

# The New York Times

## Film: Documentary on Homosexuals

**B**EFORE STONEWALL: The Making of a Gay and Lesbian Community" begins with a preface. "The people who appear in this film should not be presumed to be homosexual" — pause — "or heterosexual." This is a nice touch, a suggestion of what the documentary film is trying to do. In giving us a contemporary history of homosexuals in America, it says they are not really different.

The film — made by John Scagliotti, Greta Schiller and Robert Rosenberg, with partial financing from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, the New York Council for the Humanities, and the New York Council on the Arts — adroitly mixes old newsreel and film footage, interviews and even home movies. It opens today at Waverly 1.

The Stonewall in the title refers to the Greenwich Village bar raided by the police on June 27, 1969. The homosexual patrons resisted. A riot broke out. The incident is sometimes acclaimed as the birth of the homosexual rights movement.

Nonetheless, as the documentary makes abundantly clear, social change began long before that. Women joined the labor force in large

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### Contemporary History

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**B**EFORE STONEWALL, a documentary produced by Greta Schiller, Robert Rosenberg and John Scagliotti for Before Stonewall, Inc., in association with the Center for the Study of Filmed History; released by David Whitten Promotions. At Waverly 1, Avenue of the Americas at Third Street. Running time: 87 minutes. This film has no rating.

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numbers in World War II, which released them from old ways of life. Male homosexuals, meanwhile, found common cause in the military. After the war, homosexual communities were formed as part of the population shift to the cities.

In sometimes moving interviews, homosexuals talk about what they found. "I was in a room with 12 other lesbians for the first time in my life," a woman says, joyously recalling a meeting of the Daughters of Bilitis, "and, oh, what a thrill that was!" On screen, her happiness, even if it is in retrospect, is contagious.

"Before Stonewall" touches an earlier era, too. "I do more botnering now with straight people than I ever did in my life," an elderly woman

says. She talks of Harlem nightclubs in the 1920's. An elderly man, spare and elegant, remembers the period differently. It was the "world of the demimondaine — the people who would be out at night with no good place to go." The euphemism for homosexuality then, he says, was "temperamental."

A contemporary of his says that he "can never remember a time when homosexuality wasn't a dirty word." On the other hand, "Before Stonewall" does make it clear that it is far less of a dirty word than it used to be. It is a cheerful message, and it befits "Before Stonewall," a modest and intelligent film.

John Corry