive. Additionally, simply providing the meeting time and place aided ILGO significantly in the first months of their existence. Rohan also acknowledged the gay community in New York as having an “Irish background,” doing more to collapse the perceived incompatibility than most queer historians and also most Irish-American voices at the time. Finally, the article captured ILGO’s perspective before the initial denial of the parade application, based on their experience in the Pride Parade:

‘We were marching and all these cops who were lining the parade route with names on their badges like O’Kelly and Murphy were simply amazed to see our banner.’ If a reaction like that came from a Gay Pride Parade, the members of ILGO can only wonder what reaction they would get in New York’s biggest parade, the one on St. Patrick’s Day. An application to the parade committee is in the works, and ILGO members are hopeful that they would be approved. ‘It would not be anything antagonistic or political or anything, it would merely be a matter of self-affirmation. We would just be claiming our rightful place in the parade. Yes, we are homosexual. But we are also Irish, and we are no less Irish than any other group marching up 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue.’<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, “*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42,” 23.

<sup>147</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, “*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42,” 23.

<sup>148</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, “*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42,” 34.

The misplaced hope of ILGO's rationale behind their parade application rings hollow knowing the controversy and vitriol which would soon be launched against the group. Their application was not intended to become a political and legal battle, but simply an act of expression. Regardless, the *Voice's* publishing of a feature article about ILGO, in addition to providing resources regarding their meetings and purpose and allowing members to speak about their experiences, solidified their positioning as a younger, more liberal newspaper that saw a better future wherein one could celebrate their queerness and Irishness in America.

Several letters to the editor in response to the ILGO feature were positive in nature, although queer authors still felt the need to redact their names. One letter from Eileen Joyce read:

I read about one of the individuals interviewed and thought to myself, 'He's homosexual, he's an immigrant from Belfast, Catholic, has a black lover, -- and I think I have problems?' I commend the members of the ILGO (Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization) for their courage. It's important that everyone has a place where they feel welcome -- no matter what their beliefs are.<sup>149</sup>

Here, a seemingly straight Irish-American woman did not react with revulsion, but with compassion for the complicated circumstance of the queer Irish individual. She also felt comfortable enough to name herself in this letter. Demonstrating support for ILGO in a liberal newspaper did not prove too jeopardizing of personal reputation. Another letter read:

As an Irish lesbian living in a tight knit Irish community in the Bronx, I have experienced firsthand the dreadful sense of isolation and alienation from that community. It is ironic that I left Ireland because of my sexual identity and the terrible prejudices against Gays and Lesbians that accompany that lifestyle (due largely to the influence of the Catholic Church) and now find myself living a 'double life' in a similar situation here in N.Y., Name withheld, Bronx, N.Y.<sup>150</sup>

This anonymous contributor speaks to the struggle and the "double life" required for queer Irish immigrants in New York, exemplified by their choice to remain unnamed.

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<sup>149</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 44," 9.

<sup>150</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 45," 9.

The *Voice* also published letters to the editor from ILGO members, including founder Anne Maguire. This further provided a platform for the message and movements of the group. Maguire's article commended Rohan and the *Voice* and ultimately thanks them for their support. "We are a group of people that is consistently made invisible and censored so I certainly appreciate the guts your publication has shown."<sup>151</sup> Although Maguire critiqued the use of "homosexual" as a term used to describe the interviewees, she commended the *Voice* for taking the risk of publishing such an article about ILGO in the first place. Another letter from an ILGO member, Cait Ní Caolithe, expressed similar gratitude:

All of us [in] the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) appreciate your fair and objective article about Irish pride [and] gay identity. We think it may be of interest to know that our group also has a P.O. Box number for people interested in finding out about ILGO. "Irish Lesbian & Gay Organization" P.O. Box 4276 Rockefeller Station NY, NY 10185 Again, thank you for the coverage and keep up the good work!<sup>152</sup>

The *Voice* provided a consistent platform for ILGO members to speak and provide information about their meetings how to contact the organization. This would have provided important connections to potential members and to queer Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans in need of support. In contrast to the *Echo*, which treated ILGO as a permanent interloper and did not cover them outside of the parade controversy, the *Voice*'s platforming of ILGO marked the paper as definitively supportive and impactful.

However, the *Voice* consistently published letters to the editor that were in opposition to ILGO, especially from Jim Tighe, a regular contributor. His first letter in response to the ILGO feature, from November 24, 1990 included phrases such as "It's newsworthy that a group of Irish people labelling themselves gay and lesbian have given themselves a name and are 'seeking

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<sup>151</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 45," 9.

<sup>152</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 46," 9.

recognition. I interpret the article as non-committal on whether they ‘ought’ to be recognized as a legitimate ‘community,’” and “It sounds as though people who call themselves gay would like to be accepted as members of a legitimate community, as for example, an ethnic community.”<sup>153</sup> His phrasing separated communities based on sexual orientation or other identities from ethnic communities, and implied that ILGO’s members were excluding themselves from ethnic community based on their openness. Later, in a January 14, 1992 edition, Jim participated in the debate about the purpose of the parade while still maintaining his homophobic stances, writing “This ILGO crowd bullied their way in! True enough, the parade isn’t an entirely Catholic affair—far from it. But it’s too much to ask of Catholics to ignore the radical import of the ILGO message that Patrick of Armagh wasn’t a saint, he was just another uptight Catholic.”<sup>154</sup> While he acknowledged the parade as not entirely religious, he also attributed a statement to ILGO which there is no record of them saying. In March of 1992, Jim called ILGO “terribly offensive to ordinary people.”<sup>155</sup> These are merely a few examples of many letters to the editor written by Jim Tighe and published by the *Voice*, indicating that homophobia existed plainly in the Irish-American community, even in the younger and more liberal side.

They also published homophobic letters from other contributors, including one which stated “These people are not natural. They are immoral and spiteful. Ten years ago their actions were punishable by jail or fine. They were known as degenerates not acceptable in decent society. Please help to stop them.”<sup>156</sup> Another letter described homosexuality as “an unspeakable aberration” to all Catholics and called for ILGO to “leave the 17<sup>th</sup> of March for normal Irish people to enjoy,” claiming that “most Irish are ashamed and humiliated that there is an Irish lesbian

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<sup>153</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, “*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 47,” 9.

<sup>154</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 2,” 11.

<sup>155</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 9,” 11.

<sup>156</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 4,” 11.

group.”<sup>157</sup> The letter positioned queerness as abnormal, and straight, Catholic Irish Americans as normal and as disapproving of ILGO. The *Voice*’s platforming of such homophobia, alongside their other support of ILGO, illuminated a complicated picture of a community which both accepted and denigrated a group.

However, the *Voice* did not print these derogatory letters unchallenged, usually pitting them in comparison with a letter in support of ILGO. They also published direct rebuttals to the writing of Jim Tighe and other regularly homophobic contributors. One reply read:

I am sick and tired of reading the stuff Jim Tighe and James H. Gallagher are writing in about the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO). Whether they like it or not we represent 10 percent of the population—that’s 300,000 lesbians and gay men in Ireland or from there...Well I for one will not stop until we Irish lesbians and gays are visible everywhere...Lucy Lynch, Manhattan, NY.<sup>158</sup>

The *Voice* can then be understood as truly representative of the Irish-American community, with homophobia from older members challenged by younger generations in person and in print.

Another letter “[taking] exception with Jim Tighe’s letter,” stated:

By taking part in the parade under our own banner, we are showing the world that we are proud of our ethnicity, and we are not ashamed of our sexuality. We are showing our brothers and sisters under British oppression, in the counties of the North, what it is to be free: we are showing our brothers and sisters under self-imposed oppression, locked in closets, what it is to be free. And we are showing the politicians who run this country that we refuse to be invisible. The St. Patrick’s Day Parade belongs to us all, we cannot allow a group of small-minded people to take the parade away from the minorities in the Irish American community. Daniel W. O’Brien, Centereach, NY.<sup>159</sup>

This letter placed ILGO on the side of Irishness against British oppression, portraying the impetus to be closeted as an oppressive force similar to the discrimination imposed by the British on the Irish. This sentiment was published in the context of the Troubles and would have provided the

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<sup>157</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 12,” 11.

<sup>158</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 9,” 11.

<sup>159</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 10,” 11.

Irish-American community the opportunity to consider how oppression and power dynamics were structured in their own community to replicate oppression against queer Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans.

The *Voice* provided fair journalistic coverage of ILGO's parade battle throughout the decade, alongside criticism of the AOH and generally positive editorial coverage. A report from Brian Rohan stressed that "the members of the ILGO have fought very hard to make clear the distinction between themselves and the group of ACT-UP protestors...despite attempts by some of the AOH to link the two," demonstrating ILGO's awareness of the detrimental nature of their association with ACT-UP in the Irish-American community.<sup>160</sup> In their journalistic coverage, the *Voice*'s reporters regularly quoted from ILGO spokespeople, especially Eileen Clancy, and did not disparage their efforts.

Peter Farrelly edited the "Citizen Kane," section, which paid close attention to the AOH's leadership drama and reported humorously about the events. One excerpt from a January 7, 1992 column read:

They (ILGO) just want to march with their banner in the St. Patrick's Day parade like everybody else! In the past they have, quite sensibly, taken a low profile and allowed the AOH and parade crowd to fight among themselves. ILGO, however, have a big worry: If some deal can't be worked out allowing them to march there is no doubt that radical gay groups like Queer Nation and ACT-UP will demonstrate against the parade and St. Patrick's Cathedral.<sup>161</sup>

Farrelly did not criticize ILGO's motivations or attempt to be in the parade, but presented it as a fairly simple request. Interestingly, he grouped in opposition to "radical gay groups" such as Queer Nation, marking ILGO as less radical and more concerned with assimilation into the Irish community. Positioning them as different from the "radical gay groups" disapproved of by the

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<sup>160</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 13," 38.

