



American LGBTQ+ liberation from day 1 to Stonewall.

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Season 2, Episode 2: “Disorderly Establishment”

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For this episode, begin with posts starting June 7, 2020. (Click above.)

The original Mattachine Society jester logo is courtesy of ONE Archives at the USC Libraries.

This transcript includes text from real homophile-era publications, letters, organizational documents, et cetera. These texts contain **identifying terms** that may now be out of date.

CARL WITTMAN: San Francisco is refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there.

“A Gay Manifesto,” 1970

Act 1

HOST: What causes people to riot? Traditions, understandings, unspoken agreements — broken. A collective anger is building. The most famous riot in our history was, on the surface, the result of a broken agreement. Since their first publications, homophile activists have been reporting on police raiding the one space we have to gather: gay bars. Though mafia, police, and patrons all have an understanding that raids are business as usual, the homophiles are determined to change all of their minds. They even have to shift their own minority’s mentality. Has it ever been done? Before new queer press publicized queer problems, before Mattachine and Bilitis met in their living rooms, we were still a community, still quite in awe of what we were: strange, beautiful perversions on the outside of the world, pushed into the seediest neighborhoods. We *were* the seediest neighborhood. Before homophiles, before the war, before San Francisco there was Yerba Buena Village.

The northern port of Mexico is hardly governable by Mexican authority. Having just won their independence from Spain in **1821** and with the port so far away up north, Yerba Buena is on her own, with ships coming into the port, bringing trade and secularization to their culture. (And by trade I mean goods to sell, but we’ll get to the other kind of trade soon.) In the 1840s, Mexico and the United States are at war. Pretty soon, the US military shows up in the port, hops off their ships, and raises the American flag over Yerba Buena. And in come the white people. White merchants move in and start families, many of them with people already living there in Yerba Buena. Families begin establishing their wealth and political bonds with others. In the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, which ends the war, northern California is given over to U.S. military, and Yerba Buena Village is renamed San Francisco.

**1850s San Francisco** is made up of indigenous people, Mexican ranchers, and Anglo-American pioneers. The town of about 800 doesn’t stay quiet long, as gold is found in the hills. The port fills with ships, the hills with miners, the town with tourists on their way to find fortune. San Francisco is their stop for tools and food, and they return with gold and silver to sell. The town is suddenly wealthy, a booming economy of investment and trade over a population operating under frontier town vigilante justice. Most people are just passing through on their way, so rules are widely ignored.

Many men pass through town frequently as stagecoach drivers, delivering goods across the country. Men like **Charley Parkhurst** drive six horses across the West Coast. And Charley does it with one eye. After sailing from Boston to Panama and taking up a job driving, he was kicked by a horse and left with the nickname One-Eyed Charley. With a terrifying nickname and a

renowned reputation as one of the finest coach drivers in the West, no one ever suspects that One-Eyed Charley was born Charlotte Parkhurst.

The *San Francisco Call* reprints an article in the *New York Times*: “He drove for a while between Stockton and Mariposa, and once was stopped and had to cut away the treasure-box to get his coach and passengers clear. But he did it, even under the ‘drop’ of the robbers’ fire-arms, with an ill-grace, and he defiantly told the highwaymen that he would ‘break even with them.’ He was as good as his word, for, being subsequently stopped on a return trip from Mariposa to Stockton, he watched his opportunity, and, contemporaneously, turn his wild mustangs and his wicked revolver loose, and brought everything through safe. That his shooting was to the mark was subsequently ascertained by the confession of ‘Sugarfoot,’ a notorious highwayman, who, mortally wounded, found his way to a miner’s cabin in the hills, and *in articulo mortis* told how he had been shot by Charley Parkhurst, the famous driver, in a desperate attempt, with others, to stop his stage. Charley Parkhurst also afterward drove on the great stage route from Oakland to San José, and later, and for a long time, he was ‘the boss of the road’ between San Juan and Santa Cruz, when San Francisco was reached by way of San Juan.”

One day, the country will discover One-Eyed Charley Parkhurst’s secret, but he’ll be long gone by then...

By **1850**, 35,000 people live in San Francisco. And it’s not just white folks from the east. Gold miners come from Lima, Peru and Valparaiso, Chile, bringing tools and technology. Immigrants from South China come to work to support their families back home. African-Americans come to San Francisco to escape slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, which allowed escaped slaves to be captured and sent back to their tormentors. With so many cultures coming together, the town developed a mentality of live and let live. Sex workers are upscale, and might be seen socializing at masquerades in “polite society.” Minstrel shows go up, fostering, of course, racism, and also female impersonation in theatre. Sex and gender transgression are, really, unremarkable.

As the town booms, its citizens get territorial. Many believe the police can’t protect the lives they’ve earned there, their property and security, and people demand control on crime and the immigrants they now call “undesirables.” Basically, people forget their heritage and decide they want border control. A so-called Vigilance Committee gathers, beginning a 10-day crackdown, and capture three men deemed criminals—and execute them. As the press reports the crackdowns on crime and vice, potential tourists read about this little lawless town and, ironically, cross the invisible border around it to have some fun. With its gambling, graft, prostitution, and jazz clubs, the town is perceived as uncivilized and vulgar, barbarous. They call it the **Barbary Coast**.

Onto that coast steps a businessman from England and South Africa. **Joshua Abraham Norton** used his fortune to buy up real estate, and then hoped to capitalize on importing rice to San Francisco from Peru during a Chinese rice shortage, but as the ports fills with more ships full of Peruvian rice, his investment tanks. He sues to void his rice contract, but loses to the US

Supreme Court. Fed up with the federal government, Joshua sends letters to the newspapers, declaring himself Emperor of the United States. Though many consider the Emperor Norton eccentric, the town capitalizes on his name, selling souvenirs and honoring his fake currency in their businesses. He demands the US Congress to be dissolved and a bridge to be constructed between San Francisco and Oakland. He'll never get to see the bridge constructed, but by the time of his death, the Emperor Norton is mourned by 10,000 people in the streets surrounding his funeral. His anti-establishment demands are respected by the community of San Francisco, most of them immigrant families. They also have brought their own cultures and their own desire for freedom from oppressive governments and gods.

**Johanna** did the same thing. She left her family in the Austro-Hungarian Empire to run to Switzerland. She was there until a man attempted to assault her and then he exposed her as a so-called "hermaphrodite." Johanna ran from Switzerland to France, where she met other trans women. From France to New York, she worked on a farm and laid low. The farmer tried to make a move on her, too, and she ran to Jersey City, where another man blackmailed her into sexual servitude. One morning while he wasn't home, Johanna sold everything of worth to him and escaped to Montana to cook. Yet again, her secret revealed, she ran once more to San Francisco in 1885.

JOHANNA: I am now 47 years old and today it is still my deepest wish to wear a new princess dress, a new flowered hat, and lace petticoats. I decorate my bedroom in the manner of women, and a man seldom enters my room, because I am no friend to men. Conversations with women satisfy me more, and I am envious of educated women, because I look up to them. For that reason I have always been an activist for equal rights.

HOST: Johanna is soon referred to as "Case 13" in **Magnus Hirschfeld's** groundbreaking study called *The Transvestites*.

Her new home of San Francisco is a town of relative freedom and plenty of money. In 1887, 26 banks control nearly \$150 million. So there's plenty of fun to be had. In **1866**, there are 31 saloons for every church in San Francisco. Of course, there are conservatives who don't like this. In **1881**, a Sunday closing law takes effect. But fighting back, the League of Freedom liquor group starts a campaign to keep saloons open, posting bail for all saloons, and advising all 2000 arrestees to demand jury trial. After five convictions and a packed courthouse, the law is overturned. Conservatives consistently push new rules onto the town and the town consistently turns them over. But then, in **1882**, the US Congress passes the **Chinese Exclusion Act**, which lobbyists say is to stop Chinese prostitution, but is really to stop Chinese migration. Then Congress stops Japanese migration, too. Then they pass the aptly **Mann Act**, outlawing women from crossing the state borders. This one is also pushed as an act to stop "immoral" behavior and protect the "sexual virtue" of women. Lawmakers call it an act against the "white slavery" of women. But really what's happening is that women of color are gaining autonomy over their bodies and gaining an economic foundation by doing sex work, so the Mann Act is the government's attempt to stop their business. They'll do the same thing in **1934** with the **Tydings-**

**McDuffie Act**, in which Filipino immigration is banned, but then the gender imbalance of 14 men to every 1 woman in the Filipino community actually *encourages* prostitution. Lawmakers are dummies who rarely learn from history. California's public officials constantly create unfair rules that inadvertently cause spikes in sex work. Sometimes they try to draw in cheap immigrant labor, but discourage wives to come with the men to settle their families permanently. Prostitution naturally follows. But then the government stops immigration altogether when the population brings "too much" Asian culture to town. But even then, that doesn't stop American tourists from coming by.

