

## Introduction

### The Last Safe Group to Hate

**BELIZE:** Well I hate America, Louis. I hate this country. It's just big ideas, and stories, and people dying, and people like you.

The white cracker who wrote the national anthem knew what he was doing. He set the word "free" to a note so high nobody can reach it. That was deliberate. Nothing on earth sounds less like freedom to me.

You come with me to room 1013 over at the hospital, I'll show you America. Terminal, crazy and mean.

—From *Angels in America*

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Early in 2001, a group of parishioners from Kansas's Westboro Baptist Church, led by Reverend Fred Phelps, descended upon Fort Collins, Colorado. They were protesting Colorado State University's official response to the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity and the Alpha Chi Omega sorority's 1998 homecoming float. This float had gained notoriety primarily for the not-so-subtle references to the brutal beating of Matthew Shepard, who had just been pummeled and tied to a fence in Laramie, Wyoming. Shepard's assailants had left him to die in a pose that Laramie law enforcement officials and the mountain biker who had discovered his body thought resembled, if not exactly, a scarecrow. The description of Shepard's suggestive and gruesome posture gained quick media appeal, evoking a combination of disturbing, if not sensational, images: lynching, crucifixion, if not *The Wizard of Oz*.<sup>1</sup> Tastelessly, a scarecrow with a variety of written homophobic epithets had decorated the homecoming float, a direct reference to Shepard's beating. It was a particularly cruel display since Shepard was then just a few miles away, dying in a Fort Collins hospital bed. Reaction was

fortunately swift, and suspensions and dissolutions of the Greek organizations soon followed.

The lynching and its aftermath flamed numerous queer and other activists into action. In sharp contrast to a crime based in “hate,” loving sentiment and outraged concern coursed through the candlelight vigils, the commentaries, the plays, and the made-for-television movies about the tragedy. Yet there was still a very vocal group of people that condoned the brutality—led by Phelps, who had been slandering homosexuals for years. It was nevertheless shocking that he and his church had gone so far as to protest the trials of Shepard’s killers. A number of activists were appalled and participated in “angel action”: they dressed in angel costumes, with large, seven-foot-high wings, creating a visible barrier so one would not have to see signs such as “Fags Die God Laughs.”<sup>2</sup> A wonderful gesture to be sure, but we can’t forget that just beyond the love of the angels’ barricade were reminders of the violent intolerance of the event—reminders that there are those who did not share in the sympathy and outrage over Shepard’s murder.

Over two years later, this disdain for Shepard’s homosexuality had not abated, and Westboro Church was still upset about the disciplinary actions against CSU’s Greek organizations. “What they did and the way they treated those kids in that frat and that sorority for mocking that homo was outrageous,” complained Phelps. “If there’s any group that deserves to be mocked for their filthy lifestyle, it’s the fags.”<sup>3</sup> This kind of inflammatory speech is standard Phelps. He and his followers often give extreme voice to a particularly familiar condemnation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans people. His church’s Web site, “Godhatesfags.com,” is still on-line at the time of this book’s writing. It features the “Perpetual Gospel Memorial to Matthew Shepard,” in which an image of Matthew screams electronically and counts the number of days he has been in hell—a biblically just punishment for the “Satanic lifestyle” Matthew lived as a “homosexual.”<sup>4</sup> Phelps’s church preaches what many Protestants have long thought about queer sexuality: “‘GOD HATES FAGS’—though elliptical—is a profound the-

ological statement, which the world needs to hear more than it needs oxygen, water and bread. The three words, fully expounded, show" that severe punishments are in store when one goes against the strict scriptural and foundational laws of a holy society: "The only lawful sexual connection is the marriage bed. All other sexual activity is whoremongery and adultery, which will damn the soul forever in Hell."

It is important to realize that this expression of God's hate, this expression of rancor toward those participating in unlawful sexual practices, comes not only from the fringe, not only from the CSU students, a disturbed Kansas pastor, or even Matthew Shepard's young and angry murderers. This hatred is mainstream. Rather than dismiss Phelps as simply an extremist, as a number of fundamentalist and evangelical groups strategically do, it is important to relate his church's outrageous hyperbole to the kinds of public, doctrinal, financial, and political gains opposition to "homosexuality" has provided for powerful Christian organizations, not to mention the Republican Party, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.<sup>5</sup> Certainly Westboro Baptist Church is in the minority when it brandishes placards such as "God Hates America" or "Thank God for 9/11," but the anger it feels toward nearly the entire world emanates from the permissiveness and sinfulness of a nation that does not hate fags enough. The hatred of homosexuals is the members' primary ministry. And there is something about homophobia that arouses a deep religious fervor that extends across the more moderate spectrum of contemporary evangelical groups. For instance, the huge Colorado Springs-based evangelical media giant, Focus on the Family, even though it advocates love for the homosexual sinner who must, with God's grace, be saved from homosexuality's sin,<sup>6</sup> still considers homosexuality the "most difficult issue faced in public policy." It is an "issue" that potentially threatens the most important principle of the group's "practical Outreach" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ: "We believe that the institution of marriage was intended by God to be a permanent, lifelong relationship between a man and a woman, regardless of trials, sickness, financial reverses or emotional stresses that may ensue."<sup>7</sup>