<sup>161</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 1," 18.

Irish-American community may have helped to normalize ILGO within the Irish-American community. In addition to his “Citizen Kane” column which mentioned ILGO frequently in the context of the AOH controversy, Farrelly also wrote many articles covering ILGO and the parade controversy which treated the organization with respect and fairness.

Editorial coverage of ILGO was significantly more positive with respect to ILGO in the *Voice*, especially when compared to the dismissing tone of the *Echo*. On one occasion, the editor criticized an AOH statement which claimed that the reason ILGO was being barred from the parade was due to their violent behavior in the first parade:

A reader of this AOH statement might presume that the ILGO and their supporters had perpetrated some gross outrage on the route of the parade...Messrs. Clough and Coggins know very well that despite the most extreme provocation from supporters of the parade committee, the ILGO conducted themselves along the route with admirable restraint.<sup>162</sup>

The editor also directly criticized the AOH for the “mess that the parade committee made last year” and recognized these accusations as a ploy to further justify the AOH’s mission of discrimination. However, the supportive tone of the editorials diminished slightly when the 1992 parade was jeopardized. A February 25 editorial from that year entitled “Save the Parade” read:

Enough already! There is less than a month to go to St. Patrick’s Day and the New York parade is in a mess. With lawsuits flying every which way and conflicting claims about to be dragged through the courts, the Irish American community is totally confused by this abject situation...Both these groups [of Hibernians] are opposed in not wanting the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization (ILGO) to have the right to march. The City of New York have sued both sets of Hibernians to allow the ILGO to march. They’re also in court this week. This legal action promises to go all the way – and beyond the day itself. It’s time to call a halt. Time to break the logjam. Time for mediation between all the different groups involved.<sup>163</sup>

Although the editorial still did not question ILGO’s mission or deny them their autonomy, once the actual parade was in jeopardy, the degree of outright support diminished. Similarly to the

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<sup>162</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 5,” 16.

<sup>163</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/116, “*Irish Voice* Vol No. 8,” 1.

trajectory of support from Heritage of Pride, the entanglement of the parade issue in legal battles and First Amendment issues led many, including the editor of the *Voice*, to express some degree of frustration with or divestment from ILGO. However, the editorials returned to explicit support of ILGO in subsequent issues. One from March 24, 1992 read:

We are treated to the most outlandish displays by self-appointed spokesmen, who loudly proclaim their narrow versions of what they believe to be Irishness. Despite what these people say, nobody has a monopoly on the meaning of our ethnicity. It includes a wide range of attitudes, philosophies, and indeed lifestyles. It is all the more dismaying that many Irish people who have come to this country to escape some of Ireland's more backward political and social attitudes, should be faced with these same prejudices in an even more virulent form. There is no legislating for tolerance but perhaps this parade could be organized in a way that makes it more accountable to the whole community.<sup>164</sup>

This placed the *Voice* firmly on the side of ILGO in the debate surrounding the parade, and also as part of an Irish-American community which hoped to create a more inclusive and hopeful environment for new immigrants.

In addition to the positive editorial coverage, however, the *Voice* consistently included ILGO in their event calendars and referenced them positively in other columns, normalizing the group as a legitimate Irish-American organization and demonstrating their support even more clearly. In their event calendar "The Guide," the *Voice* included an announcement for an ILGO event in their January 28, 1992 issue:

Saturday, February 1 ILGO Seisiún The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization are having a seisiún this afternoon after their regular monthly meeting. Admission is \$5. This is a bring your own beer and musical instruments affair. 3pm at the Center, 203 West 13<sup>th</sup> Street, between 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Avenues. More info: (212)967-7711 ext. 3078.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 12," 8.

<sup>165</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 4," 34.



Similar announcements were included in the February 4 edition, alongside an announcement about the founding of the Boston ILGO.<sup>166</sup> These dances, alongside other ILGO events, supplemented the lack of community allotted to queer Irish immigrants and Irish-Americans, epitomizing the mission of ILGO to collapse the contradiction between queerness and Irishness. By hosting various cultural events, ILGO created the community it was denied. The *Voice*'s inclusion of ILGO in event calendars not only broadened access and awareness of the organization but facilitated assimilation into the Irish-American community.

In the *Voice*'s advice column "Dear Bridget," a question from an Irish-American mother with a gay son requesting support mentioned ILGO, saying "That's why it is so important that a support group like the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization exists, where people can come together and discuss the unique problems that they have to deal with and offer each other encouragement and support. And that's something all of us need whether we are Gay or heterosexual."<sup>167</sup> This response was printed in the March 24, 1992 edition, in the midst of the drama surrounding that year's parade. The advice columnist's decision to endorse ILGO's purpose and validate their existence in the context of the hatred they were receiving from much of the Irish-American community demonstrated the supportiveness of the *Voice* as a publication.

Their support of ILGO also represented the attitudes of the younger generation of the Irish-American community, with the "Enquiring Photographer" section of the February 4, 1992 edition asking community members their opinion on ILGO's inclusion in the parade. Three out of four of the respondents answered affirmatively, ranging from twenty-something women to middle-aged men. The only negative response did not say that homosexuals should be barred from entry, but

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<sup>166</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 5," 36.

<sup>167</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, "*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 12," 20.

just that they should march as “Irish or Irish Americans.”<sup>168</sup> The *Voice* thus embodied the perspective of a younger, more modernized Irish-American community in support of ILGO and the purpose of their organization.

The *Voice* published a forty-eight-page St. Patrick’s Day supplement on March 17, 1992. This included an article titled “ILGO: A Group in Transition,” which reported the extent to which the priorities of the group had shifted since the 1990 feature:

Almost two years later, ILGO members say the Parade issue has superseded the other aspects of the group. The newsletter is long forgotten, the discussions at the monthly meetings are dominated by talks on parade developments, and several members who were originally heavily involved have dropped out of the spotlight or have left the group altogether... Those still active in ILGO say that the focus on the parade has changed the makeup of the group, but that it is a necessary sacrifice. Marching under their own banner in the Parade is too important a cause for them to give up, they say, as public awareness and acceptance of homosexuals will ultimately make it easier for people who are reluctant to publicly admit their sexuality, particularly those members of ILGO who elected to stay home on March 17.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to covering the parade controversy, the *Voice* continued to report on ILGO as an organization in the Irish-American community, extending its work to normalize their message and existence.

As the coverage of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade and ILGO’s activist work here suggests, there was a robust debate within New York’s Irish-American community over whether or not it was possible to celebrate both one’s Irishness and queerness. The variety of responses to ILGO from the Irish-American community, from the AOH’s efforts to discredit ILGO and maintain their own “moral obligation and legal responsibility,” to the *Echo*’s regular condemnation and the *Voice*’s support, illustrate the impact that ILGO and the parade controversy had on the community. ILGO prompted community-wide debates about the purpose of the St. Patrick’s Day parade that

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<sup>168</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 5,” 11.

<sup>169</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 11,” 22.

saw more conservative members arguing for the parade's religious nature. Other more moderate and liberal members the event acknowledged it as more of an ethnic celebration. Regardless of the affiliation of the group in question, the association with ACT-UP and other more "radical" gay groups proved detrimental to ILGO's acceptance by the Irish-American community writ large. ILGO thus challenged Irish-American identity itself, and, and as we will see in the next chapter, proved it to be based on an idea of Irishness that did not wholly align with the reality of queer politics in Ireland itself.

### **Chapter 3: “Hello, New York”: Queer Ireland, Acceptance, and Transnational Solidarity Movements**

Although some accounts of ILGO’s campaign do touch on the existence of a similar movement prompted in Ireland, an extensive analysis of the discrepancy between Irish America and Ireland has not been conducted. Even as many ILGO members emigrated from Ireland to the United States and were prompted in part by the homophobia entrenched in Ireland’s institutions, the same vitriol and discrimination did not exist towards queers in the context of the St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Much historical analysis addresses the intricacies of queerness in Irish identity formation, especially concerned with Irish nationalism and the association of queerness with significant Irish cultural and political figures. However, the influence of this conflict on Irish-American identity formation has not been considered, and queerness does not figure significantly in transatlantic studies of Irish immigrant identity. Internal records from many queer Irish activist groups, including the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, the Northern Irish Gay Rights Association, and ILGO Ireland, are considered, alongside oral history interviews with queer Irish activists and other personal accounts of the movement. Through an analysis of these records, this chapter seeks to complicate understandings of queer Ireland and reveal the emergence of an international solidarity effort prompted by ILGO, forming a queered Irish transatlantic identity.

#### *Historiography*

A brief understanding of the history of queerness in Ireland is necessary to consider the reaction to ILGO in the 1990s. Many mainstream histories of Ireland do not include queerness as a point of interest or study, partially due to the entrenchment of Catholicism in the country. However, a

burgeoning field of queer histories of Ireland is emerging, especially when considered alongside the Gaelic Revolution and the Irish nationalist movement as similarly complicating and engendering new forms of Irish identity. Brian Lacey's *Terrible Queer Creatures: homosexuality in Irish History* is perhaps the most comprehensive account. He notes that the Irish language has many words used to describe homosexual people and activities and that the Brehon laws, early Irish law texts, do not explicitly condemn the act of husbands "[lying] with the servant boys when it is not necessary to do so" as morally wrong but instead simply as grounds for divorce.<sup>170</sup> These laws, Lacey argues, are more critical of a husband's neglect of his wife than of the sexual preferences of the husband and point towards the naturalization of the eroticization of male relations to demonstrate the relative normalcy of homosexual acts in pre-Christian Ireland.<sup>171</sup>

The attempt to convert Ireland to Christianity and impose moral order on pagan society through religious laws solidified the place of homophobia in Irish culture as something built into social, moral, and political orders. It also functioned as a vein of British colonial control over the Irish population. This was codified in the passing of a bill for the "act of punishment for the vice of buggery" in 1634, with the first man hanged under the Buggery Act in 1640.<sup>172</sup> The death sentence for this offence was abolished in 1861 and replaced with penal servitude and hard labor.<sup>173</sup> Similarly to many queer histories, the overabundance of penal records centers many histories around male actors who were punished by the state for sodomy or buggery. The Vagrancy Act of 1898 contained sections regarding soliciting and importuning for immoral purposes and was almost exclusively used to prosecute homosexual offences.<sup>174</sup> The Labouchere Amendment to

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<sup>170</sup> Lacey, 34.

