

rency with the general public, even if its antonym *Urning* (and the English counterpart *Uranian*) were used for some decades by German authors and their British imitators. The earliest appearance of the words *gay/straight* in tandem must therefore be the term of development of the whole semantic process.

Although it has not been found in print before 1933 (when it appears in Noel Ersine's *Dictionary of Underworld Slang* as *gay cat*, "a homosexual boy"), it is safe to assume that the usage must have been circulating orally in the United States for a decade or more. (As Jack London explains in *The Road* of 1907, *gay cat* originally meant—or so he thought—an apprentice hobo, without reference to sexual orientation.) In 1955 the English journalist Peter Wildblood defined *gay* as "an American euphemism for homosexual," at the same time conceding that it had made inroads in Britain. Grammatically, the word is an adjective, and there has been some resistance to the use of *gay*, *gays* as nouns, but this opposition seems to be fading.

In the light of the semantic history outlined above, a particularly ludicrous complaint is the notion, advanced by some heterosexual writers, that the "innocent" word *gay* has been "kidnapped" by homosexuals in their insouciant willingness to subvert the canons of language as well as morals. As we have seen, the sexual penumbras of meaning were originally introduced by the mainstream society (i.e., chiefly heterosexuals), first to designate their own rakes and ramblers, and then the women these men caused to "fall." Quite apart from the quaint charge of verbal kidnapping (which ignores the fact that many words in English are polysemous in that they have two or more distinct meanings), there does exist a legitimate concern among homosexuals themselves that the aura of frivolity and promiscuity adhering to the word has not been dissolved. In that sense the comparison of the substitution of *gay* for homosexual with black for Negro is not valid, though

the two shifts were contemporary. To be sure *gay* has gained the allegiance of many well-meaning outsiders for the same reason as black, the assumption being that these terms are the ones preferred by the individuals they designate. Many lesbian organizations now reject the term *gay*, restricting it to men, hence the spread of such binary phrases as "gay and lesbian" and "lesbian and gay people." Such ukases notwithstanding, expressions such as "Is she gay?" are still common among lesbians.

Despite all the problems, brevity and convenience suggest that this three-letter word is here to stay. Significantly, in 1987, in the aftermath of negotiations with the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD), the *New York Times*, which had formerly banned the use of *gay* except in direct quotations, assented to its use.

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GAY LIBERATION

See *Liberation, Gay*.

GAY RIGHTS

See *Decriminalization; Movement, Gay*.

GAY STUDIES

Gay scholarship on the subject of homosexuality has been fostered by both political and personal motives. On the political plane, it has meant the search for other cultures and societies in which the homosexual was not a criminal and an outcast, in which homosexual love was not the object of opprobrium and disgust, but both were an accepted part of the social and sexual life of the age. Above all, the homoerotic component of the glorious civilizations of the past—ancient Greece and Rome, medieval Islam and Japan—was a stimulus and a challenge to homosexual researchers seeking the roots of their own situation. At the same time they were studying themselves through the