So clearly, immigrants and sex work on the Barbary Coast bring economic strength to the town. Soon, a group of Mexican and South American sex workers arrive in San Francisco's port to settle on **Telegraph Hill**, forming a new community. Also in the port: goods from Chile, Peru, the Caribbean, eastern North America, Hawaii, Japan, China, the Philippines. Imports fill the Pacific Street storefronts, which is nicknamed Terrific Street for its nightspots and prostitution. Deadfalls where people can find wine and beer, liquor dens with music boxes, concert saloons, and dance halls to fill the space between the real money: brothels. The Barbary Coast burns red lights all night and hangs red shades in the windows through the day. Legal sex work in the brothels net huge profits for madams, often more profits than the gold diggers find in the hills. Sex workers are San Francisco's first female entrepreneurs. One writer of the time called the Barbary Coast "the haunt of the low and the vile of every kind... the petty thief, the house burglar, the tramp, the whoremonger, lewd women, cut-throats, murderers, are all found here." And with one saloon per 96 residents, the highest proportion in the U.S., a newspaper printed, "this city is ruled by the saloons, no matter whether Republican or Democratic Party is in power."

As the century turns, vaudeville brings more culture. More female impersonation, acrobats, comedy, magic, animal tricks, songs, dance, opera. It was *America's Got Talent*, but way more racist. But in these shows, the citizens of San Francisco see people outside of their own race and class performing. Social boundaries are crossed. Minds are opened. One of vaudeville's most famous female impersonators even goes to Broadway. **Julian Eltinge** makes his Broadway debut in *The Fascinating Widow*. His "impersonation" of a woman is seen with the astonishment of a magic act. Soon after, his producer opens the Julian Eltinge Theater on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street in New York, where he performs exclusively. (It'll one day become an AMC movie theater.) He takes the stage by night and publishes *Julian Eltinge Magazine and Beauty Hints* by day. He experiments with beauty that turns away from Victorian matrons and focuses on the curved, thin lines of a Gibson girl. He fascinates cisgender women with his skill. He's commercializing drag of his era, he's the **RuPaul** of the early 1900s. The audience of people of all genders see him as a glamorous sexual deviant, an outlaw between genders. Eltinge, like Ru, brings queer language and gestures to the mainstage, but unlike Ru, he spends time off stage flexing his muscles for journalists and starting fights with stagehands to prove his masculinity. Because he markets himself to fans of two types: those that desire to be the performer and a desire to sleep with the performer. Eltinge doesn't want to be perceived as the skid row "fairy impersonators." People like **Bert Savoy**, who travels the country as "Maude," a sexually charged campy vaudeville character who leans on sibilant

'S's to say, "You slay me!" and "You don't know the half of it." He is one of the most quoted comedians of the era, a fop spreading queer language. Savoy is the rare case of a blatantly queer mainstream performer banking on their own identity, which he's allowed to do because he's making fun of fops—and because he is one, he's nonthreatening. It's performers like Savoy and Eltinge working in San Francisco that brings in tourists, often queer tourists, and they bring more money.

## Act 2

343,000 people fill the town of **San Francisco in 1900**. Historian John D'Emilio theorizes that capitalism liberated queer people from the closet, where they depended on heterosexual marriage and having children as a means of survival. While the government is relying on the traditional family unit to support capitalism, it was actually capitalism liberating queer people from the traditional family. San Francisco is proof that if a queer person can get there, they can gain capital and support themselves — no family, no farm. And even if they can't find much money, they can find other queer people, often for the first time. They could support each other and form their own house. But those people, who have found some semblance of liberation, will feel the government beginning to crack down on its disloyal subjects.

SAN FRANCISCO CALL REPORTER: The home of unspeakable vices,

HOST: the *San Francisco Call* deems a dance hall on the Barbary Coast. Female impersonators show off and homosexual sex can be purchased for a buck in a booth. With the laws wide open, police have little incentive to stop the sex work, gambling, and liquor sales. Dance halls hire "pretty waiter girls" who earn a weekly wage of \$15-25 and commission on all liquor and dances they sell. These percentage girls sometimes even take home half the profits of their sex work. Tourists come. Men rent rooms in boarding houses. Saloons are the social hub of queer sexual exchanges. Nothing can stop the Barbary's reputation, so nothing can stop the tourists from coming.

Even when the earthquake and fire of **1906** burn the **Barbary Coast** to the ground, it comes back bigger and cleaner. The entertainment is wilder than ever. And the **Black Cat** opens at Eddy & Mason, inviting sex work and queer performance. Charles Ridley takes over the café in 1911 and decides to make the Black Cat "the most popular place in Bohemia." Even the mayor is cool with it. He encourages it. Sex work is briefly regulated, so that workers are required to register at a city health clinic so they can come in for regular check-ups. The madams of brothels just pay-off the mayor and city officials so they can be left alone. Literally everyone is happy. Except... in come the morality crusaders, pushing out sex workers. California passes the **Red-Light Abatement Act**, outlawing prostitution, and the sex work is all over.

Just kidding. It moves out of the brothels into the streets. The Barbary Coast's economy collapses without the brothels. Soldiers passing through the city to fight in the Great War instead find sex workers in the city's **Tenderloin** area, in the bars and on the sidewalk. Perhaps the

Tenderloin was named after the similar neighborhood in New York City, or perhaps it was a nod to it being the “soft underbelly” where cops are paid off to ignore vice. Local folklore says it was a cop who said he could only afford to eat chuck steak until he transferred to vice-riddled neighborhood, and now he eats tenderloin. Or maybe, it was just a reference to the readily available loins of sex workers. No one really knows why it’s called “the Tenderloin.” Male and female sex workers walk Market Street from the waterfront of arriving sailors all the way to the Tenderloin, where they can stop at the Black Cat.

MUSIC: The Black Cat

REPORTER: startling for originality and uniqueness...costumed in carnival dress...to outshine anything ever before attempted in San Francisco.

HOST: The papers call the Black Cat’s employees “disreputable.” The Black Cat will become known for unconventional writers and performers to gather, including John Steinbeck, Tallulah Bankhead, and Bette Davis. Other bars hire drag queens who sell sex, too, in the hotels of the Tenderloin. In an unpublished memoir, one person wrote:

MEMOIRIST: I recall a mad ‘girl’ called Anne Pennington, who would stop anything male, on the pave, and purr: ‘Would you like a fancy boy, tonight?!’

HOST: Sure, it’s illegal. But cops take pay-offs from sex workers, making this work more clandestine, based in secret codes and ever-changing networks of information – the foundation of queer culture. And the more rules the government applies, the more opportunity there is for police to cash in. They start curfews and ban the sale of alcohol to women standing or sitting at a bar. They even ban women from pouring alcohol unless they own a percentage of the bar. Women who work in bars are no longer allowed to accept drinks from customers. City officials say they want to stop the illegal sex work, so they crack down on *all women*. Who stands to benefit? Well, all men, of course. But more specifically...