<sup>171</sup> Lacey, 34.

<sup>172</sup> Lacey, 90.

<sup>173</sup> Lacey, 148.

<sup>174</sup> Lacey, 148.

Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 was a notorious anti-homosexual law, which included the phrasing of “gross indecency” instead of just sodomy or buggery and was used to prosecute conduct which previously had not been explicitly illegal.<sup>175</sup> An attempt was made in 1921 to extend the Criminal Law Amendment Act to lesbianism, but the act did not pass the House of Lords, as they did not want to publicize the notion.<sup>176</sup> Anti-homosexuality was entrenched in British colonial law in Ireland and Catholic teachings.

The association of prominent figures in the Gaelic Revolution and the Irish Nationalist movement brought homosexuality to the forefront of Irish social consciousness. The 1895 trial of Oscar Wilde under the Labouchere Amendment, where he was convicted and served two years of hard labor, captured national and international attention.<sup>177</sup> The trial and Wilde’s existence as an important cultural figure switched the popular understanding of homosexuality from a set of acts available to anyone to a concept descriptive of a particular type of person.<sup>178</sup> Later, nationalist figures like Roger Casement and Padraig Pearse would be accused of or associated with homosexuality. Lacey argues that although the anti-homosexual laws that operated in Ireland were the products of colonial parliaments, the leaders of nationalist movements were convicted that homosexuality among the Irish was a result of contamination from Britain, a “pollution implanted by foreign hands,” further entrenching homophobia in Irish society.<sup>179</sup> An Irish Government Report in the 1930s, after the Republic of Ireland had won independence from British rule, reported that “gross indecency between male persons [was] spreading with malign vigor.”<sup>180</sup> It is in this context of institutional and societal homophobia that the gay rights movement in Ireland emerged

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<sup>175</sup> Lacey, 149.

<sup>176</sup> Lacey, 181.

<sup>177</sup> Lacey, 149.

<sup>178</sup> Lacey, 147.

<sup>179</sup> Lacey, 215.

<sup>180</sup> Lacey, 225.

in the 1970s. Lacey's brief section covering ILGO's campaign analyzed the movement as transnational and populated by Irish immigrants.

A collection of essays edited by Anthony Bradley and Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Ireland*, includes an article by Lucy McDiarmid surrounding the controversy of Roger Casement's diaries and public understandings of nationalism and homosexuality. His diaries, which contained "homosexual content," were released by the British Government to defray his legacy as a hero of the Irish Nationalist movement. A public debate resulted, centering the idea that his homosexuality was a slanderous accusation from the British government against an Irish martyr. This debate reinforced the idea that British social mores, such as homosexuality, were a "pollution" in Ireland and needed to be reversed.<sup>181</sup> In recent years, McDiarmid argues, Casement has been "repoliticized and claimed as a homosexual ancestor" and exists as a "precursor in a more particularized history" for Irish lesbians and gays.<sup>182</sup> His diaries were forensically declared genuine in 1993, aligned with decriminalizing homosexual acts. McDiarmid posits that this controversy functioned as an "object lesson in many forms of patriotism for new, revisionist Ireland...in which patriotic reverence and homosexual love were acknowledged to coexist."<sup>183</sup> She also references ILGO in the essay, mentioning,

When the members of ILGO march on St. Patrick's Day in New York, protesting their exclusion from the parade, they carry posters with pictures of Irish homosexuals – Frances Power Cobbe, Somerville and Ross, Wilde, Casement, Eva Gore-Booth –establishing a genealogy of people who never conceptualized such a genealogy themselves.<sup>184</sup>

In addition to reinforcing the connection between Irish queerness and nationalism as central to conceptions of Irish identity, McDiarmid's inclusion of ILGO in her history demonstrates the

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<sup>181</sup> McDiarmid, 135.

<sup>182</sup> McDiarmid, 150.

<sup>183</sup> McDiarmid, 152.

<sup>184</sup> McDiarmid, 151-152.

extent to which ILGO is considered critical to histories of queer Irishness. Perhaps because there is a comparatively smaller and shorter history of the gay rights movement in Ireland, ILGO is not excluded from queer histories as it continues to be in the histories of the United States and New York.

Another work which adds to the discussion of sexuality and the character of national identity in Ireland is Susannah Bowyer's *Queer Patriots*, which examines shifting rhetorical strategies concerning sexuality alongside economic growth and globalization in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in Ireland. She locates her work in Foucault's thesis that homosexuality is a culturally and historically specific concept. She argues that a local version of cosmopolitan gay sexual identity came to be celebrated as emblematic of a liberal and sexually liberated Ireland. She also looks at how the "cultural figure" of the homosexual was mobilized in Ireland to align them with the "global gay brand" to create the appearance of multicultural sensibilities in Ireland.<sup>185</sup> As the figure of the homosexual came to represent the updated modernity of Ireland, part of the "Celtic Tiger view" of economic growth, more harmful forms of homosexuality, such as clerical child sexual abuse, came to be understood as moral contamination from Britain. Bowyer argues that the figure of the Irish Roman Catholic priest, previously an icon of the "traditional values at the heart of the Irish nationalist project," instead came to be characterized as "foreign at home."<sup>186</sup> Bowyer also mentions ILGO in her text, locating queer identity as an issue of intense conflict and an "aspect of Irish diaspora identity."<sup>187</sup> Again, the connection made repeatedly between queerness, Irish nationalism, and ILGO in queer Irish

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<sup>185</sup> Susannah Bowyer, "Queer Patriots," *Cultural Studies* 24, no. 6 (2010): 801–20, 804.

<sup>186</sup> Bowyer, 804, 812.

<sup>187</sup> Bowyer, 815.



histories provides helpful context for understanding queer Irish history and the environment of Ireland which reacted to ILGO's campaign.

### *Roadmap and Ties to Larger Thesis*

First, the chapter will examine reactions to ILGO's campaign in Ireland and the inclusion of queer groups in St. Patrick's Day parades in Ireland with no issue, utilizing newspaper coverage, accounts from ILGO founder Anne Maguire, and an oral history interview with activist Katherine O'Donnell. Then, I will examine solidarity movements for ILGO conducted across borders and violence, looking at the records and actions of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, the Northern Irish Gay Rights Association, and the political party Sinn Féin. Finally, I will examine the foundation of ILGO Ireland, the 2000 trip, and the transatlantic movement which emerged to support ILGO in the wake of significant divestment by New York activist groups. Ultimately, this network which crisscrossed the Atlantic engendered a new transnational identity that took pride in both Irishness and queerness, marking ILGO as integral to Irish history and identity formation.

### *Pride-Filled Parades and Ireland's Response to ILGO*

The controversy surrounding ILGO's denial from the New York St. Patrick's Day Parade and subsequent protest made national and international news and merited reactions from various populations in Ireland, including both straight and queer groups. Even though homosexuality was not decriminalized in the Republic until 1993, queer groups were accepted into St. Patrick's Day Parades in Cork as early as 1992 and Dublin in 1993. A dissonance emerged between the AOH's repeated denial of ILGO based on the fundamental dissociation of queerness and Irishness and the relative ease of acceptance between the two identities in Ireland. The acceptance of queer groups

into St. Patrick's Day parades in Ireland, within the context of the prominence of ILGO to the Irish gay rights movement and to Irish news more broadly, can be read as a direct response to the denial of ILGO by Irish-American groups. Irish identity itself, then, as claimed by and experienced by many peoples, was impacted and expanded by ILGO's campaign.

In Cork, thirty-two lesbians and two gay men applied and were admitted to march in the 1992 St. Patrick's Day Parade. Activist and academic Katherine O'Donnell participated in various ILGO protests throughout the decade and helped organize the 1992 Cork contingent. While living in Boston, she met a "young, gay Irish guy, [her] age, who was a member of ILGO," and witnessed the controversy surrounding their initial application and denial in 1991.<sup>188</sup> Upon her return to Cork, she and other prominent figures in the queer community organized a contingent to march in the St. Patrick's Day parade, with their group "[winning] a prize" and holding a banner saying "Hello, New York!"<sup>189</sup> O'Donnell described the motivation for their application to march: they "wanted to kind of stick it in saying, okay, we can march here because we can be Irish and queer here. And in America, the bastion of progressiveness...the argument was that you couldn't be gay and Irish."<sup>190</sup> Clearly, the organizers of the Cork parade group were motivated to disprove the perceived discrepancy between the two identities. They wanted to "confound the arguments that were being used against ILGO," and also demonstrate to the conservative Irish-Americans that Ireland was different than New York.<sup>191</sup>

Although the group was welcomed into the Cork St. Patrick's Day parade, and it "was not such a large, controversial issue as it was in America just to be included in the parades," certain

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<sup>188</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>189</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>190</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>191</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

members felt they needed to disguise themselves.<sup>192</sup> According to O'Donnell, “most of the lesbians were in fancy dress as a way of disguising,” although they may have been out in their personal and professional lives.<sup>193</sup> However, she said it was easier for the initial parade acceptance to be in Cork rather than in Dublin because “there was a lot more visibility of lesbians and gay men in Cork. [They] were part of the social fabric.”<sup>194</sup> The two gay men in the contingent, for example, owned “a very successful” vegetarian café and were prominent in Cork’s economic network. Their application for the parade was bolstered by Arthur Lee’s prominence in both “commercial communities” and “lefty liberal communities” in Cork.<sup>195</sup>

O'Donnell pointed out another potential reason for the relative ease of acceptance of the Cork group, saying that “the people who ran the Cork parade were the Cork Chamber of Commerce” and that “liberal politics in Ireland had also been associated with people who wanted to modernize Ireland.”<sup>196</sup> In Anne Maguire’s account of ILGO’s campaign, she quoted Kiernan Murphy, a member of the Chamber of Commerce, as stating, “I suppose you could say we are fairly progressive down here in Cork...[we] recognized that this group are a part of our society and have as much right to march as anyone else.”<sup>197</sup> Letting the queer group into the parade allowed the Chamber of Commerce to project forward a “twenty-first-century version of Ireland” aligned with what other liberal, capitalist countries were doing.<sup>198</sup> This perspective aligns with Bowyer’s argument that the inclusion of a “global gay brand” allowed Ireland to demonstrate liberal sensibilities in Ireland and represent significant social and economic modernization.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>193</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>194</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>195</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>196</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>197</sup> Maguire, 107.