Especially now that there are intensified efforts to legalize same-sex marriage and increasing images of queers in the entertainment industry, the religiously reinforced heterosexual family has potent, conservative appeal. The family grounds the conservative traditions that the right holds dearly—traditions it perceives to be viciously under attack by the presence and increasing acceptance of homosexuality. As a policy issue, the publicity around homosexual condemnations proves to be crucial, enabling the so-called religious right to gain, lucratively, a stronghold on conservative constituents of the market-driven United States, longing for “purity,” tradition, and financial prosperity. When “homosexuals” are a religious issue, the reproductive heterosexual family is cast as in decline and in need of “traditional values.” A resurgence of strong, religious emotion inevitably follows.

Homosexuality, in the early 1990s, became a major topic of policy making—a topic that still helps win elections. Soon after Focus on the Family moved its international headquarters to Colorado Springs in 1991, it supported—along with Pat Robertson’s Christian Coalition, the National Legal Foundation, Lou Sheldon’s Traditional Values Coalition, Concerned Women for America, Summit Ministries, and the Eagle Forum—Colorado for Family Values’ successful grassroots 1992 state referendum known as Amendment 2.<sup>8</sup> The passage of this amendment effectively curtailed the full participation of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (and most likely trans) people in legal claims of discrimination, prohibiting, quite underhandedly, their legal right to assert that they have suffered discrimination. According to the ACLU of Colorado, the amendment “ma[de] it *legal and constitutional* to discriminate against men and women who are—or *who are thought to be*—homosexual or bisexual.”<sup>9</sup> The United States Supreme Court agreed, with the majority opinion arguing that such a group could not be targeted. The amendment was ruled unconstitutional in 1996.

The resemblances between the Westboro Baptist Church and Focus on the Family are not hard to detect: for instance, as with Phelps, Focus on the Family helped wage a prominent protest on homosexuality in Colorado, and both organizations garnered huge national and international atten-

tion. The reaction to Amendment 2's beating of gay, lesbian, and bisexual rights in Colorado was swift and produced the kind of media attention that ironically aided evangelical groups like Focus on the Family, provoking the homosexual panic and religious relief it needed to promote its particular public and biblical policies.<sup>10</sup> A large-scale boycott of the state was proclaimed, and Colorado soon came to be called, as Wyoming would be after Matthew Shepard's murder, "The Hate State." The *Advocate* ran, in 1993, a glossy, nine-page article hysterically entitled "Colorado Goes Straight to Hell," noting that "the negative publicity" had created battle lines, and "Colorado's gays and lesbians are left to fend for themselves in a poisonous atmosphere."<sup>11</sup> But the religious right was pleased to engage the poison. Although easy to condemn, the religious right operates according to cherished beliefs, believing its work to be motivated by faith and, especially, by a love that refuses to heed its important message. Followers portray themselves as religious victims in a secular world, fighting to bring the light back to humankind. In fact, they claim, as Christians long have throughout the last thousand years or so, to be some of the most persecuted people in a world that devalues their strong religious faith.<sup>12</sup> Conservative fundamentalists are engaged in a form of worship as they battle what they consider to be a corroding and pervasive evil in a world that is less and less holy.