**Police. They crack down on vice districts, and in exchange for lighter crackdowns, they take payoffs. This is called graft.** Cops get paid well enough to let sex workers work. Julian Eltinge distances himself from other drag queens because while they find their fame on the stage, they are persecuted on the streets in their day-to-day. And while many of the queens want to *be* Eltinge, they are actually transgender women, using their stage personalities as a way to “cross-dress” and not only feel real, but be applauded for it. Many of them even pass as female during the day. If they’re caught “cross-dressing,” they can sometimes get away with it by saying they work in the theatre. Some of the trans women living on sex work call themselves “mattress-actresses,” performing their feminine show in the bedroom. The theatricality of sex and gender in San Francisco is still very commonplace, unlike the outside world. And in the outside world, the federal government is cracking down.

**Prohibition** takes effect in **1919**, banning the sale of alcohol throughout the country. San Francisco built her wealth on booze, and the city officials blatantly ignore the law. Bootleggers import bottles on the long shoreline, which is difficult for the federal government to monitor. Ships from Mexico and Canada unload small boats on the ocean outside of federal lines. The city's Board of Supervisors passes a **1926** resolution against police enforcing prohibition "on any basis." They even send a copy of that resolution to the chief of police, the federal Prohibition administration, and the California State Senate. San Francisco is deemed "the wettest in the west." Gin and brandy are locally made. Wine presses dry on the Italian district's sidewalks. Jazz clubs pour liquor into coffee cups throughout the night. Cops who enforce prohibition are publicly reprimanded.

And as usual, liberation attracts conservative folks looking to push a cult. I mean, religion. Protestant reforms from Anglo-American migrants push for change. This city's community – created by Chinese, Irish, German, Japanese, Italian, and Mexican families – the Protestant reformers call this city's community a "social evil," and claim venereal disease to be spreading through sex work and corrupting the morality of women. Religious reformers specifically blame Chinese immigrants, and call for an end to interracial relationships. The cops crack down.

Lesbians and sex workers feel the crackdown, too. Lesbians and sex workers are seen as the same, in that they both break gender and sexual roles for women. They ignore monogamy. They ignore men as viable relationships. And they take up public space in a way that displays their disdain for monogamous and/or heterosexual relationships. Sexologists and journalists begin to put forward their theories that lesbianism is acquired by sex workers because they're disgusted by the perverted men that pay them. Others theorize that sex work is the lowly, desperate result of lesbian experimentation. We'll see these theories begin to play out in the lesbian pulp books of the 1940s.

Police commissioners look for these "degenerates," finding them in places like the Black Cat. In 1921, they note that the café hires women who—

COP: "mingled with the guests, singing to them, sometimes eating and drinking at their tables, and usually dancing with them."

HOST: The Black Cat loses its dance permit and is forced to close. But they're not the only place hiring sex workers and queer performers. Italian immigrant **Joseph Finocchio** opens a **North Beach** speakeasy to push alcohol under Prohibition. One night at Finocchio's, a female impersonator stands up and does an impromptu performance, reminiscent of Sophie Tucker. The crowd adores her, and Joseph's club changes forever. Soon, everyone goes to Finocchio's to see female impersonators. Joseph pairs singers with so-called "exotic" dancers—a local woman of color, promoting gender transgression along with racialized entertainment. Tourists eat it up. **Finocchio's** is called the place "Where Boys Will Be Girls."



As you probably learned in school, Prohibition comes to an end in 1933. As you probably didn't learn in school (unless you're reading this right now in school, in which case, your teacher is a fantastic teacher, lucky you!), in most major cities like New York, Prohibition ending gives police new opportunities to crack down on queer spaces, like by revoking liquor licenses of bars serving queer people. But in San Francisco, alcohol has been illegally lifting up the economy in spaces filled with queer people, sex work, and gender transgression. And that's not going to change. With the repeal of Prohibition, the spaces filled with queer people and sex workers are now legal spaces for alcohol sales. Queer and sex-positive people get legal space to socialize and work.

MUSIC: State Board of Equalization

HOST: In most states, as Prohibition is lifted, local laws govern liquor sales. California's liquor control is handed off to the tax board: the State Board of Equalization. The SBE's main objective is to manage the *finances* of liquor sales statewide, and in addition, they manage *vice* connected to liquor establishments. Since they're an agency of the state rather than the city, it's harder for them to enforce the vice laws connected to liquor. State employees can't be inside every club all the time. The hard liquor is only supposed to be sold in hotels, restaurants, and some clubs, but smaller nightclubs get away with it. Smalltime investors take advantage of the state's inability to monitor everything and they open cheap nightspots that are easy to run. Hard liquor and cheap entertainment are the modern small saloons with niche clientele, like queer people. This ain't the big vaudeville, wide-appeal kind of show anymore — because intimate spaces are difficult for the State to find and regulate. In fact, you don't have to go see Julian Elating in the theatre or spend the evening at another Finocchio's show. There's a queen on stage in a nearby saloon. The Black Cat even returns in a new location at 710 Montgomery Street. Waterfront bars, theatres, Market Street, the Barbary Coast—residents of northeast San Francisco hear the early whispers of queer community.

The morality police – literal and figurative police – crack down on people perceived as sexual deviants. Female impersonation on the stage is widely banned. It's seen as a reflection of their *everyday degenerate life on the street*. Through the mid-1930s, female impersonation is outlawed in Chicago, New York, Milwaukee, Detroit, Philadelphia, New Orleans, Baltimore, and Los Angeles. Drag and sex work cease to exist.

Just kidding! They move to new spaces. In San Francisco, drag and sex work still thrive. And because the State Board of Equalization is mostly concerned with getting the tax profits from liquor, they still don't even care to shut down queer bars. But how will police make their extra money if they can't take payoffs for prohibited liquor?

MUSIC: "Jezebel" performed by Beverly Shaw on her LP "Songs 'Tailored to Your Taste'"

HOST: In **1934**, **Mona Sargent** opens the first San Francisco lesbian bar. She started Mona's on Union Street, and a couple years later, moved around the corner from the Black Cat. It was an

effort to start a bar for the “mad bohemians” who live in her building. She finds a place nearby that was already a bar, stocks it, and opens it. Mona and her husband Jimmie cover the smoky basement’s floors with sawdust to make it feel bohemian. Waitresses sing and create a floorshow of male impersonators parodying popular songs. As both sex workers and lesbians seek safety in public spaces, they come together in North Beach and Tenderloin area bars like Mona’s. Also, her advertisements are suggestive. Using the word “bohemian” is code for unconventional sexuality. So naturally, the police are watching. A police sergeant stopping in notes that he can’t tell—

COP 2: “which were the men and which were the women.”

HOST: Since cops can’t arrest based on an establishment serving alcohol, they make arrests on the operation of serving minors, operating a “house of ill repute,” or running a “disorderly house.” How vague. So that’s what he arrests Mona on. But still, the girls come in to her bar. When she returns from the police station, she begins discouraging hostile customers from making scenes by watering down their drinks. This house will not appear disreputable. She’ll overcharge them or completely ignore them. Sex and gender transgressive customers rely on bar management to protect them in these ways. They need her to keep the police out of the bar. Like other bartenders, Mona will spot undercover cops and signal sex workers with coded messages. Bartenders screen clients at the bar and negotiate terms before allowing them access to sex workers. They flash lights or suddenly change the music if they spot a cop coming in. To an extent, the city allows for many bars to get away with selling sex. It brings tourist money to the city. But still, cops would like a little payoff. Lesbians also frequent these bars so they can enjoy the freedom there, however limited.

Mona’s charges were incredibly common for bar owners and their patrons. “Disorderly house” and “disorderly conduct” are so vague, it’s easy for cops to intimidate bars for payoffs. In many cities, crime bosses open their own gay bars, water down the drinks and pay off the cops in order to make a steep profit off of queer people. Queer people need places to go and this is what it takes to protect them from the government: mafia payoffs. The cops don’t care how crime bosses run their businesses as long as the officers get their graft. The mobs gay bars thrive in major cities. But in 1934, San Francisco once again becomes the exception.