<sup>198</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>199</sup> Bowyer, 805.

O'Donnell also proposed that since the queer activist groups in Dublin, like the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, were so focused on the goal of decriminalization and other legal reform in 1992, Cork's position as a "second city" enabled them to be "before Dublin in lots of things in terms of LGBT politics."<sup>200</sup> Such logic did not apply to the United States, where the GLIB and ILGO Boston faced even more vitriolic responses to their St. Patrick's protests and similar legal frustrations. Regardless, the existence of the Cork contingent in the 1992 St. Patrick's Day parade illuminated the difference between Irish-America and Ireland regarding the societal acceptance of queer Irishness.

The parades in Cork and later in Dublin were covered by the *Irish Echo* and *Voice*, demonstrating an interest in and awareness of the discrepancy between Irish-American and Irish perspectives in the United States. The *Echo* mentioned the Cork parade, writing, "in Cork City, the gays took part in the St. Patrick's Day festivities; they won the prize for the best newcomer's float."<sup>201</sup> Letters to the editor in the *Echo* from Irish-American community members also brought up the Cork parade to either support or continue to dissuade ILGO. One letter mentioned, "Gays marched to the cheers of onlookers in Cork, Ireland, last St. Patrick's Day without incident." In contrast, another letter mandated that "statements about gays marching in the corresponding parade in Cork or gays (in general) being or not being allowed to march are irrelevant and outside the scope of this issue."<sup>202</sup> Irish-Americans either acknowledged the conflicting nature of the Cork parade or continued to dismiss it in their tirades against ILGO. Significant cognitive dissonance was required to maintain that Irishness was incompatible with queerness when events in the homeland directly contradicted that position.

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<sup>200</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>201</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 339, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 12," 4.

<sup>202</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 339, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 12," 4; NYU AIA 004, Box 39, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI No. 10," 8.

Coverage in the *Voice* of the Cork parade was more extensive, with an entire article in the March 31, 1992 edition titled “Cork Gays March” stating:

While St. Patrick’s Day Parades in Boston and New York were marred by controversies surrounding the entry applications of homosexual groups, the City of Cork in Ireland unhesitatingly accepted a gay group into its parade, and even went on to award the group a prize for ‘best new entry.’ ...News reports said that there was nothing but cheers for the group from the estimated crowd of 60,000.<sup>203</sup>

The article also included a quote from Catherine McCarthy, a member of the Cork contingent who had also marched with ILGO in the 1991 parade, saying that “The Irish Americans seem to believe they are upholding a view of Ireland that probably never was, and it is certainly not the Ireland I know.”<sup>204</sup> That perfectly encapsulated the sentiment of much of the queer Irish action surrounding the St. Patrick’s Day parade and even the motivation of positive reactions from straight Irish spectators, to disabuse notions of an Ireland that would categorically deny ILGO and other queer groups from existing. The *Voice*’s inclusion of such a quote also may have forced Irish-Americans to consider such contradiction, while the *Echo* did not. The *Voice* also referenced the Cork parade in the April 7 “Citizen Kane” entitled “Parade Post Script”:

After the participation of a gay contingent in the Cork St. Patrick’s Day Parade it may already have struck people that there is an important divergence between conservative elements in the Irish community in the United States and certain developments in the Ould Country. (It should also be noted that not only did the Cork gays not need any police protection but they won the prize for best new parade entrant. Try to imagine that happening in New York!).<sup>205</sup>

Farrelly, regular contributor and editor of the “Citizen Kane” segment, took a joking tone to acknowledge the dissonance between Ireland and Irish-American ideas of Ireland. He singled out the conservative contingent of Irish America as having misconceptions about Irish social and political developments. He pointed out the irony of their discrimination against ILGO in the name

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<sup>203</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 13,” 22.

<sup>204</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 13,” 22.

<sup>205</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 14,” 18.

of Irishness. Overall, newspaper coverage of the Cork parade presented Irish-Americans with information about the contradiction between their imagined Irishness and reality.

In Dublin, the National Gay and Lesbian Federation was accepted into the St. Patrick's Day parade and marched without incident. A March 17 article from the *Echo* covered Dublin's inclusion of the group, writing:

It is one of Ireland's little ironies that while homosexuality is still technically illegal in the republic, the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Dublin will this year have a gay float. Without fuss, and with consummate good grace, Dublin Tourism, the event's organizer, has given the go-ahead to the National Lesbian and Gay Federation to take part.<sup>206</sup>

The article also quoted a spokesman from Dublin Tourism, saying, "If they want to march on the basis of their sexuality, that's their business, not ours. We have no difficulty with them taking part. The parade is non-sectarian, non-religious, and non-political. They are citizens of this city the same as you and I."<sup>207</sup> The parade's organization by Dublin Tourism also aligns with O'Donnell and Bowyer's proposed arguments that the impetus to accept gay groups into the parades stemmed from a desire to appear modernized socially and economically. Ireland's economy was also fueled significantly by tourism, and marketing campaigns contributed to the creation of the idea of Ireland as an ancestral homeland for Irish-Americans, as well as just a place of origin.<sup>208</sup> Although the inclusion of groups in both Cork and Dublin parades marks a degree of acceptance of queerness in Ireland, they may have been motivated by the desire to appear socially and economically liberal rather than by actual, wholehearted endorsement.

An article in the March 24, 1993 edition of the *Echo* detailed the events of the Dublin parade:

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<sup>206</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 339, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 12," 4.

<sup>207</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 339, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 12," 4.

<sup>208</sup> O'Brien and Rogers, 139.

Just hours before New York City police carted away members of ILGO on Fifth Avenue, a gay group took part in Dublin's St. Patrick's Day parade largely without incident. Riding atop a rainbow float, 10 members of the National Lesbian and Gay Federation made their way up O'Connell Street in the 24<sup>th</sup> annual Dublin parade. It was the first time a gay group had taken part in Ireland's largest parade...the 350,000 spectators who turned out for the parade cheered the gay contingent along with the other groups...the group was warmly received by those on the viewing stand by the GPO, although Prenderville said Irish Americans there were somewhat quiet. Prenderville said that the inclusion of gays in Dublin's parade showed that the gay community was a part of society in Ireland.<sup>209</sup>

The consistent comparison between the treatment of gay groups in the United States and Ireland, made even by the *Echo* in 1993, demonstrate a general awareness of the dissonance between understandings of Irish identity. One potential explanation for the ease of acceptance of gay groups into Irish St. Patrick's Day parades is that the parades were not essential to Irish identity. St. Patrick's Day parades were originally an American phenomenon, demonstrated by the fact that the 1993 parade was only Dublin's twenty-fourth time hosting one. Most Irish people did not have to declare their Irishness while living as citizens in Ireland itself. Immigrants to America and subsequent generations of Irish-Americans used the parade to express an ethnic identity (and/or a religious one) and to assert their claim to Irishness publicly. ILGO's founding, then, was motivated by the desire to proclaim Irishness and queerness in the specific context of the United States and the environment of New York City's Irish-American community. As St. Patrick's Day parades hold less significance to Irish identity in Ireland, any supposed challenges to that identity in the form of queerness were readily accepted and not perceived as destructive or threatening.

However, that does not mean that queer groups marching in St. Patrick's Day parades in Ireland held no significance. It demonstrated increased cultural acceptance of LGBT people in a previously silencing environment. Aidan McKearney's study of the experiences of gay men in the rural west and northwest region of Ireland centered specifically on rural identities separate from

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<sup>209</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 39, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 13," 3, 31.

the urban gay context. One section focused on the impact of local queer networks and their participation in acts of radical visibility, highlighting the Longford LGBT group's involvement in the St. Patrick's Day Parade as attracting national television coverage. An interviewee stated:

Our very existence, our very presence tells the local people that there are LGBT people living and working here, amongst them...that we are not some strange species up in Dublin...and that we are not going to hide ourselves away in a corner, we can proudly walk in our own town in the St. Patrick's Day parade...I think that tells people we are not afraid and not ashamed.<sup>210</sup>

St. Patrick's Day parades still held significance for the declaration of Irish identity, and the participation of queer groups in rural west Ireland marked a local radicalism which sought inclusion in the particularities of their geographic context.<sup>211</sup> This impulse for queer inclusion in the parades, inspired by ILGO, demonstrated the impact of their message even in Ireland and the importance of asserting queer identity through public demonstration.