The people of Colorado, led by the state's rapid influx of evangelical Christian organizations in the early 1990s, willed this law, and their righteous and religious leanings legitimized the amendment's discriminatory force.<sup>13</sup> For instance, Kevin Tebedo, executive director of Colorado for Family Values, in a forum produced by the Colorado Springs library system called "Tolerance/Intolerance: Sexual Orientation Issues," summed up the Pikes Peak climate around issues of sexual diversity. He claimed that the country was in a moral crisis that fanned the flames of a religious war—a war that, if homosexuality were to receive political and cultural legitimacy, would be fought and won, and "every knee will bow" in front of the Lord.<sup>14</sup>

Although not everyone bowed in religious defeat and devotion (not yet), Coloradans experienced an intense political and legal atmosphere, leaving

quite permanent effects. But it wasn't just Colorado. This "last safe group to hate"—lesbians, gays, bisexuals, queers, trans people—is easily hated anywhere and by anyone. Exactly contemporaneous to Amendment 2, a similar state referendum, Proposition 9, was on the ballot in Oregon, and a number of similar moves on local and statutory public policy were in the works, or on the stark horizon.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, conjoined religious and conservative opposition to lesbian and gay rights would heat up in states as far apart as Hawaii and Vermont, where the questions of civil unions provoked anxieties around conservative notions and definitions of the family, culminating in the Defense of Marriage Act, which has recently been reinforced by the backlash of anti-gay marriage amendments after some strides in same-sex marriage rights were gained in a few liberal-leaning states.

What we specifically learn from situations such as Matthew Shepard's murder and Colorado's passage of Amendment 2 is that a loving God hates that fags might marry, adopt, or live happy lives in their sin; and, somehow, this strong religious rhetoric appeals to a national citizenry that is only partially religious—and even less fundamentally religious. In other words, God hates that fags (and lesbians, bisexuals, trans, other queers) might upset and revolutionize the heterosexual nation. And although Colorado evangelicals are the minority of the state's population, over half of the electorate approved the amendment. Strong religious words about an uncomfortable topic such as queer sexuality not only unite sexually conservative people across economic classes, ethnicities, and races, but are part of a tradition of collective rhetorical expressions about what it means to be an "American." One can simply think of the ways that the terrorist actions of September 11 inspired an entire nation to start singing "God Bless America," to start repeating slogans such as "One Nation under God." These collective utterances do not signal that a terrorist action provoked the conversion of the majority of the United States to a newly found or rediscovered religious faith. What these songs and strong words about God and the blessed nation teach us is that powerful expressions of unity are often religious rhetorics—*not specific religious belief systems or theologies*. The

words of God are conveniently and easily used to express the deep sentiments of an anxiously conservative and collective population of people.

Religious language has always been part of the strongest, united descriptions of American communities, with roots that are puritanical, constitutional, and persist today, even as the country has become increasingly respectful, at least nominally, of religious diversity. The expression of the religious intolerance of queers is a kind of hate speech that serves an important role in the rhetoric of American society. Years ago, the influential Puritan historian Perry Miller described a “literary type” of national rhetoric developed by Puritans in the seventeenth century: the fast-day sermon. Otherwise known as “the jeremiad,” this kind of religious talk harped on the lapses in religious devotion and practice in a community that had originally been founded as a city upon the hill, as one nation under God. The description of these lapses, and their particular causes, served a variety of purposes that helped reorient and consolidate the community that had been ravaged by religious “declension,” or deterioration. According to Miller and critics such as Sacvan Bercovitch, these sermons helped “retur[n] to the exercise of former authority” and did so by naming the spiritual crises at the origins of national decay—and those origins could then be expelled, at least rhetorically. Of course, scapegoats were usually the more provocative elements or members of the community—people who were considered foreign to the traditional values of the group. There were those who did not belong, and they needed to be expelled from the group. Saying as much (even more than doing) became a soothing speech ritual that helped the majority feel connected to the nostalgia of happier, holier times. Miller writes: “Having suffered the intrusion of foreign tyranny and alien ideology, having expelled the invader by an act of will, now resuming the direction of their own affairs, the Court found something infinitely reassuring—what reestablished continuity with the past—in rehearsal of the comfortable array of defects, phrased out of their own experience and accustomed language of their own judgment.”<sup>16</sup> “Phrasing out,” through this very American literary convention of the jeremiad, was of course not a final

act; saying that the intruders, the “decay,” were gone did not make it so. But the act of repeating the expulsion (the “rehearsal of the comfortable array of defects”), the act of condemning and lamenting the sins that had appeared in a community that was no longer as religious as it thought it once was, evoked a nostalgia that reconstituted the society as one with nobler origins. Such nostalgia was a comfort that could fuel and strengthen the religious ties of a majority rule that inevitably would become more secular as the colony became colonies, and eventually a nation.