The **Great Depression** pushes workers to advocate for their rights. With the support of the American Workers Party and the Communist League of America, longshoremen in every port on the West Coast go on strike for unionization. You might recall in season 1, **Harry Hay** participated in this 83-day Waterfront Strike. The event peaks on **Bloody Thursday**, when two workers are killed by police in the strike. The next day, thousands of strikers and their families walk down Market Street in a funeral procession with no police present. A general strike follows. Drivers, small businesses, theatres, and night clubs shut down. After four days, a unionization agreement becomes possible. The strike loosens the hold crime syndicates have on San Francisco’s workers. Crime bosses stop looking for queer bars to “protect.”

Then in the peak of the Depression, newspapers roll out headlines revealing FBI agent Edwin N. Atherton's report on graft. It seems cops have been taking up to \$5 million annually in illegal payoffs. The **Atherton report** brings another public push against the police. At a time when people are already miserably furious at their government, they now see in the paper that even someone inside the FBI has investigated cops stealing from the people. In reaction, San Francisco's city officials begin a new crackdown, this time on the crime bosses for paying police. This combination of weakened organized crime, a distrust of the police, and alcohol barely regulated by the state allows San Francisco's gay bars to thrive...

MUSIC: upswing

HOST: Cocktail lounges like Forbidden City in **Chinatown** bring in plenty of tourist dollars. Sex and race tourism are a draw for white, western people who are going to the city to see something culturally new, outside of their own world. But while sex and race tourism open people up to new experiences, they also solidify social and sexual stereotypes. It reassures people that the freaks are in the city and they, the tourists, are just visitors who will return to natural, normal, hetero whiteness. One club advertises:

CLUB ADVERTISER: "The all-new show is titled 'Orient 66' and features a bevy of Oriental cookies, Kaouri—exotic dancing star from Japan, and the sensational act of Karnak and the 'Girl on the Sword.'"

HOST: Chinatown is essentially a city itself. Between 1882 and 1946, under the Chinese Exclusion Act, the neighborhood is a racially segregated set of square blocks where people take refuge from California's horribly anti-Chinese laws. Within this space, there is also sex work, opium dens, and gambling. Raids bring in many arrests, but the tourists bring in a lot of money, so it seems worth it. New pagoda-style towers at the entrances welcome tourists who will soon come for the **1939 World's Fair**. Chinatown and North Beach prepare for the cash coming from all over the world, spent by people looking to experience something new. And while on one edge of the sword, this tourism is exploitation, on the other edge, queer people of color entertaining the masses is a new form of representation and authenticity for others like them.

Finocchio's, like many queer clubs, still experiences raids. Still looking for Puritan power, police Chief Quinn declares,

POLICE CHIEF QUINN: Lewd entertainers must be stopped!

HOST: In **1936**, five female impersonators are arrested along with Finocchio's owners for hiring percentage girls. The chief revokes the dance permit of the 201 Club for the same reason. Joseph Finocchio promises to run the club with no percentage girls (no sex work) and bans entertainers from speaking to patrons, and the cops promise to lay off. The city still wants these gender transgressive shows because they bring in the tourist money. So with alcohol legal, Finocchio

reopens his club in a larger venue on Broadway. He expands the floorshow and hires more female impersonators. Finocchio's playbill teases,

FINOCCHIO: "public entertainment that was so unusual and spectacular...it would set the entire country talking."

HOST: There are no more raids on Finocchio's after he begins to run it like a regular theatre, and it becomes one of the main events of the North Beach area, surrounded by touristy Italian restaurants, coffee shops, jazz clubs, and pool halls.

Mona Sergent also upgrades after Prohibition is repealed. She opens several little bars, including **Mona's 440**. She never had an intention of opening a gay bar, just the little bohemian spots. But with the tolerance of the area, she naturally takes in male impersonators who sing live for her lesbian patrons. Lesbians of middle and working classes, both butch and femme, come from all over to visit Mona's. Historian Lillian Faderman will compare it to Le Monocle in Paris and pre-1933 Berlin. Mona's becomes as well known a tourist attraction as Finocchio's, even lifting his tagline for her own ads:

MONA SERGENT: "The Place Where Girls Will Be Boys."

HOST: Her performing boys become local celebrities. As cops push against sex work in the clubs, like Finocchio's, the gender transgressive performances are a way to keep the bars "lawful, yet titillating." The bars capitalize on transgender bodies, but remain one of the few spaces where trans people can find legal sex work in their true gender. And customers applaud them for it. Asian and Latinx performers do what is billed as an "authentic and elaborate Geisha dance." Another does Hedy Lamarr. There's a "Cuban King Kong" strip comedy act involving a full gorilla costume. **Stormé DeLarverie's** Jewel Box Revue fills Finocchio's to capacity for four shows, six nights a week. Tallulah Bankhead and Bette Davis visit.

Tourist guidebook *Where to Sin in San Francisco* asks and answers,

*WHERE TO SIN* GUIDE: "Is it true what they say about Finocchio's? Yes, it is. Even if the girls were women, the shows would be provocative. But the artists in the costly gowns are not women... Guys and their gals in the know sit at least three tables from ringside and let themselves be sucked in by insidious illusion."

HOST: Finocchio's mainstream appeal popularizes queer entertainment for the city. *Where to Sin in San Francisco* also tells tourists that are "in the mood mauve" to go to Mona's 440. It's a big place with a long room. Bar on the left, booths line the wall, and tables lead up to the stage at the end of the room, where **Beverly Shaw** sings her torch songs. By day, a cab driver, by night, she's a star at Mona's. One tourist magazine credits Shaw's songs as the ones "your mother didn't teach you."

MUSIC: “Honey Suckle Rose” performed by Beverly Shaw on her LP “Songs ‘Tailored to Your Taste’”

HOST: She drapes the microphone cord over her shoulder and looks into the audience, singing directly into the eyes of women at the tables. She always has multiple girlfriends, and makes it no secret. In the 1950s she’ll return to Los Angeles to record her album *Songs Tailored to Your Taste* on her own label named after her lesbian bar Club Laurel. In the audience will be Edythe Eyde, the lesbian songwriter featured in last week’s episode. She’s inspired. Tina Rubio is another star of Mona’s. Credited as “the dynamic Latin star,” she sings references to Spanish, Pacific Island, and Mexican cultures and loves sexual innuendo. One review says Rubio sings in “Tahitian, Spanish, English, and Double Entendre.”

MUSIC: “Worried Blues” performed by Gladys Bentley

HOST: Mona’s most recognizable star is the “Brown Bomber of Sophisticated Songs,” **Gladys Bentley**. She came up singing in Harlem. Defining her look as a 250-pound woman wearing a tuxedo and top hat, she also boldly flirts with women from the stage. She dedicates songs to her lesbian lover. Gladys came to San Francisco to play the gay clubs that thrive like nowhere else after cops stopped her from wearing pants in LA. Tourists come to see her as a spectacle of talent, transgressing gender, sexuality, race, and body. She’s like a lesbian Lizzo. The mainstream press adores her. *San Francisco Life* reported in 1943:

SF LIFE REPORTER: If you’re looking for quiet, soothing music that will lull you to sleep, put a record on your phonograph and spend the evening at home...but if you want to hear singing that will make the blood pound in your pulse, listen to the brown bomber of sophisticated song at Mona’s Club 440. Her name is Gladys Bentley and she’s as gifted with the piano keys as with her vocal chords.

Though she also wore a tux, Kay Scott presents a much different show at Mona’s:

KAY SCOTT: There goes my gal, she’s changed her name to Mike.

There goes my gal, she’s turned into a dyke.  
She cut her hair,  
She’s wearing shirts and ties,  
She used to make men stare,  
Now she gives the girls the eyes,  
I just can’t figure out how it all began  
There goes my gal, a lesbian.

HOST: Here’s another one:

KAY SCOTT: When it’s early in the morning and I stagger up the hill,  
To test out my Simmons while everything is still,

I make frantic love to a cute little Jill,  
Who is shacking up with me on Telegraph Hill.  
Tiddle da, tiddly do da for peace and good will,  
We're all on the make up on Telegraph Hill.