The application and acceptance of queer groups into St. Patrick's Day parades in Cork in 1992 and in Dublin in 1993, directly inspired by and responding to the actions and ideology of ILGO in the United States, indicates the impact of ILGO in queer Irish circles and Ireland more broadly. These parades and the positive responses of queer participants and straight spectators were placed deliberately in conversation with the discriminatory responses of Irish-America. Irish actors were motivated to correct the version of Irishness that conservative Catholics like the AOH maintained that they were defending. This inclusion may have been partially inspired by the desire to seem economically and socially liberalized by incorporating the "global gay brand." Still, it does demonstrate some degree of acceptance of queerness in Ireland even before official decriminalization. Although St. Patrick's Day parades in Ireland did not hold the same significance

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<sup>210</sup> Aidan McKearney, "Changing Landscapes: Gay Men in the West and Northwest of Ireland," *Sexualities* 25, no. 5–6 (2020), 652.

<sup>211</sup> McKearney, 656.



in terms of the assertion and claiming of ethnic identity as they do in America, they still held identity- and nationally-based importance, as is demonstrated in the radical participation of queer groups in the parades in more rural counties and locales. Therefore, ILGO's movement prompted an examination of Irish identity more broadly and engendered a conversation about the nature of queerness within Irish identity and the right of Irish-Americans to claim that identity.

### *Solidarity Across Borders, Violence, and Nationalist Thought*

ILGO's actions also prompted movements of solidarity across borders, sectarian violence, and conflicting dimensions of nationalist thought. Firstly, any solidarity expressed by queer Irish groups towards ILGO necessitated crossing national boundaries across the Atlantic. More significantly, the Troubles captivated Irish and Irish-American social and political consciousness from the late 1960s until 1998 with the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Indeed, much coverage of ILGO and the issue of the St. Patrick's Day parade by Irish-American newspapers lamented the existence of such a controversy for pulling the attention from the sectarian and ethno-nationalist conflict. In a time when many groups in Northern Ireland were bitterly divided from those in the Republic, queer groups organized across the conflict, both for gay rights more broadly and also on behalf of ILGO. Finally, the expression of support for ILGO and queer movements from Sinn Féin, a nationalist political party, and other nationalist figures such as Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, resolved in some way the tension between queerness and nationalism in Irish identity formation.

The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network was founded in 1989 explicitly to campaign for law reform. Although they were primarily focused on achieving the goal of decriminalizing homosexuality in the Republic, they still fought for and expressed support for ILGO. A collection

of material entitled “Resource Material on Lesbian/Gay Law Reform,” published by GLEN on April 11, 1992, included several ILGO mentions. One excerpted a statement from Monica Barnes, chairwoman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Women’s Rights, made on March 6, 1992, which expressed:

disapproval of the fact that the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization of New York (ILGO) have been banned from marching in this year’s St. Patrick’s Day Parade. Irish people are decent, compassionate, and tolerant, and this action of the Ancient Order of Hibernians does not reflect this.<sup>212</sup>

GLEN’s documentation of political support for ILGO from the Irish government and inclusion in a collection of legal materials demonstrates ILGO’s significance to their organizing in Ireland and beyond.

Later, in a section entitled “International Contacts,” they wrote that GLEN networks with the following organizations, including ILGO New York, writing:

ILGO supports GLEN’s demands and campaign. We have co-operated in raising awareness in Ireland of the refusal by the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) to allow them to participate in the St. Patrick’s Day parade because it is a ‘Catholic event.’<sup>213</sup>

Transnational networks of solidarity, with both sides supporting each other’s campaigns, were forged due to the publicity ILGO and GLEN merited in their efforts. The inclusion of ILGO in the “International Contacts” section demonstrated the connection between the two organizations and the provision of support from both parties. ILGO even congratulated GLEN for their victory in decriminalizing homosexuality, writing that they “have fought long and hard...and have won!” in a 1993 edition of *ILGO News*.<sup>214</sup> Although GLEN campaigned mostly for decriminalization, they

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<sup>212</sup> Trinity College Dublin Library Archive, “GLEN Resource Material on Lesbian/Gay Law Reform,” Hirschfield Center, 1992, 13.

<sup>213</sup> Trinity College Dublin Library Archive, “GLEN Resource Material on Lesbian/Gay Law Reform,” Hirschfield Center, 1992, 17.

<sup>214</sup> National Library of Ireland (Hereafter, NLI), Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,972/8, “ILGO News June 1993.”

involved themselves in the transnational network of support for queerness and Irish identity forged by ILGO and received support in return.

The Northern Irish Gay Rights Association also supported ILGO tremendously during the 1990s. They were founded in 1975 in Belfast, with membership drawn from both sides of the Troubles.<sup>215</sup> Homosexuality was decriminalized in Northern Ireland in 1982, over a decade before GLEN's successful efforts in the Republic in 1993.<sup>216</sup> The secretary, Seán McGouran, orchestrated and described many of the solidarity actions organized by the group starting in 1992. In a letter, McGouran wrote that these actions "have not been very effective" and should be expanded outward "to the Irish 'diaspora,' and also anyone who wishes to join in a protest against an injunction done to Gay people, simply because they are Gay."<sup>217</sup> This letter was written to an unnamed publication inviting their readers to contact NIGRA, who promised to "furnish anyone contacting [them] with materials on the matter."<sup>218</sup> McGouran mentioned that they have "ILGO's permission to organize this solidarity campaign," indicating a level of communication and coordinated activism between the two groups.<sup>219</sup> He also highlighted that NIGRA marched in the 1998 St. Patrick's Day parade in Belfast, the first sponsored by the city authorities, noting that they were "well-received" and that the bigotry faced by ILGO "no longer exists in the island of Ireland."<sup>220</sup> Notably, he referenced the "island of Ireland" in the context of such exaggerated bigotry and sectarian violence, which had characterized much of the public perception of Ireland in the past decades. By emphasizing that the actions of the AOH stand in contrast to that of NIGRA and the rest of Ireland, including

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<sup>215</sup> Lacey, 248.

<sup>216</sup> Lacey, 255.

<sup>217</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. "NIGRA Saint Patrick's Day."

<sup>218</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. "NIGRA Saint Patrick's Day."

<sup>219</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. "NIGRA Saint Patrick's Day."

<sup>220</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. "NIGRA Saint Patrick's Day."

the North, McGouran highlighted the extent of support for ILGO as existing across and beyond such violence.

Another letter written by McGouran showcased the action taken to support ILGO in 1998 and 1999, which he viewed as somewhat in “shambles,” attributing that to the lack of preparedness from various groups for the “long haul” of ILGO’s fight.<sup>221</sup> Within this letter, he mentioned reaching out to groups and publications in London, Birmingham, Glasgow, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United States and Ireland.<sup>222</sup> Clearly, NIGRA and McGouran considered these solidarity campaigns with ILGO to be central to their activism due to the extent of their organizing efforts. Another letter, written directly to ILGO, asked permission to set up an ILGO solidarity group in Ireland to “put our own solidarity in the matter of the St. Patrick’s Day parade on a firmer footing.”<sup>223</sup> He posited that emphasis on the year 2000 as the tenth year of ILGO’s campaign may be a “selling point” in interesting more groups in the matter and “[convincing] substantial numbers to take a long-term view of this sort of campaigning” that of demonstrations, pickets, and epistolary campaigns.<sup>224</sup> McGouran signed each of these letters with the phrase, “Yours in solidarity,” demonstrating the clearly-defined actions and intentions of NIGRA in support of ILGO.

The efforts of NIGRA included a picket of Aer Lingus in Dublin in 2000 in protest of their sponsoring of the New York St. Patrick’s Day parade, as documented in Volume 10 No 2 of *Upstart*, an “independent publication from Northern Ireland for Gay Women and Men.” The article described the experience of the picket, mentioning that they got a “very good reception from those

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<sup>221</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. “NIGRA Letter.”

<sup>222</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. “NIGRA Letter.”

<sup>223</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. “NIGRA to ILGO – St. Patrick’s Day Letter.”

<sup>224</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. “NIGRA to ILGO – St. Patrick’s Day Letter.”

[they] spoke to,” with “many [stopping] to discuss the picket with [them].”<sup>225</sup> The article also included a transcription of the leaflet which NIGRA passed out, entitled “Year Eight – End the Hate!” and included statements such as:

The Hibs claim to be concerned about Civil Rights in Northern Ireland for decades – yet they are eager to violate the Civil Rights of Irish people in America. Gay women and men from Ireland are forbidden to walk in the St. Patrick’s Day Parade in New York – yet for all this century this parade has been a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural festival. Gay people can join the St. Patrick’s Day parades in Dublin and Cork (and now Belfast!) but not New York.<sup>226</sup>

NIGRA deliberately indicated the hypocrisy of the AOH, with their concern for civil rights violations associated with the Troubles coinciding with their discrimination against ILGO. As a group from Northern Ireland, NIGRA’s positioning in their advocacy for ILGO granted them significant authority, even as their actions may not have been incredibly impactful.

Another letter from NIGRA attempted to organize solidarity and orchestrate the beginnings of an “island-wide solidarity campaign” from Ireland, putting pressure on the AOHA, which “may well have ten years (or more to go).”<sup>227</sup> They proposed that a significant picket in Belfast before the events of St. Patrick’s Day 2000 would have a powerful impact, tying the exclusion of ILGO to the AOH’s refusal to admit the NI Civil Rights Association into the parade in the period of 1968-1970, a time in which “such support would have been of inestimable worth.”<sup>228</sup> Again, NIGRA positioned the AOH on the opposite side of civil rights organizing from them, even as the AOH and much of Irish-America “[claim] to be concerned about Civil Rights in the region” of Northern Ireland.<sup>229</sup> NIGRA’s public and repeated evisceration of the hypocrisy of the AOHA in

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<sup>225</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, “*upstart* Vol 10 No. 2”

<sup>226</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, “*upstart* Vol 10 No. 2”

<sup>227</sup> Dublin City Library Archive (Hereafter, DCLA), LGBT Ephemera Box 1, “NIGRA – St. Patrick’s Day Lesbian & Gay Solidarity.”

