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Lesbian Schoolworker Records

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Author

Granholm, Kimberlee

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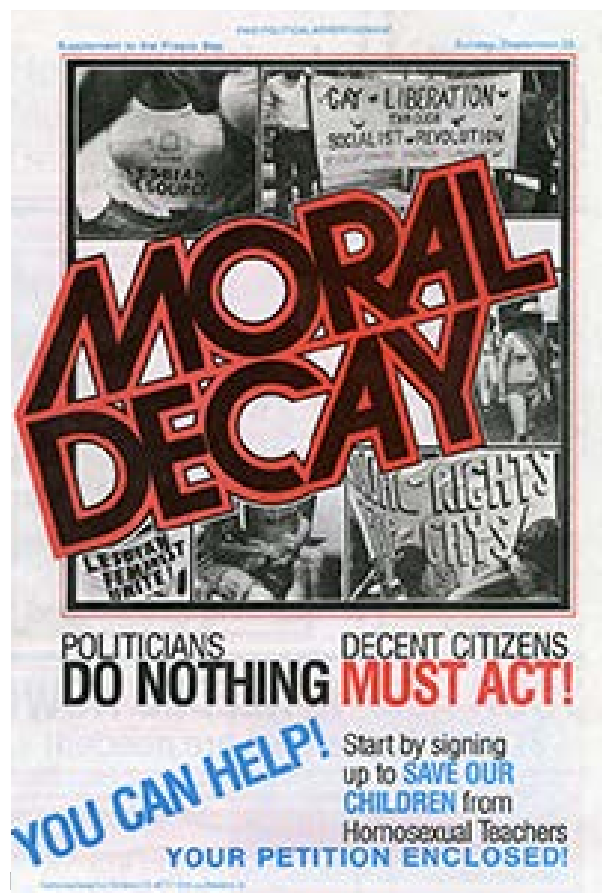
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LESBIAN SCHOOLWORKER RECORDS

I N 1978, Proposition 6 was presented on the California State ballot. This initiative, proposed by conservative legislator John Briggs as well as California Defend Our Children (CDOC), and later nicknamed the Briggs Initiative, rallied to ban gays and lesbians from teaching within the public school system. This later extended to possibly include any supporters of gays or lesbians as ‘advocates of homosexuality.’ A CDOC pamphlet in circulation at the time argued that the purpose of the initiative would not deny gays or lesbians their human rights, but instead “protect the rights of innocent children from people who choose their position as a teacher,” maintaining that “there is no inherent right for an individual to hold a teaching job.”





was the Lesbian Schoolworkers Records, which contained information regarding its organizational history, principles of unity and structure, press releases, newsletters, flyers, paste-ups, and photographs. With a commit-

within our own movement and this society," the Lesbian Schoolworkers organized in 1977 to defeat the Briggs Initiatives, Propositions 6 and 7. While this organization was among the many to rally against the anti-lesbian

and gay bill, it was uniquely also actively campaigned against the anti-lesbian and pro-death penalty laws, and sought identify the relationship between Third World oppression and the oppression of all lesbians. Throughout the election fight,

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the Schoolworkers emphasized that the struggle against Proposition 6 was not a single campaign issue or just a fight for civil rights, but instead, “that we are all suffering at the hands of a common enemy.”

Comprised of a core group of twenty, and over seventy participants, the Schoolworkers planned educational activities, sponsored cultural events, and produced leaflets and newsletters aimed at defeating the legislation and educating voters. Representatives often went before various civic groups, councils and educational organizations to speak against the measures, and were notorious for their slideshow, “Don’t Let It Happen Here.” Designed to

inform others of the dangers of the Briggs Initiatives, the slideshow drew together such crucial struggles as abortion, death penalty, and of course, women and lesbian oppression. Amber Hollibaugh, political activist from San Francisco, traveled throughout small but crucial Northern California towns presenting the slideshow and participating in public debates.

Within this collection there is also information about both pro and anti-Briggs organizations; a San Francisco Board of Education study on the possibility of including “gay lifestyle” into school curriculum on family and health studies; and a Oregon State Task Force of 1977 report, which collected “information on homosexual men and women in Oregon in order to make recommendations on legislation and administrative policies that would ensure the civil rights of all Oregonians.”

In end, the Briggs Initiative failed miserably, even after first receiving overwhelming support. With the help from Harvey Milk, public opinion was soon swayed; groups seen as traditionally heterosexual, such as the trade union

movement, the teachers’ associations and unions, child-care workers, health-care workers, and even churches, largely opposed Proposition 6 in end. While the defeat of the Briggs’ Initiative did not solve the discrimination of California’s gay and lesbian citizens, it did for the first time—as explained by Hollibaugh in a 1979 interview—“expose sexual dynamics as central in this society” by discussing homophobia as an intrusion of basic human rights.

—Kimberlee Granholm

Kimberlee Granholm is an M.A. candidate in the Moving Image Archive Studies program, where her interests focus on film curatorship, exhibition, and public access. She currently acts as the Graduate Student Association’s Director of Melnitz Movies. She is also a Graduate Student Researcher at CSW.