HOST: And one more:

KAY SCOTT: At Mona's Club on old Broadway,  
you'll hear some people pass and say,  
'If you go in there, you'll be surprised,  
the boys are girlies in disguise.'  
Never falter, never fear  
we're here to give the patrons cheer.  
You'll never fall and you'll never flub  
If you come to Mona's Club.

HOST: Mona boosts the popularity of lesbian entertainment, and several bars follow suit: The Paper Doll, the Artist's Club, the Beaded Bag, Mona's Candlelight, Blanco's, the Chi-Chi Club, and Tommy's 299. North Beach and Telegraph Hill draw lesbians from all over the world, particularly as the Golden Gate and San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridges make their grand debut for the tourists of the World's Fair in 1939.

The city markets their achievements all over the country, calling their town the "Paris of America." One magazine even notes, "Blue laws are foreign to the lightheartedness of San Francisco, a city that has always been able to distinguish between liberty and license. Away with them—let us be gay while the mood is on us." Wow. Hot. People come for the talent shows, the games, the parades, and, of course, the sex. Tourist magazines point them toward Mona's and Finocchio's, "America's Most Unusual Nightclub." As the World's Fair kicks off in 1939, tourists spend more than \$15 million in the Bay Area. That's more than double the tourist spending the previous year. So of course the city protects obvious attractions like Mona's and Finocchio's, which allows more queer clubs to open their doors. *Where to Sin in San Francisco:*

*WHERE TO SIN GUIDE:* If you are one of those old-fashioned sinners who thinks "gay" means "merry," you may disabuse yourself by spending an evening at The Paper Doll. This is a rendezvous of the Gay People. You'll see gay women who walk and talk like men and gay men who walk and talk like girls and often you'll find it hard to tell whether a gay man is a man or gay woman is a woman because sometimes a gay woman cuts her hair like a man's and puts on men's clothes and looks more like a gay man than a gay woman and a gay man sometimes lets his hair grow and plucks his brows and puts on fawn slacks and looks more like a gay woman than a gay man and maybe they are both so anyway but it is very confusing what with gay boys calling each other bitches and gay girls calling each other joes.

HOST: A few of the tourists who arrive in **1945** from Los Angeles are a professor of psychology at UCLA, her husband, her former student **Sammy**, and his boyfriend. The psychology professor has just discovered the two to be a couple, after they first introduced themselves to her as cousins. Sammy was an outstanding student in her class, where she once taught homosexuality as a sickness. It's the standard for all psychology experts to teach. Treatments include electroshock therapy, lobotomy, hysterectomy, castration, hormone therapy, all sorts of brutal experiments. As Sam becomes friends with his former professor, he and his boyfriend George invite her and her husband to San Francisco for a Thanksgiving holiday. On their first night, Sam insists they visit Finocchio's. The female impersonators astonish his professor. She's never seen anything like this. She sees the realness of their lives, she sees the audience captivated by their hilarity and believability. After the show, they go back to their hotel on Nob Hill for a drink. Sammy turns to his professor, **Dr. Evelyn Hooker**.

SAM FROM: We have let you see us as we are, and now it's your scientific duty to make a study of people like us. People don't know what we are.

DR. HOOKER: I can't study you, because you're my friends. I can't be objective about you.

SAM FROM: We can get a hundred men, any number of men you want. You're the person to do it. You know us. You have the training.

HOST: It takes a few years for the study to get off the ground, but the idea is born in San Francisco's exceptional climate. Put a pin in that.

### Act 3

*WHERE TO SIN* GUIDE: Rebels have been flaunting convention at the Black Cat for over twenty years. During the war, many a Montgomery Street Bohemian went forth to work or fight, but they're back now. Any night you can watch genuine artists, intellectuals and andsoforths boisterously protesting, or being loudly indifferent to such common social practices as sobriety and amiable conversation.

HOST: **Sol Stoumen** buys the Black Cat in the 1940s, but it maintains its clientele. Bohemian bars like this one now attract Beat writers like Jack Kerouac, who sets part of his novel "On the Road" in the Black Cat. **Allen Ginsberg** calls the bar—

ALLEN GINSBERG: the best gay bar in America. It was totally open, bohemian, San Francisco...and everybody went there, heterosexual and homosexual... All the gay screaming queens would come.

HOST: These are just the type of bars the military begins to target. **World War II** brings troops through the port city, where evacuation routes are planned for emergencies and locals sit in long blackouts. President Roosevelt's plan requires tens of thousands of workers, and as soldiers pass

through San Francisco on their way to battle, they seek what could be one last thrill. Soldiers find the sex and race tourism of the Barbary Coast, which encourage them to find sex workers of different races, gender expressions, and sexualities. And while this absolutely creates a fetishizing of people of color, it also provides once-unavailable opportunities for people to connect with others unlike themselves. It challenges the anti-miscegenation laws *and* economically boosts the community. Women of color and lesbians involved in sex work gain more financial strength. They become bound together as outlaws, forming their own subculture as autonomous women.

And they are ready to entertain the troops! Thousands are stationed here, roaming the entertainment district. As you heard in episode 8 last season, many of the soldiers explore homosexuals for the first time passing through San Francisco on their way to war. They find sex, relationships, queer coding in language and behavior. Gay bars continue to open all over the city. Claiming to worry about the spread of venereal disease, the Army and Navy bans three bars from military personnel in **1942**. The State Board of Equalization, that tax board that was pretty much ignoring the sex and gender transgression in the bars, they step in and help the military shut down two of the bars. They claim to have tracked venereal diseases back to these taverns. The SBE sends statements to over 50 bars that they must follow the state's liquor laws or their licenses will be revoked. To make their mission clear, their mission against "delinquency, disease, and disorder," the Army and Navy create a joint board of their own: the Armed Forces Disciplinary Control Board. Together, the San Francisco Police Department, the District Attorney, the State Department of health, the State Board of Equalization, and the Armed Forces board strategize to block the gay bars.

They use the city's arrest records of sexual deviants to find so-called "problem spots," which are just gay bars. "Off-limits" signs are posted in nearly 100 bars where soldiers can be arrested even if out of uniform. But if they're willing to risk it, the "off-limits" signs are actually a signal to soldiers that the bar serves homosexuals. When soldiers continue to frequent the bars, the State board announces, "If the Board [of Equalization] does not crack down on you, the Army and Navy will."

Undercover agents are sent into the gay bars, and suddenly, no one knows who is watching them inside their own bars. Paranoia spreads in the spaces where the patrons were once liberated. Hosts and bartenders become watchdogs for outsiders. If someone doesn't seem queer, *the clientele* watches *them*. So then the staff and patrons encourage queer dress and behavior so they know you're one of them. Butch/femme roles in lesbians are expected. But if a cop finds that a soldier is participating, the bar receives a citation.

**1943. Jim Kepner**, a future writer for *ONE Magazine*, among many other homophile publications, walks down Montgomery Street, excited to finally meet other queer people in a bar for the first time. He's headed for the Black Cat, feeling like he's floating four inches above the sidewalk. As he reaches the building, he touches the door, and suddenly a pack of policemen push by him, into the bar. Jim has read the gay pulp novels, he knows exactly what's happening.



A raid. He crosses the street and hides in a doorway, feeling helpless. He imagines riding in and saving his gay siblings, but he knows there's nothing he can do.

JIM KEPNER: The first view I got of my brothers and sisters was when 12 or 15 drag queens and about 12 or 15 butch numbers were led out of the bar by the police looking guilty, and practically all the queens were struggling and sassing the cops. I felt so good when I heard one of the queens scream at the policeman who was shoving her:

QUEEN: Don't shove, you bastard, or I'll bite your fuckin' balls off!

JIM KEPNER: That queen paid in blood. They beat her and two or three of the others.

HOST: Finocchio's, the Black Cat, the Beige Room, and Mona's Candlelight are among the many warned that the State board will send police to raid the bar and scare off regulars, and the board will suspend their licenses. In order to intimidate soldiers from entering, the Armed Forces board stations military police outside of any bar they deem a "disorderly establishment." A town that was once considered "wide-open," is forced to begin closing doors on homosexual and transgender people and cut off their economy. While running for San Francisco district attorney, Edmund Brown states,

EDMUND BROWN: There is no organized crime in San Francisco; the crime is all organized by the police department.