<sup>228</sup> DCLA, LGBT Ephemera Box 1 “NIGRA – St. Patrick’s Day Lesbian & Gay Solidarity.”

<sup>229</sup> DCLA, LGBT Ephemera Box 1 “NIGRA – St. Patrick’s Day Lesbian & Gay Solidarity.”

defense of ILGO may indicate a frustration indicative of Irish groups more broadly over the hypocrisy of Irish-American groups regarding the Troubles. The letter closed: “If you happen to pick up this leaflet after St. Patrick’s Day 2000, there will still be (barring a miracle) plenty to do in the coming years.”<sup>230</sup>

NIGRA organized solidarity actions in Ireland and beyond on behalf of ILGO since 1992, collaborating directly with ILGO and conducting campaigns and pickets of their own. The centrality of ILGO to the group’s organizing efforts demonstrates the significance of ILGO’s movement to queer activist networks in Ireland and the power of queer identity to transcend national borders and sectarian conflict.

However, support from ILGO across national borders and conflict was not limited to queer activist groups. Explicitly nationalist organizations and individuals also expressed support and solidarity for ILGO, helping to collapse the controversy surrounding queerness and nationalist movements. Sinn Féin is one of the nationalist political parties in Ireland, initially founded in 1905 and associated with the Irish War of Independence and the establishment of the Republic of Ireland. During the Troubles, they were associated with the Provisional Irish Republican Army. They expressed official support for gay and lesbian rights in 1980.<sup>231</sup> However, this did not result in immediate or significant support for the gay rights movement in Ireland from all members of the nationalist movement.

Volume 3 No. 3 of *An Glór Gafa*, or *The Captive Voice*, a Sinn Féin newspaper written by Irish Republican Prisoner of Wars, advocated including gays and lesbians in the nationalist movement. The article, written by Brendí McClenaghan, who was imprisoned in Long Kesh, labeled gay men and lesbian women as “invisible comrades” who had been involved in the struggle

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<sup>230</sup> DCLA, LGBT Ephemera Box 1, “NIGRA – St. Patrick’s Day Lesbian & Gay Solidarity.”

<sup>231</sup> Lacey, 251.

for national liberation and independence “as long as any other section of our people.”<sup>232</sup> McClenaghan argued that although women were once nearly invisible in the nationalist movement, they have succeeded in putting feminist issues on “the agenda of the anti-imperialist fight” and that a similar conversation needed to occur for queer nationalists. He wrote that “national liberation by its very nature incorporates gay/lesbian liberation as an integral part” and that homophobia within Irish society and the Republican movement “must be confronted not only by gays and lesbians but by everyone who espouses the ideals of republicanism.”<sup>233</sup> The article declared support for gays and lesbians within the nationalist movement, directly aligning the ideologies of queer liberation and Irish republicanism. Its publication in the winter of 1991 may indicate a connection with ILGO’s assertion of queerness within Irish identity, linking queerness to radicalism and the ideas of republicanism.

One significant leader in the Nationalist movement was Bernadette Devlin McAliskey. She was a civil rights leader from Northern Ireland, present at Bloody Sunday (a civil rights demonstration on January 30, 1972, where British soldiers opened fire on the crowd unprompted in Derry). She was a platform speaker when the shooting began. Elected MP for Westminster in 1968, she punched the Home Secretary Reginald Maudling after his comments that the paratroopers responsible for the murders of 13 civilians were shooting in self-defense.<sup>234</sup> She commanded tremendous respect and authority in the Nationalist movement, although distanced somewhat for her staunch republican feminist stance, dubbed by some as ‘Fidel Castro in a mini-skirt.’<sup>235</sup> Devlin also built significant connections with other social movements transnationally,

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<sup>232</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,978/2-4, “*An Glór Gafa* Vol 3 No. 3.”

<sup>233</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,978/2-4, “*An Glór Gafa* Vol 3 No. 3.”

<sup>234</sup> Graham Dawson, “Trauma, Place and the Politics of Memory: Bloody Sunday, Derry, 1972-2004,” *History Workshop Journal* 59, no. 1 (Spring 2005), 165.

<sup>235</sup> O’Keefe, 165.

touring the States in 1969 and visiting Angela Davis in prison.<sup>236</sup> Her experience in Irish-America was marred by frustration with the response from conservative Irish-Americans, consisting of backlash to her outspokenness regarding socialism and racial equality.<sup>237</sup>

Perhaps related to her frustration with the Irish-American community's hypocrisy, McAliskey repeatedly declared her support for ILGO, lending her authority in the Nationalist movement to their cause. Anne Maguire had worked on McAliskey's election campaigns and wrote, "In the 1990s, Bernadette immediately supported ILGO when she heard what was happening in New York. She's never marched in the St. Patrick's Day Parade but has said she will make one exception: she'll march when ILGO marches."<sup>238</sup> McAliskey immediately declared her support for ILGO, understanding and acknowledging the significance of ILGO's attempt to assert queerness in the Irish-American community. Paralleling her attempt to inoculate racial and overtly socialist politics in the Nationalist movement, McAliskey's support for ILGO aligned with radical, feminist republicanism. The "Upcoming" section of the Calendar in the June 1993 edition of *ILGO News* stated, "Saturday, October 30: Bernadette Devlin McAliskey is coming to NYC and to visit ILGO."<sup>239</sup> Her visit to the campaign in 1993 marked ILGO's movement as significant transnationally and incorporated within an Irish self-determination agenda. An ILGO flyer from 1995 quoted her again, urging "all the other bigots [to] remember [her] words":

I will never march in the St. Patrick's Day Parade until I can march with ILGO. Twenty-six years ago we took to the streets in the North of Ireland to protest discrimination. Now ILGO is fighting the same battle on the streets of New York City. Americans who oppose

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<sup>236</sup> Theresa O'Keefe, "'Mother Ireland, Get Off Our Backs' Republican Feminist Resistance in the North of Ireland," essay, in *The Troubles in Northern Ireland and Theories of Social Movements*, ed. Lorenzo Bosi and Gianluca De Fazio, (Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 172.

<sup>237</sup> Matthew J O'Brien, "Irish America, Race, and Bernadette Devlin's 1969 American Tour," *New Hibernia Review* 14, no. 2 (Summer 2010), 85.

<sup>238</sup> Maguire, 29.

<sup>239</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,972/8, "ILGO News June 1993."



discrimination against Catholics in the North of Ireland cannot turn around and discriminate against lesbian and gay people at home.<sup>240</sup>

Here McAliskey directly contradicted the hypocrisy of the Irish-American community's avid support for civil rights in Ireland with their intentional discrimination against Irish lesbians and gays. Her stance, perhaps influenced by her history of advocating for other causes like Black liberation and socialism, placed ILGO on the side of Irish nationalism, fueled by self-determination and the right to exist without colonial structures of violence. Positioning the AOH and conservative Irish-America on the side of the oppressor, McAliskey's consistent and vocal support of ILGO helped bolster ILGO's position in Ireland and Irish-America.

Networks of solidarity between ILGO and other Irish groups were built across national borders, sectarian violence, and the Atlantic Ocean. The support of GLEN and NIGRA, especially NIGRA's consistent organizing of boycotts and pickets, marked the creation and maintenance of transnational alliances between queer Irish groups and ILGO, demonstrating the significance that the actions and message of ILGO to the gay rights movement in Ireland. Additionally, the vocal support of figures within the republican movement, including Sinn Féin, political prisoner newspapers, and Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, helped to collapse the contradiction between queerness and nationalism in Irish identity formation. These groups placed ILGO on the side of Irish republicanism and radicalism, comparing the discrimination of the AOH against ILGO with that of the British against Catholics in Northern Ireland, forcing a confrontation of Irish-American hypocrisy. ILGO's campaign extended beyond the confines of the queer movement, impacting the Irish Nationalist movement even as the Troubles endured.

### *ILGO Ireland, the Tenth-Anniversary Trip, and Queer Transatlantic Identity*

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<sup>240</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, "St. Patrick's Day – Year 4."

An offshoot of ILGO was founded in Dublin, ILGO Ireland, intended to support the actions of ILGO from Ireland and drum up support from queer activist groups there. ILGO Ireland's most significant action was organizing a tenth-anniversary trip to New York in 2000, bringing Irish queer activists and individuals to support ILGO's protest march. However, individual queers had been traveling across the Atlantic to support ILGO throughout the 1990s, forging a queered, transatlantic Irish identity.

Katherine O'Donnell traveled to New York several times throughout the decade, most notably in 1993. An account of her experience appeared in the June 1993 edition of *ILGO News*, with her stating the reason for their journey "to be the living proof that there ARE queers living in Ireland, and to remind America that lesbians, bisexuals, and gays could parade without fear or prejudice on Patrick's Day—in Ireland."<sup>241</sup> Her role in orchestrating the 1992 Cork parade directly informed her desire to appear in New York and again motivated her to distinguish between Irish-America and Ireland. O'Donnell and another Cork woman, Helena, could not walk with ILGO in the parade because they could "jeopardize [their] visas" if arrested. She reported that it "shocked [her] to watch people who looked like [her] brothers, cousins, neighbors, and friend walk by [her], some of them cursing at queers, and to realize that there was no place for [her] in their parade."<sup>242</sup> Being directly confronted with the vicious homophobia of the Irish-American community after being cheered by Cork's spectators the year prior was difficult for O'Donnell to witness. She did press after the events of the parade and reported being unsure how to answer the question of whether Cork was a better place to be gay than New York City, responding:

Cork was a better place to be queer on Patrick's Day, and it was a kinder, gentler place to bring up queer children. But every Irish queer knows the reality, that there is no safe haven,

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<sup>241</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,972/8, "ILGO News June 1993."

