

GLBT Expo

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movement progressed, economic organizing took on new shapes. Queer people pulled resources together to produce publications: *ONE*, *Mattachine Review*, *Gay Community News*, *Ladder*, and a slew of other queer presses and publications.

In the Seventies, queer people discovered the power of boycotts. From refusing to purchase orange juice in protest over its spokeswoman's support of an anti-gay initiative in Florida to giving up the products of Coors Brewing Company because of the conservative politics of its owners, queer people sometimes were successful at changing corporate policy. More recently, the queer history of boycotting made it easier for groups like the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation to target corporate sponsors of homophobic radio and TV shows by Dr. Laura and Michael Savage.

AIDS distracted gay men from any Leftist agenda the movement may have had and in the intervening years, some radical lesbians had children and formed families. The movement changed. Some say it grew up.

We have worked toward assimilation by fighting for laws to protect us against employment discrimination — laws of great symbolic value, but of limited real benefit primarily to middle-class and wealthy working gay people. In any case, our move toward assimilation and a larger reorganization of the source of American identity from function to consumerism opened the door for a new form of economic organizing: the market niche.

It wasn't until the Nineties that savvy marketers and assimilationist gays

promoted queer people as an untapped market. With an estimated \$35 billion up for grabs, businesses jump through hoops not to upset queer people. Corporations spend millions of dollars advertising in our national publications, supporting our organizations, or sponsoring our events to get our attention. Many have adopted more inclusive human resource policies. Businesses that accept and support queer people are in; those that discriminate or work against us are out. The Coors Brewing Company, once the target of boycotts, now provides millions each year to sponsor theme nights at gay bars or advertise in national gay publications.

Today, playing up the gay market niche is the dominant form of economic organizing in the gay movement. We do little-to-no economic development within our own community. We do not encourage individuals to start their own businesses and work towards self-sufficiency. We do not have mentoring programs for queer-owned small businesses. If we support gay-owned businesses, we do so because they also support our community institutions, and not because advancing the economic interest of our gay brothers or sisters is inherently a good thing. We have not, as other oppressed minorities have, organized funding cooperatives or community financial institutions (national banks posing as 'gay banks' don't count).

These forms of economic organizing would undermine the value of queer purchasing power and, ultimately, an assimilationist agenda. If we can stand on our own as a community, employ each

other, support each other's businesses, then why would we need to hetero-model ourselves into the straight world?

What Makes Us Stronger

And yet, one of the interesting things about the Expo was how many queer people were there to support or build up queer businesses. The straight companies competed side-by-side with traditionally gay companies in a way that democratized commerce.

Aaron Leventman was at the Expo representing Provincetown, where he's the assistant town clerk, and Provincetown Tourism, where he's the administrative assistant.

They were there to "promote tourism because tourism is our main industry," said Leventman. "Because of gay marriage and the high court ruling, we're here to answer questions about getting married in Provincetown."

Provincetown, a small Portuguese fishing village and summer arts community on the tip of Cape Cod, has been a gay tourism destination for the better part of a century. While vowing to remain a party town for gay singles, Provincetown is positioning itself as, in the words of Provincetown Tourism Director Patricia Fitzpatrick, "A Gay Niagara Falls."

A number of gay entrepreneurs went to the Expo to network with other businesses. Jonathon Corish saw the Expo as "a platform to launch this business and get our name out." Based in Florida, his company Forever Now produces greeting cards for the gay and lesbian market that are "high-quality and tasteful."

"It was an excellent place to meet key people in this industry and have fun at the same time," said Corish.

Susan Siegel attended to pro-

mote the Children's Alternative Media Project, "a business dedicated to increasing lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender acceptance and visibility by developing and marketing quality children's media with accompanying curriculum materials." That's gay-themed children's books, if you weren't paying attention.

Wachovia Corporation, the U.S. Postal Service, DiversityWorking.com, and others offered career information. Starbucks brought their mobile latte van and set up an elaborate booth that stretched over three spaces.

"We're committed to neighborhoods," said Jack Rakes, regional recruiter for Starbucks Coffee Company, who attended the expo to recruit workers. Rakes stressed that Starbucks was deeply committed to promoting diversity. The company offers domestic partnership benefits and focuses its philanthropy on literacy and AIDS issues.

The goal of economic organizing is not the reformulation, recasting, or revision of queer people to serve the needs of corporate America. It's about changing America's economic and commercial culture so that it meets the needs, whims, wants, and desires of queer people. As a tool to this end, the Expo offers a place where queer people can network and exchange ideas; a matchmaker for employers and queer workers; and a venue for gay businesses to compete directly with mainstream businesses and let the natural tension between capitalism and identity work its magic. ▼

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Coming to OITM in JUNE:

Chelsea Boys

by Glen Hanson & Allan Neuwirth!

"Chelsea Boys" revolves around the lives and loves of three gay roommates residing in New York's trendy queer ghetto: cuddly Nathan, a short, neurotic, 40-something native New Yorker; gorgeous Sky, the naïve yet deeply spiritual art student raised on a farming commune in Canada; and the fabulous, street-smart black club diva Soirée, who masks his inner pain with a rapier wit and outrageous style.