One can repetitively hear the distinguishable features of the jeremiad today, especially in the examples I have already cited. The national, heterosexual family, a religious tradition—if not the core tradition of the nation with civil and legal enfranchisements—is perceived to be under attack by the nontraditional homosexuals. Especially now, as they try to wed, homosexuals threaten the very fabric of the United States because they want to celebrate, enjoy, adopt, and legislate sinful, deviant behaviors. Homosexuals are evidence that the nation has lost its more pristine religiosity. As a result, the traditional family, the conservative predicate of a strong society, needs to be a specific focus made possible by what needs to be “phrased out” of that focus: the decay-ridden homosexual.

What contemporary, anti-homosexual jeremiads signal, among other things, is that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans politics must be concerned with the rhetorical force of religion. Religious condemnations, representations, and policies around same-sex sexuality, in large part, compose the parameters of contemporary LGBTQ publicity in a nation that is resolutely not ready to grant full citizenship rights to queer people. The seemingly inherent social conservatism of religious language guards, if not creates, a nation that does not want to have its foundational social organization, *the family*, substantially and systematically changed or challenged. Sure, the aesthetic gains of LGBTQ visibility in the late 1990s and early years of the twenty-first century might suggest that queer sexuality is an acceptable feature of the national entertainment landscape.<sup>17</sup> But the 2004 U.S. presidential reelection of George W. Bush should grimly remind us that there are

still very explosive concerns about rights that swirl around the “family”: marriage rights, partner rights, and adoptive rights, among other concerns. In fact, that election should reinforce the axiom that a religiously reinforced heterosexual familial unit still remains the political and cultural priority. The perceived attacks on that priority help reinscribe the absolute straightness and religiosity of the U.S. public sphere: there is something necessary and politically valuable in making sure that queers are available to be phrased out of, but not removed from or fully included in, the law, the culture, and the politics of the United States.

Rather than get lost in despair, I want this book to illustrate the unexpected opportunities hatred has occasioned for queers—for quite some time. The conservative uses of the conservative language of religious hate are only part of the story. For hostile language often has a peculiar use-value in oppositional politics. Judith Butler’s *Excitable Speech* is a subtle exploration of hate speech, “question[ing] for a moment the presumption that hate speech always works, not to minimize the pain that is suffered as a consequence of hate speech, but to leave open the possibility that its failure is the condition of critical response.”<sup>18</sup> I’m provoked by Butler’s insights, and in *God Hates Fags* I want to argue that religious condemnations of queers, what often amounts to queer hate speech,<sup>19</sup> does not necessarily only hurt and harm. Rather, I am interested in the fact that queers have long used such hateful expressions as the conditions of their publicity in a U.S. public sphere—a sphere that necessarily always shapes the positions from where anyone, especially queers, can speak. I want to analyze what we might term a “queering” of conservative religious hate speech about queers. Yet rather than produce, as Butler proposes, a “resignification of speech . . . [that] opens new contexts, speaking in ways that have never been legitimated, and hence producing legitimation in new forms,”<sup>20</sup> queers also mine the hostility and politics of the old and very traditional rhetorical forms of national belonging that have always been religiously legitimated by the instances of the strong, conservative language I described above.

Rather than suggest a politics based on another version of the importance of the difference of queers, the American jeremiad should give us pause about formulating identity difference as the antidote to coercive forms of national consensus. The jeremiad should warn us about relying too much on the recognition of difference as the best kind of political action, especially if the nation-state wants, indeed requires, queers to be different. Thus, this book advocates a politics already embedded in the worst words of the nation. Despite the particular rhetorical violence inflicted perniciously on queers by conservative, collective expressions of U.S. belonging, LGBTQ feeling, politics, aesthetics, and ideologies have long understood the kind of power the repetition of religious hate speech offers. While lesbian, bisexual, and gay theologians or spiritually and pastorally minded gay activists and academics dominate much gay-positive thinking about religion,<sup>21</sup> I want to draw our attention, instead, to examples of the virulent rhetoric of the Christian right that accompanies numerous expressions of queerness and queer politics throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Throughout this study, I rely on an analysis of the *rhetoric* of religion, a rhetoric belonging to primarily conservative forms of Christianity in the United States. By focusing methodologically on the rhetoric rather than the belief of certain forms of Christian religion, I remind us of the differences between religious language and religious belief. I do so in order to shed another kind of light on the expressions of religious hatred and intolerance that saturate a variety of important cultural and political objects that constitute, in part, the public sphere of minority sexuality: literature, art, music, media, politics, judicial review, and personal testimonies. The conceptual tools that make this book methodologically possible are interdisciplinary and gathered from literary studies, philosophical inquiries, cultural studies, critical race studies, queer theory, feminist theory, critical legal studies, as well as insights garnered from original archival and historical research of the queers and conservative Christians who share in the intense expressions of the religious hatred of homosexuality. I alternate close read-

ings of objects that are very meaningful for queer people—such as literature, magazines, political pamphlets, gay icons—with the critical legal and political analyses of Supreme Court cases and anti-gay legislation that shape the way such cultural objects can be read, experienced, transformed, and understood. I also pay deep attention to the political strategies, public declarations, Web sites, interviews, and other media made by key religious right organizations that have mounted the most successful regulations and condemnations of homosexuality in the most recent past.