<sup>242</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,972/8, "ILGO News June 1993."

yet, for Irish queers, and nothing has exposed our vulnerability as much as our attempts to walk with pride, and with each other, on St. Patrick's Day.<sup>243</sup>

O'Donnell did not paint Ireland as a queer utopia, as it was not. However, she acknowledged directly to the American and Irish press that there was not the same resistance to the assertion of queer identity or queer groups in St. Patrick's Day parades. Each year, individuals and small contingents of Irish queers able to fundraise or fund their transportation traveled to New York City, slowly building a network of transatlantic queer resistance. Much of the confusion from Irish activists seemed partly due to the expectation that the response would be more accepting in America and the desire to demonstrate Ireland's acceptance of the queer groups as a marker of liberalization and progress.

The founding of ILGO Ireland and the organization of the 2000 tenth-anniversary trip marks the zenith of a queered, transatlantic activist network and the development of a specifically transient and queered Irish identity. The board included Katherine O'Donnell and Ailbhe Smyth, academics at University College Dublin, and Linda Cullen, director of the 1993 RTÉ documentary *We're Here, We're Queer, We're Irish*, covering the 1993 parade and protest. Additionally, Catherine "Catch" Keeley and Niall Martin were members, with Catch Keeley involved in founding the original ILGO in New York. Notes from a meeting on October 20, 1999, included extensive planning regarding the trip, with "the list of people interested and definite in going to NY starting to grow, from personal contacts and from the e-mail shot that Katherine did."<sup>244</sup> These meeting notes also demonstrated the interconnectedness of the two ILGOs, with "Linda and Katherine [needing] info from Anne/ILGO re: Accommodation."<sup>245</sup> Especially in the context of the tenth-anniversary of ILGO's fight, the importance of an Irish contingent to the parade was

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<sup>243</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,972/8, "ILGO News June 1993."

<sup>244</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, "Notes from meeting ILGO 2000 – October 20<sup>th</sup> 1999."

<sup>245</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, "Notes from meeting ILGO 2000 – October 20<sup>th</sup> 1999."

tantamount, with many of the original organizers experiencing burnout and support from queer New York networks declining.

A flyer advertising the trip stated that “Dozens of Irish lesbians and gays are travelling to New York to join their (ILGO’s) protest on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. The Irish delegation will travel by cavalcade into New York City on March 15<sup>th</sup>” and asked, “Do you want to join us for this historic event?”<sup>246</sup> It provided space for individuals to fill out contact information and ask questions regarding travel plans:

The outbound flight with the group is on March 15 – on what date do you want your return flight?

If you would like to be put up by ILGO friends in New York – on what dates will you need accommodation?

Through extremely generous donations there are some travel subsidies available.

Do you require a travel subsidy?

Are you interested in being contacted for solidarity protests in Ireland?<sup>247</sup>

ILGO Ireland’s flyer left room for multiple kinds of participation in the protest. Significantly, the financial subsidies provided enabled various people to participate in the trip, whereas previous individual trips would have been self-funded. The concerted effort to bring a large group of queers to New York for the 2000 protest demonstrates the continued significance of ILGO to queer organizing in Ireland and the Irish social consciousness.

An ILGO 2000 planning packet provided information about final headcounts and travel details. Fifty people made the trip: four from Galway, four from Cork, four from Derry, and the rest ostensibly from Dublin<sup>248</sup>. This packet, however, only listed those for whom ILGO Ireland had made flight arrangements. Those who arranged their travel were not included in the total count. The presence of fifty Irish queers at the 2000 protest was significantly felt, adding a much-needed

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<sup>246</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, “ILGO Ireland New York March 17 2000.”

<sup>247</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, “LGO Ireland New York March 17 2000.”

<sup>248</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1. “ILGO 2000 New York.”

boost to ILGO New York's efforts. Katherine O'Donnell recounted her experience at the 2000 parade, where she was arrested. She said that the tenth-anniversary protest and the act of being arrested and "lifted off Fifth Avenue" functioned to "[choreograph] the realities of what homophobia looks like."<sup>249</sup> She characterized her choice to get arrested in the protest, even though the "worst that could have happened was [her being] deported," as an act of "conscientious objection."<sup>250</sup> She spent twenty-six hours in a "freezing and cold" jail cell and got a "tiny tourist experience of what it'd be like to be in the criminal justice system in the States."<sup>251</sup> A publisher from Arlen House wrote to Katherine that it was "good to finally meet [her] in New York," hoping that the "arrest wasn't too horrific."<sup>252</sup> The physical presence of ILGO Ireland representatives at the 2000 parade and their willingness to get arrested indicate the level of dedication to ILGO's cause from queer Irish groups and the existence of a transnational solidarity network unconcerned with the interference of either state apparatus.

A selection of email correspondence between Katherine O'Donnell and Margot Backus regarding the motivations of Irish queers going to the US to participate in the ILGO protest perhaps best articulated these ideas:

I think the biggest piece of it is NYC's hegemonic position in defining Irish identity. And the US's hegemonic position in defining Irish identity, which is crystalized in the NYC parade...[Irish-Americans] are trying to keep the real modern-day Ireland, or representations thereof, PURE by mandating a public representation of Irish/Irish American identity as strong (militarily, hence the US Army) and pure (hence all the little girls with batons in green jumpers and the exclusion of ILGO). And Irish queers understand correctly that it constitutes an enormous threat to THEM and to their vision of Ireland...because [Irish-Americans] are, for reasons they themselves don't understand, driven to turn Ireland itself into a purified museum so that their own inherited confusion about their own identity and history

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<sup>249</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>250</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>251</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>252</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, "Arlen House April 7 2000."

is never threatened, because Ireland is constituted only in terms of simple, unchanging, emptied out cultural symbols void of any actual content or meaning.<sup>253</sup>

The existence of ILGO Ireland, the 2000 tenth-anniversary trip, and the centrality of ILGO to queer Irish organizing help us understand the contested nature of Irish identity formation. The intensity of the claim of more conservative Irish-American entities to the identity necessitates defending and complicating through groups like ILGO and the assertion of queerness as an essential part of that identity on both sides of the Atlantic. The existence of these networks of solidarity, then, across borders, violence, and oceans, creates a queered Irish identity which must be transatlantic, which must be loudly proclaimed, and which must be defended by queers on both sides. Ultimately ILGO is significant to queer Irish circles and Ireland as a whole and essential to the global definition of Irishness.

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<sup>253</sup> NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 46,009/1, “thoughts about ILGO and Ireland.”

## **Conclusion: Reasserted and Resilient – ILGO as Central to Queer Irish Identity and History**

The Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization and their efforts to march as *out Irish* in the New York City St. Patrick's Day Parade mattered significantly to queer New York, Irish, and Irish-American circles and their competing understandings of identity formation. This thesis has argued that the ILGO movement created a transnational network of solidarity between queers in New York and Ireland, resulting in the making of a new Irish identity that was queer, transatlantic, and transitory.

That ILGO's bold and repeated assertions of the coexistence of queerness and Irishness impacted queer activism in New York City stands in stark contrast to histories of queer New York and Irishness that have long seen them as fundamental opposites. As the analysis of records from Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride reveals, there was a flurry of support for ILGO in the movement's early years as they resisted their exclusion from the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Queer Nation, a radical direct-action group, incorporated ILGO into their programmatic and advertising material. They featured a "St. Patrick's Day Working Group" and identified the parade in their published materials as a significant moment in the gay rights movement. They also included ILGO's information on their contact sheets from 1992, further indicating a degree of coordination and collaboration between ILGO, Queer Nation, and the larger movement in New York City. In short, ILGO was firmly entrenched within queer activist networks of the 1990s.

Heritage of Pride, the group organizing the New York City Pride Parade, also supported ILGO and its campaign. Members of Heritage of Pride volunteered as parade marshals and joined the crowd as protest marchers. Moreover, their meeting notes also demonstrate an interest in ILGO for research-gathering purposes: they *monitored* and *observed* ILGO's interactions with the NYPD to "negotiate more" for the pride parade. Although they supported ILGO ideologically, Heritage

of Pride sought to maximize their interactions with police and city authorities as they struggled to secure parade permits of their own.

The 1993 parade and protest, mired in controversy and legal battles, garnered various reactions from the queer activist networks regarding the radicality of ILGO's actions. The Mayor and NYPD took out an injunction against ILGO after they lost their court case, making any marchers guilty of criminal contempt and their planned protest march an act of civil disobedience. ILGO faced pressure from many "homocrats" (gay men in the Democratic Party system) and other prominent queer activists who wanted them to abandon their campaign as they feared it would jeopardize other ongoing campaigns to secure domestic partnership rights, a state-wide Gay Rights Bill, and the acceptance of gays in the military. Homocrats worried that ILGO's desire to assert their queerness in Irish communities was too risky and threatened the assimilationist goals of Irish-Americans and some queer activist organizations. Conversely, a fringe group known as the Civil Disobedience Rebels loudly criticized ILGO's actions as not radical enough and even mounted an alternative action to ILGO's protest march. Others like Sarah Schulman placed ILGO within the tradition of queer action against the religious right, arguing it was another effort at self-determination within the gay community. While queer activists might not have all agreed on ILGO's direct action campaign, these varied opinions legitimized and validated their mission.

As the individuals previously associated with bringing ILGO to the awareness of other organizations gradually receded from prominence, ILGO was primarily discarded by queer activist networks in New York. Although individuals may have continued to attend the annual protest, ILGO disappeared from the records of Queer Nation and Heritage of Pride after 1993. Heritage of Pride also may have been motivated to distance themselves from ILGO due to the legal conflict over the parade permit, potentially jeopardizing their interactions with the state and the



organization of the Pride Parade. Regardless, ILGO held tremendous significance within queer activist networks in New York, even as common attritional factors took hold.

