

Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement. MARCIA M. GALLO. New York: Carroll & Graf, 2006. 274 p. ISBN 13: 978-0-78671-634-0.

Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement, which won the 2006 Lambda Book Award, is the first book-length exploration of the history, achievements, and underlying tensions of one of North America's most influential lesbian organizations. Marcia M. Gallo's interviews with former group members and extensive use of archival records provide a fascinating portrait of the group's rise and fall.

Formed in San Francisco in 1955, the Daughters of Bilitis (pronounced "Bill-EE-tis") (DOB) became an internationally renowned lesbian rights organization in the pre-Stonewall era. The group's name was a sly reference to the eponymous lesbian poet in Pierre Louÿ's *Songs of Bilitis*, and was chosen on the assumption that only other lesbians would understand it. The DOB was created as a social club by four couples; the organization was intended to provide a safe space for women who were tired of both police harassment and the scrutiny of tourists found in San Francisco's bar scene. However, in a move that would create the first of many internal schisms, founders Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon pushed the DOB to become a politically oriented "homophile" organization in 1956. The group grew slowly but steadily, thanks largely to the newsletter *The Ladder*; within two years there were local chapters in New York, Los Angeles, and other urban centres. In 1960, the DOB began sponsoring biennial conventions on issues of importance to gays and lesbians, and these events (which featured mostly sympathetic religious, medical, and legal authorities as guest speakers) garnered a fair amount of media attention. Throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s, the DOB's goals were explicitly assimilationist: members were expected to follow a dress code, and the group strove to promote lesbians as respectable, upstanding citizens yearning for greater inclusion in mainstream society. This strategy came under increasing attack toward the end of the 1960s and the beginning of 1970s, when the confrontational tactics of more radical groups like the Gay Liberation Front made the DOB seem timid and staid by comparison. However, as Gallo illustrates, those subsequent organizations owe a debt to the efforts of groups like the DOB, who faced great risks for their candor in earlier and more conservative times. A major structural reorganization in 1968, loss of *The Ladder* in 1972, ceaseless infighting, and a growing generation gap eventually brought about the DOB's demise, though some local chapters managed to continue into the early 1990s.

Different Daughters keeps issues of race, class, and gender at the forefront. While initially it is somewhat unsettling to read the ethnicity and class background of almost every person introduced, such designations do help the reader understand the group's significance within the larger social context of

mid-twentieth-century America. From its earliest days the DOB was mindful of multiple forms of oppression, and while it may have grown out of the shared misery of homophobia, the group also recognized that racism and sexism were powerful determinants of members' experiences. This consciousness led to some positive developments (e.g., membership was mixed from the group's inception; women of colour occupied prominent leadership roles), but it also may have contributed to the DOB's dissolution as bitter disagreements arose over fundamental principles such as assimilation vs. radicalism, gay liberation vs. women's liberation, and sexual orientation vs. race and/or class issues. These are familiar tensions for today's activists, and if nothing else, *Different Daughters* should serve as a cautionary tale about the political costs of internal squabbling.

Different Daughters was based on Gallo's PhD dissertation, and it manages to be both scholarly and accessible. Extensive oral history interviews provide excellent primary-source material; the death of at least two key members of the DOB (Barbara Gittings and Del Martin) in recent years makes these face-to-face sessions all the more valuable. The sixteen pages of glossy photos and newsletter excerpts, as well as Gallo's meticulously cited research in such repositories as the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Historical Society (San Francisco), Lesbian Herstory Archives (New York) and ONE Institute and Archives (Los Angeles), serve to underscore the important role that archival records play in the creation of cultural memory and identity. Without *The Ladder*, the DOB would have had a much smaller influence and probably would not have lasted as long as it did; in many ways, print was the ideal medium for the mid-twentieth-century lesbian community as it allowed people to participate as passively or as actively as their comfort levels dictated. Gallo has been careful here to preserve the pseudonyms of certain contributors, and in her prologue she makes the sobering point that many of the people who once fought so hard to come out have found themselves re-closeted in old age, dependent on caretakers or nursing home staff who presume them to be heterosexual.

Different Daughters is an important contribution to the still-young field of queer history and archives, which has tended to privilege the experience of gay men over that of lesbians. After years of being either ignored or cast as the "ladies auxiliary" (p. xxi) of such male-dominated groups as the Mattachine Society, Gallo has finally given the quietly revolutionary Daughters of Bilitis their due.

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