HOST: And by 1943, the police are raiding gay bars regularly. When cops notice a queer space, they alert the Armed Forces board. They send a letter saying to "clean up conditions." If cops continue to see queers, the bar is set off-limits to military and listed in the newspapers in order to intimidate gay soldiers. Then police raid the bar and the State board suspends the liquor license. A perfect system. And it all happened so fast.

Bar owners work inside their own bars, typically to save money, but also to police their business. If queer customers touch or imply that they want to do anything sexual together, the manager might throw them out. Queer people develop a coded language to discuss sex. Words like butch, trade, top, bottom, ki-ki—basically 1940s for "nonbinary"—are all put to use or even created during this crackdown. The queer vernacular is used in a stylized way of introducing yourself to another person. If you don't use the language just right, you're seen as suspicious. One person of the time will describe the elaborate way of speaking to "the Queen's tea party." If the other person gets it just right, you quickly have a secret code going. Bar owners also protect their queer customers. If a straight man walks in and tries to make a move on a lesbian, the bartender finds a way to separate them. Managers make entering their bar as uncomfortable as possible. They cover the windows so passersby and cops can't look inside. They put the entrance at the back of the building. Since the windows are darkened, customers inside can see new people entering before the newcomers can see them. Bartenders and hosts are positioned in places where they can see everything. Then the dance floor is in the back room.

All of the queer bars are radically different by the end of the war. Their customers are, too. The State board's so-called "emergency" wartime plan with the Armed Forces board ends, but police are in a habit now. They continue to raid these—

COP: havens for homosexuals.

HOST: But many queer soldiers return to this unbelievable city after the war. Despite the crackdowns, it's still more liberated than the small towns they're from. Traditional family structure and gender roles are perceived differently by them now. Marriage and birth rates are dropping. Even married women want to go to work. Many women stay single just so they can work without the discrimination married women tolerate at work. Gay soldiers who were dishonorably discharged for being gay have a hard enough time finding work, a college education, or home and business loans, so they might as well stay in San Francisco. Their military discharge papers are printed on blue paper, so everyone immediately knows they've been sent home for sexual deviancy. And with far less soldiers needed in battle, gays are among the first forced out, tripling the rate of gay soldiers discharged during the war. Women who want to work are seen as unpatriotic and unwomanly and sent packing, too. With nothing to lose, together, the nation comes out.

Bars, however risky, become like churches for queer people. It's where they find people like them, people with blue discharge papers. There's no point in returning to hostile hometowns when they have the Black Cat and other nightclubs in San Francisco. And in 1949, the Black Cat is raided again, this time taking 10 to jail. With an "off-limits" sign still lingering in the window, the café continues to serve queer customers and hire female impersonators. Their newest hire, to the SFPD's dismay, brings more gay people than ever.

#### Act 4

HOST: Born and raised in the city, **José Sarria** went to a private school where he spoke Spanish, his first language, and wore a uniform. During the Depression he switched to public schools, where he saw his community getting in line for food and working hard for very little. The Sarria family played at local bingo nights to win bags of food, and sometimes, for special occasions, they would go downtown and José got to dress up in girl's clothes for fun. After discharge from the military in **1947**, he went to college to become a teacher. During his final year, he was caught and arrested at the all-men's bar in the St. Francis Hotel for public sex in the bathroom. His life is forever set on a different course because he'll never find a teaching job now—even with a degree, even with the ability to speak multiple languages. So there's nothing much else to do but go to his mother's dressmaker, get a gown, hop on a streetcar, ride across the bridge, climb up a fire escape, and slip into the back door of a bar called Pearl's. José wins second place and two weeks of performing for \$50 a week. Clearly this can be a career, and he books a job singing during intermissions at the Beige Room. When Finocchio's Mexican singer dies, he auditions to

replace him. Joseph Finocchio comes to the Beige Room to see José, but ultimately chooses another personality that's well known. José moves on. He books a job at the Black Cat.

AUDIO: "José at the Black Cat!!!" from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives  
(Listen to the episode to hear José entertain the crowd — it's half the fun of act 4.)

HOST: The famously bohemian club allows for women to smoke, poetry to be read, wine to be shared in the afternoon. As he sings, José watches his new love, Jimmy, wait tables. To sing at the Black Cat, you must be different, queer in some way. So he keeps wearing his dresses and pearls, or men's slacks and his mom's borrowed earrings. His mother says if you're going to wear jewelry, wear these nice things.

JOSÉ SARRIA: My eyebrows were plucked in those days. I didn't look like a clown—I was neither there nor here. You could say I was a boy, you could say I was a girl. I was unique.

AUDIO: "José at the Black Cat!!!" from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

HOST: José says that since his father was a Nicaraguan marquis, then he must be the marquesa. To José, queerness is its own form of birthright nobility.

AUDIO: "José at the Black Cat!!!" from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

HOST: One night at the Black Cat, a woman in the audience tells José,

WOMAN: Oh, your outfit is fabulous, but those shoes don't do anything for you. Try my shoes on.

HOST: He agrees, giving her his loafers and taking her heels. They're a perfect fit. José prances around the Black Cat all night and everyone loves seeing the man in heels. At the end of the night, he gives them back to her.

JOSÉ SARRIA: Well, here's your shoes, thank you very much.

WOMAN: No, no, no, those are a gift for you, to remember me.

JOSÉ SARRIA: I can't take them.

WOMAN: Well, I'll take your shoes. I need a pair of shoes to loaf around in.

HOST: José wears heels for every performance for the next 40 years. He does three shows a night, at 9, 10:30, and 11:30. Hazel plays piano while José greets people between shows.

AUDIO: "José at the Black Cat!!!" from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

HOST: When straight tourists show up, José subtly encourages them to leave by speaking to the crowd as if everyone inside the café is gay.

AUDIO: “José at the Black Cat!!!” from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

JOSÉ SARRIA: Once you come in here, your reputation is lost!

HOST: Waiters greet hetero-looking men entering with their girlfriends by saying something like:

FEMME GAY 1: I didn’t know I was merely another woman.

FEMME GAY 2: Why haven’t you ever told me you were married?

FEMME GAY 3: My God—a bisexual!

HOST: Either they take it with good humor or they run for the hills. By making heteros the objects of uncomfortable attention, they aren’t the voyeurs, we are. (Now how can we do a modern version of this for bachelorette parties?)

AUDIO: “José at the Black Cat!!!” from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

HOST: José banter with his very gay audience, eating up the attention of beautiful men, mocking the discomfort of tourists. He sings campy versions of known operas. He plays all the parts with his own asides and commentary with political thoughts. 300 people watch as he rants and sings, they laugh and cheer. Unlike Finocchio’s, the Black Cat’s space allows for him to interact with patrons. José Sarria becomes the icon of the Black Cat, almost synonymous with it. And when he has his audience laughing, has their full attention, he refers to them as a community. Likeminded, politically aligned, ethically the same in their queerness.

AUDIO: “José at the Black Cat!!!” from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

HOST: He reads articles from the paper while in drag, and comically comments on them. He also reads threatening notices sent to him by the police. At the end of every show, he asks everyone to stand, hold hands, and sing, “God Save Us Nellie Queens.”

AUDIO: “God Save Us Nellie Queens” performed by José Sarria and friends

HOST: Under the assumption that everyone here is gay, everyone is encouraged to participate. The audience is one queer community. Sarria helps shift the minority’s mentality. Language and culture bloom in a way once only fostered by anonymous letters. People make plans to meet in these bars, they make friends and lovers. Queer men, women, all genders in between, and all

types of sex workers share these spaces. **Donald Webster Cory** writes in *The Homosexual in America* in 1951,

DONALD WEBSTER CORY: From the gay street to the gay bar may be but a few steps, or several miles, but an aura of respectability is to be found at the latter that is lacking at the former. One need not hide one's head as an acquaintance walks by; one does not deny encounters, but on the contrary makes appointments, utilizes the meeting-place for social convenience.