ILGO's challenge also raised questions about the authority of conservative Catholic organizations to define "Irish-American." It thus prompted an examination within the New York Irish community regarding the purpose of the St. Patrick's Day Parade. The Ancient Order of Hibernians, whose New York County Board organized the parade and rejected ILGO's initial application, articulated their "moral obligations and legal responsibility" to the parade in internal documents to reassert control. In the years following the 1991 parade, the AOH repeatedly honored members associated with the St. Patrick's Day Parade and emphasized the importance of cultural legacy. Grounded in the historical position of the AOH as defenders of Catholicism and Irish identity, they interpreted ILGO's attempt to march in the parade as an attack, a form of "Catholic-bashing." References to ILGO were often implicit or coded. They frequently grouped ILGO with other "radical groups" like ACT-UP, which proved detrimental to ILGO's position within the Irish-American immigrant community. The actions of the AOH can be understood to represent the older, middle-class, conservative contingent of the New York Irish.

Irish-American newspapers covered ILGO and the parade issue extensively but with varying degrees of support and different tones in their treatment of the organization. Analysis of both the editorial coverage and letters to the editor revealed a variety of opinions from the Irish-American community, disproving the notion that there was any monolithic condemnation of ILGO. The *Irish Echo*, the "Oldest Irish American Newspaper" founded in 1928, took a derogatory tone towards ILGO in multiple editorials throughout the early 1990s. The editor initially showed support for the organization and criticized the hypocrisy of the AOH. However, as the existence of the parade itself was jeopardized, editorials shifted to blaming ILGO for the controversy and

demanded that ILGO acquiesce to the AOH's demands. They argued that "continuing [ILGO's] crusade would hurt and risk alienating thousands of Irish-Americans, including many within the AOH itself, who might otherwise be supportive of its cause."<sup>254</sup>

Commonly, the *Echo* published letters to the editor of contrasting opinions, one supporting ILGO and one denigrating them, usually with harsh and homophobic language. Although the supportive letters did demonstrate a degree of support for ILGO in the Irish-American community, they were usually authored by individuals unaffiliated with ILGO or Irish-American queers who redacted their names. Other supportive op-eds or letters published by the *Echo* were from Democratic Party politicians not officially affiliated with ILGO, whose spokespeople were only quoted in journalistic accounts of the crisis. Conversely, influential members of the AOH, such as George Clough Jr., the national president, were repeatedly given a platform by the paper. This discrepancy, alongside the accusatory tone of editorial coverage of ILGO, reveals the *Echo* to generally represent a more conservative demographic of the Irish-American community.

However, the spread of opinions represented in letters to the editor demonstrates the impact of ILGO's assertion of queerness and Irishness simultaneously. Community members debated whether the St. Patrick's Day parade was wholly religious in origin and purpose or whether it was simply a celebration of ethnic heritage to be governed by civic rules. Additionally, many conservative letters to the editor began to acknowledge the historical existence of Irish queers. However, they maintained that such individuals should remain closeted to access Irish-American identity and celebration. Still, the concession of Irish queers' existence acknowledges the confluence of the two identities, validating ILGO's message.

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<sup>254</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 37, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXV No. 5," 8.

The *Irish Voice* was founded in 1987 and deliberately positioned itself as a more liberal publication catering to new immigrants and the younger Irish-American generations. Its support and platforming of ILGO became a critical method to demonstrate progressivism. Before the controversy, the *Voice* published a feature about ILGO entitled “Irish Pride & Gay Identity” on October 20, 1990. As well as serving as an introduction to the broader Irish-American community, the feature provided ILGO members with a platform to articulate the reasons for their founding and the unique issues faced by queer Irish immigrants. Editorial coverage of ILGO and the parade crisis was also generally positive, ultimately arguing for the parade to be “organized in a way that makes it more accountable to the whole community.”<sup>255</sup>

The *Voice* did publish letters to the editor containing homophobic content, but they were usually accompanied by a direct rebuttal and outweighed by the many positive letters. Additionally, interviews with community members proved that the younger generation of Irish-Americans and new Irish immigrants were generally supportive of or indifferent to ILGO’s campaign.<sup>256</sup> The *Voice* also consistently included ILGO in event calendars and referenced them positively in advice columns, uplifting ILGO as a legitimate Irish-American organization and normalizing its message. The *Voice*’s provision of support, as well as their deliberate positioning as a more liberal and tolerant publication, validates the existence of support for ILGO in the Irish-American community, especially from the younger generation of Irish America.

These reactions from Irish-America were based partially on the idea of queerness being incompatible with Irishness, with Irishness being constructed as part of Irish-American identity formation to be pure and unchanging. Queer activists and straight participants in Ireland were motivated to disprove this notion of intolerant Irishness and actualized this by accepting queer

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<sup>255</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 12,” 8.

<sup>256</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 11/126, “*Irish Voice* Vol 6 No. 5,” 11.

groups into St. Patrick's Day Parades. In 1992, a contingent of lesbian and gay community members was accepted into the Cork Chamber of Commerce parade and won "the prize for the best newcomer's float."<sup>257</sup> Katherine O'Donnell stated that part of the interest in marching in the parade was to show Irish America that it "was not such a large, controversial issue as it was [there] just to be included in the parades."<sup>258</sup> In 1993, Dublin Tourism accepted the National Lesbian and Gay Federation into the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Both groups were cheered by hundreds of thousands of spectators, a stark contrast to the vitriol ILGO and affiliated groups continued to receive in American parades. This inclusion of the "global gay brand" may have been driven by a desire for Ireland to seem economically and socially liberated, but it was inclusion nonetheless.<sup>259</sup> As St. Patrick's Day Parades were a particularly American invention, meant to proclaim ethnic identity in the context of the United States, queer groups did not pose such a threat to a tenuous identity in Ireland. However, the participation of LGBT groups in St. Patrick's Day Parades in rural counties of Ireland was still significant and created a local radicalism unique to the western and northwestern regions of the country.<sup>260</sup>

Queer Irish groups and nationalist figures created solidarity networks that crossed international borders and sectarian violence. The Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, whose organizing efforts largely contributed to decriminalizing homosexuality in the Republic in 1993, included ILGO in documents surrounding law reform, even listing the organization as an "International Contact." The Northern Irish Gay Rights Association, spearheaded by Seán McGouran, orchestrated solidarity campaigns, pickets, and boycotts from 1992 onwards, considering ILGO to be a crucial issue to their organizing and leveraging their positioning as a

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<sup>257</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 339, "*Irish Echo* Vol LXVI, No. 12," 4.

<sup>258</sup> Katherine O'Donnell in discussion with the author, February 6, 2023.

<sup>259</sup> Bowyer, 805.

<sup>260</sup> McKearney, 656.

Northern Irish group to exert authority over Irish American opinions. They repeatedly criticized the AOH for their discriminatory actions, placing them on the ideological side of the British and deriding those who “[claim] to be concerned about Civil Rights in the region” of Northern Ireland but continued to deny ILGO.<sup>261</sup> Nationalist political parties like Sinn Féin declared support for ILGO and gay and lesbian rights in the republican movement more broadly. This was exemplified in an issue of the *An Glór Gafa* newsletter, arguing that “national liberation by its very nature incorporates gay/lesbian liberation as an integral part.”<sup>262</sup> Prominent figures in the movement, such as Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, also expressed support for ILGO on multiple occasions that helped to ease any tensions between queerness and nationalism. These actions highlight how ILGO’s campaign was considered a queer Irish issue and demonstrate the extent to which queer activism transcended national borders and sectarian conflict.

Though individual activists made trips from Ireland to support ILGO throughout the 1990s, the foundation of ILGO Ireland in 1999, combined with the organization’s presence at the protest in 2000 to join the campaign’s tenth-anniversary that marked ILGO as a fundamentally transnational queer movement. Fifty Irish queers flew out to support ILGO’s 2000 protest, orchestrated by the newly founded ILGO Ireland. This network supplemented the void of direct support from queer activist networks in New York and created a transatlantic solidarity network characterized by queer Irish immigrant identity. They dared to assert the coexistence of queerness and Irishness proudly, and the movements of support around them queered Irish identity, necessarily transatlantic and foundational to the global definition of Irishness. The story of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization should be considered essential to the histories of queer New York, Irish America, and queer Ireland.

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<sup>261</sup>DCLA, LGBT Ephemera Box 1, “NIGRA – St. Patrick’s Day Lesbian & Gay Solidarity.”

<sup>262</sup>NLI, Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,978/2-4, “*An Glór Gafa* Vol 3 No. 3.”

The New York County Board's ban on queer groups marching in the St. Patrick's Day Parade was officially lifted in 2014, but the issue of queer identity in Irish America is far from resolved.<sup>263</sup> Even in 2023, the Staten Island parade, organized by the Parade Committee of the Ancient Order of Hibernians under President Larry Cummings, continues to deny "homosexual organizations" from the parade.<sup>264</sup> The continued discrimination faced by queer Irish American groups only further reinforces the urgency of the original message of the Irish Lesbian and Gay Organization: "We would just be claiming our rightful place in the parade. Yes, we are homosexual. But we are also Irish, and we are no less Irish than any other group marching up 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue."<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Marc Santora, "Gay Groups to March in St. Patrick's Day Parade as a Ban Falls," *New York Times*, September 3, 2014.

<sup>264</sup> Victoria Manna, "LGBTQ Groups Barred from Staten Island St. Patrick's Day Parade Again," Staten Island St. Patrick's Day parade denies LGBTQ groups, March 2, 2023.

<sup>265</sup> NYU AIA 004, Box 7/122, "*Irish Voice* Vol 4 No. 42," 34.

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