HOST: Queers who find Webster's book find a place to go meet their people. As McCarthyism is on the rise, just hanging out in these spaces is an act of resistance. The government almost demands patriarchy and monogamy and traditional wage-earning family structure. Queerness and femininity are vulnerabilities to the government's American ideal. And many of these queer people don't even know the bars are paying off cops to keep them from raiding. But if the bar doesn't pay, customers are stuck in the squad's control. Women in "men's" clothing who aren't wearing "women's" underwear are arrested for impersonating the opposite sex. Drag queens are arrested on the same grounds. No bar is safe. The *San Francisco Chronicle* reports,

SF CHRONICLE REPORTER: All was not so gay, gay, gay as usual yesterday at the free thinking Black Cat Restaurant at 710 Montgomery Street. Agents of the Board of Equalization arrived on an errand: to take away the bohemianesque joint's license from Bartender Sol M. Stoumen.

HOST: Charging the bar as "a hangout for persons of homosexual tendencies," the State board does suspend the Black Cat's license. In his appeal to the board, Sol Stoumen rejects this claim. Police disagree. They testify that they've been inside, investigating the bar for over a year. They not only serve homosexuals, the Black Cat is a *meeting place* for them. Cops called "spotters" watch inside gay bars to keep track of regulars, so when they eventually raid a bar, the people can't say they just stumbled in and didn't know it was a gay bar. They've been seen there multiple times. Sol Stoumen loses his license for the Black Cat.

It's an incredibly profitable bar, and he's not easily letting it go. Stoumen hires attorney **Morris Lowenthal**, who shifts the case in a new appeal to the San Francisco Superior Court and the First District Court of Appeals. He takes an angle on it that justifies the bar as a homosexual hangout. In his argument, Lowenthal explains the new **Kinsey Reports** to the court. He states that homosexuals have the right to gather in a public space. This idea—that homosexuals not just be served but also welcomed to gather in a restaurant—is appalling to both courts. They deny his appeals and support the State board. Taking on **George Reilly's** State Board of Equalization, Lowenthal takes the case to the California Supreme Court, and finally persuades that judge.

JUDGE: Even habitual or regular meetings may be for purely social and harmless purposes, such as the consumption of food and drink, and it is to be presumed that a person is innocent of crime or wrong and that the law has been obeyed.

HOST: *Stoumen v. Reilly* affirms that homosexuals have the right to assemble and the right to be served alcohol. The Black Cat's liquor license is restored. Gay bars are officially not illegal. And in that ruling's phrasing, the cops find a sliver of wiggle room. *If* an illegal act occurs inside these bars, the police can shut it down, of course. And since sodomy is illegal and crossdressing is grounds for arrest, then any behavior that is *perceived* as though something homosexual or queer *is going* to happen, then police can take action. The ruling sets up homosexuality as an illegal act, not a state of being. Cops don't see gayness as something you *are*, but as something you *do*. So random touching, limp wrists, femme voices on men, butch clothing on women, same-gender dancing, kissing, hand holding – if cops see someone acting queer, they can raid because sodomy might happen. They call this queer behavior public indecency, and the police form new methods of controlling the queer community.

But this case essentially stopped the State Board of Equalization. Still, even post-war, the Armed Forces board picks up the slack. The military can't post the off-limits signs without the authorization from the State board, though, and the Armed Forces can't revoke liquor licenses, either. Even in a case against the Tenderloin's 585 Club, the cops testify that they checked ID cards at the door and they told the men not to leave with homosexuals. (I imagine the homosexuals taking their ID cards back from the cops privately smirked as they walked into the gay bar.) And other than that, there's not much else the cops can do—

COP 2: —unless a crime is committed.

AUDIO: “José at the Black Cat!!!” from the San Francisco GLBT History Archives

MUSIC: 1820s West

HOST: Finally, in **1951**, thanks to the Black Cat, gay bars boom again. San Francisco is again the exception to other cities. Miss Smith's Tea Room and the Tin Angel open, the Paper Doll's supper club gathers a huge following, the Beige Room moves to Broadway, and **Tommy's Place** and the **12 Adler** open. When the hearing is called for the 585 Club, the manager doesn't even show up to court. The owner of Pearl's shows up to his hearing to say maybe instead of kicking out the homosexuals, he “would rather not have service personnel.” No one cares if the Armed Forces board bans their bar from the military personnel. And the board knows it. Slowly, gender ambiguity and flirty language return to the bars. Dykes roll up their sleeves to show off their tattoos. Some lesbians hang out with sex workers and they make it no secret that they're paying these beautiful women. Like the early days of San Francisco, now sex workers are respected in queer society.

Many lesbians tend bar, like Kay in Filipino Town. Her father owns the bar and since she's gay, lesbians frequent her business. **Tommy Vasu** opens the 299, encouraging butch dykes like her to come in. Tommy wears ties, short hair, and hangs out with sex workers. She owns the parking lot across the street from her bar, where she takes in more capital. Tommy hangs with gangers and drives a Cadillac convertible. Other business owners call Tommy “a gentleman among ladies.”

Her bar has a hotel upstairs, which workers, of course, use to their advantage. At the 299, Tommy Vasu encourages women to take financial steps forward. With anti-prostitution laws still banning women from tending bar unless they own part of the business, Tommy gives women a percentage of her bar's ownership so they can work legally. Mona Sargent does the same thing. Above in Tommy's Place, there's a restaurant with a pianist in the back room and a mezzanine where patrons can see others down below at Adler. The access to multiple entrances and exits at two different addresses gives the bar a unique combination of safety and speakeasy. There's a voyeuristic element of watching from the mezzanine. Framed photos of women decorate the walls. The wide appeal encourages more lesbian bars to open: Ann's 440 replaces Mona's 440, the Copper Lantern opens, the Front, and the Anxious Asp, where the restroom walls are papered with pages of the Kinsey Report. Many of these bars are opened by lesbian waitresses or entertainers from earlier queer clubs like Mona's. They're all on or near Broadway's tourist district. And not all operate at once, but at least 4-7 lesbian bars are going at any time. Lesbians rent homes on Telegraph Hill nearby, making North Beach, as the song earlier suggested, the city's lesbian neighborhood.

The Armed Forces board is furious that they can't get legal backup from the State or police. In 1951, their chairman cites the number of venereal disease cases as grounds for the State board to reinstate wartime emergency protocols, so the military can post "off-limits" signs again. The State board decides that's a good reason, and they put up signs at the Black Cat, Finocchio's, the Beige Room, the 299, Mona's Candlelight, the Paper Doll... But of course venereal disease isn't what all these bars have in common. So the signs go up, but they can only keep out military. So the Armed Forces board pushes a little more, asking the State board to revoke some licenses and arrest some homosexuals. The State board responds to the military, keeping the *Stoumen v. Reilly* in mind:

STATE BOARD REP: It is generally found that the reasons for Out of Bounds orders do not constitute grounds for disciplinary action under the ABC Act, and the military order is given upon opinion rather than on evidence.

HOST: The SFPD then flatly states to the military that *Stoumen v. Reilly* is their reasoning and they have no cause to make arrests or shut down a bar if no crime is committed. Homosexual and transgender people continue to party. **Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon** check out the North Beach bars like Mona's and the Paper Doll. They see people who know each other and have their own groups, but personally Del and Phyl still feel like tourists. Those that feel the same way might join the **Daughters of Bilitis** one day. Others will gather at picnics, theatres, Halloween drag parties like the Beige Ball at the Beige Room, and high-fashion private drag shows in someone's upscale home. Gay men cruise in the parks and public bathhouses. The city is alive with queerness. **August 4, 1954, Mattachine Society Publications Chairman Hal Call** writes to a friend about San Francisco:

HAL CALL: ...daisy chains had been commonplace every night—in the men's room. Glory holes there, I am told, are large enough to crawl through...In Huntington Square, atop Nobb Hill

—one block from the Fairmont and the Mark...there are often up to 100—or more—males sitting and waiting out there at 3 a.m., and when one likely looking sailor walks through, the horde races to get at it. And, the bushes in the park seem to “get together” again and again after 9 p.m. Union Square has become notorious. I have seen up to 50 obvious persons waiting to make a contact at midnight on a weekend. Another park, Lafayette, in Pacific Heights, has been the scene of the same thing—with beatings and robberies resulting...Cruisers leaning against theater marquees on Market...have become very obvious and numerous.

HOST: But how long can it last? While the State Department begins cleaning house under Executive Order 10450, and the public’s perception of queerness shifts again, this time even in San Francisco.

While the newly revamped Mattachine Society moves headquarters up to the Bay, the Police Department starts a new “drive on sex deviates.” Through the last week of **June 1954**, sex crimes officers in plainclothes invade the gay bars and make arrests. They sweep the parks, beaches, and baths. The *San Francisco Examiner* reports the arrest of—

SF EXAMINER REPORTER: —a business executive, a college professor, a salesman, married men with children, and men picked up in Union Square, the favorite after dark rendezvous of homosexual prostitutes.

HOST: They can’t shut down the bars, but they can arrest anyone who acts queer. The arrested must register as sexual deviants, which is logged into a book in Sacramento. Then when there’s a sex crime, everyone in the book is interrogated. And people will do anything to stay out of the book. When one man tries to pay the bonding fee after arrest and stay out of the book, the bondsman says,

BONDSMAN: Well, we like to see something more tangible.

BARON: I have a practically brand new car. I’ll be very happy to sign it over as a security deposit, if you will.

HOST: Hal at Mattachine doesn’t have much sympathy for them:

HAL CALL: No private homes, apartments, or even parties have been raided. But streets, parks, bars, and beaches are being watched. It has come to pass that public lewd activities are intolerable. But what two willing adults do quietly in private is no concern of the law—and both a lieutenant and inspector on the **Vice Squad** have personally told me so.

HOST: He remains ignorant of the people who have no homes, have no ability to get employed to pay for a home. Or have to keep up the charade of heterosexuality at home in order to keep their job and home. He remains ignorant of the issues dealt with by transgender women of color



working on the streets below his Mattachine office. But still, he writes to the *San Francisco News*:

HAL CALL: Chief Gaffey and the Sex Crimes Details are probably aware that a great percentage of San Francisco's population is completely or partially homosexual.... It is unthinkable that such a huge minority can be either a) run out of the city; b) charged with an offense and put in jail or prison; or c) prevented from congregating with others like themselves.

HOST: The next month, despite paying off the police, Tommy's Place is raided by the vice squad. Her two bartenders, Grace and Joyce, are arrested and accused of serving minors. The minors have fake IDs, but their willingness to use them at Tommy's Place feeds into the "gays will recruit our children" narrative. The PTA demands police protection. Chief Gaffey encourages cops to "move in on sexual deviates." The State board revokes Tommy's liquor licenses. The San Francisco County Grand Jury and a U.S. Senate subcommittee start investigations. They report stories about high school girls who "donned mannish clothes and frequented pool halls," eventually leading them to Tommy's Place. The arrests are all over the papers.

SF EXAMINER REPORTER: Repercussions were swift yesterday following the smashing of a narcotics and sex 'thrill' ring which had enmeshed teen-age girls here... Sex deviates have used drugs, including barbiturates and benzedrine, to make youngsters in the 14-15 age group more pliable.

HOST: The police do report that they found drugs during the raid. It's later discovered that the police planted drugs, possibly heroin, in the bathroom and pretended to find it. Grace and Joyce are set to go to trial on the charges of contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and everyone who knows them knows they don't do heroin, and it doesn't make sense that someone would tape it to a pipe beneath the sink because no one would shoot up in the bathroom regularly because they'd be caught easily.

Grace goes to trial in the height of the publicity, and she's convicted. The other women, customers of the bar, are encouraged to testify against the women who opened a space for them to feel welcome. The next month, **October 1954**, the Senate subcommittee comes to town to broadcast their hearings on national television, declaring sex deviates "a big factor in juvenile delinquency and drug addiction." The *Mattachine Newsletter* reports:

HAL CALL: The owners deny these charges. They have forced strict identification rules and have not tolerated the presence of any suspected or known drug addicts.

HOST: The *Examiner* turns it around on the Mattachine:

SF EXAMINER REPORTER: The organization of sexual deviates...one of the largest memberships in a nationwide organization of sexual deviates suspected of being a big factor in juvenile delinquency and drug addiction.

HOST: The Grand Jury looks into the Mattachine Society, but finds their publication “arty” with “nothing lewd.” Tommy’s Place and the 12 Adler, on the other hand, are shut down.

SF EXAMINER REPORTER: There must be sustained action by the police and the district attorney to stop the influx of homosexuals. Too many taverns cater to them openly. Only police action can drive them out of the city. It is to be hoped that the courts here will finally recognize this problem for what it is and before the situation so deteriorates that San Francisco finds itself as the complete haven for undesirables. The courts heretofore have failed to support the arresting and prosecuting authorities. Without the support of the courts, the police and the district attorney cannot attack the problem effectively.

HOST: A follow-up piece demands that the police clean up the city’s “unwholesome” conditions:

SF EXAMINER REPORTER: The condition is marked by the increase of homosexuals in the parks, public gathering places and certain taverns in the city. It is a bad situation. It is a situation that has resulted in extortion and blackmail. Even worse, these deviates multiply by recruiting teen-agers.

HOST: The 1954 records of “sex offense” arrests in San Francisco reach new heights. Sex offenses include all sorts of euphemisms for queerness—sex perversion, indecent acts, obscene literature. The whole nation experiences this. After the panic ensuing the public trial of Tommy’s Place, the State Board of Equalization’s chairman encourages voters to pass a measure splitting his agency’s responsibilities between dealing with state tax regulation and liquor licensing control. The board has mostly been consumed with tax issues on liquor, not policing the environments where the liquor is sold – especially after the *Stoumen Black Cat* case. If this measure is passed, an independent board will better police the bars.

It was just a few years ago that a nascent queer society was taking its first steps toward community. Established meeting places, economy culture, drew people in the know to this exceptional town. The state steps in and tells them they’re all sick, tells them they don’t deserve the public spaces and opportunities everyone else has. Someone has to show the queer people of San Francisco that they do not just exist, but that they are healthy, and that they are a likeminded community with power to overthrow government rules. The challenge is convincing queer people that we deserve liberation — and then we can take it.

As the state contemplates how to get more cops in bars, **George Christopher** runs for mayor on a law and order campaign against the former head of the State board, George Reilly – as in *Stoumen v. Reilly*, the Black Cat case legalizing gathering and serving of homosexuals. George Christopher campaigns on a platform arguing Reilly has been unable to control liquor and vice,

and he's unfit to run this city as mayor. Voters make their voices heard. They pass the measure splitting the State board, creating California's new **Alcoholic Beverage Control Board**, or ABC—a board specifically made to police the bars. And they elect law-and-order George Christopher as their mayor. Once a coastal port that cultivated queer culture, San Francisco's queer community now finds itself under the fists of two powerful new enemies... Next week on episode 3, "Resort for Sex Perverts."

*Cut from the episode:*

HOST: Jim Kepner told historian Eric Marcus more about going to those 1940s gay bars:

JIM KEPNER: When we left the bars, we were very careful not to go out at the same time any of the queens did. Some of them were real cute about tricking us and would walk out the door at the same time one of us more closely ones went out. There was a two-step that you used to do as you went out the door. You would take the minimum number of steps you had to in order to get into a position where you appeared to be passing by the bar.

HOST: When Kepner told that story of seeing queens dragged by police out of the Black Cat to an early Mattachine discussion group. He added,

JIM KEPNER: Look, the queens were the only ones who ever fought. If not for the queens, there wouldn't have been bars that the rest of us could sneak into. Because of them, we could go to the bars and be gay for one night; we could let our hair down. But when we left the bars, we pinned up our hair and pretended we were like everyone else. And they didn't... They're our front line. And they're not the ones who cause prejudice. People are much more upset when they find out that their neighbor or friend who wasn't obvious is, in fact, gay.