In these pages, I investigate the manner in which religious hate becomes a language through which queers strategically mediate conventional structures of national belonging. Feelings are complicated things, and hate in particular is very messy. So in order to understand religious hate speech, I look to Raymond Williams, and his oft-quoted “structures of feeling” concept. For Williams, structures of feelings are cultural hypotheses rather than explicit facts, the “produced institutions, formations, and experiences” we are so prone to perceive so easily. Williams conceives of a structure of feeling as “a kind of feeling and thinking which is indeed social and material, but each in an embryonic phase before it can become fully articulate and defined exchange.”<sup>22</sup> That is, feelings are not fully formed, are not entirely articulate, but still perform a very important service: they can give some kind of shape, however hypothetical or inaccurate, to those things that don’t have shape. And hate can be the queer’s “embryonic stage.” In other words, the hate that marks so much of the way queers are targeted by the religious right and the national jeremiad can nevertheless be made into a structure of feeling that helps queers—who’ve been forbidden, who’ve been silenced, and who’ve been forced not fully to belong to the U.S. citizenry—carve out sustainable, if not yet fully understood or disclosed lives embedded within a politics and culture predicated upon so much violence and hate. The particular form this structure of feeling takes is linguistic. Although religious queer expressions might seem injurious and restricting, these religious *words* are just that: *words*. A language of hatred is not the same thing as the emotion of hatred, and even though the hatred of the

right doesn't quite belong to queers, queers, in order to give voice to the complaints and injuries they must endure in the United States, can use the right's hateful words. Religious hate can so often be transformed into inarticulate language of the queer.

What specifically makes this form of emotive language so operative is one important comparison these hateful words can inspire: the comparison between queers and racial minorities. The religious hatred of queers and the nation's shameful history of racism can be made to seem resonant.<sup>23</sup> Expressions of religious homophobia, so we're often told, are much like expressions of racism; a religious slur against a queer is much like a racist slur against a racial minority. The comparison between the experiences of minority sexuality and minority race can certainly be found everywhere: from protest chants, "Marriage is a Civil Right! Gay/Straight! Black/White!" to the highest level of judicial review in the Supreme Court's reversal of Amendment 2 in *Romer v. Evans*, which cites comparisons between Amendment 2 and the infamous segregation ruling in *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Certainly, these are not the easiest or best comparisons to make. There are vast and important differences between sexuality and race that can be obscured by linking the terms. Whole histories of oppressions and nuances of experience can be occluded or forgotten when we start mixing the categories together. We will explore, in greater detail, the particular perils the "like race" analogy threatens. Nevertheless, racial analogies, despite their very real dangers, have had a productive and strategic currency for queers in the sphere of U.S. culture and politics, especially for queers who are also racial minorities. I argue in this book that expressions of religious hate work for queers because the repetition of religious hate speech allows queers to make the race analogy—an analogy associated mostly with the African American experience, which has effectively, rightly or wrongly, become a metonym for all racial minority positions in the United States. The imprecise analogy between queerness and race is made possible by the citation of religious hatred.

Let me be very clear: this book does not attempt to dismantle or deni-

grate the important analytics that have been ingeniously developed to understand and investigate the awful and wonderful cultures, politics, and histories of race relations in the United States. I have no interest in “doing away” with the concept of race by dislodging it from its most traditional, interpretive frameworks.<sup>24</sup> I understand that the comparison between racial and queer minorities is a dangerous comparison to make. There is much about race and sexuality that cannot be said when we compare the two. Yet, although the racial analogy does not easily fit, does not cleanly identify queers with racial minorities, the analogy flourishes. We must understand why. So rather than critique the fraught comparison, which others, as we will see, have done so well before me, this book pursues the utility of the potent emotional analogies made possible by the language of religious hatred. Because the ferocity of religious intolerance makes queers resemble—that is, be “like” *but not “be” the same as*—“race,” an interesting rhetoric of minority protest emerges. This rhetoric has helped gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and trans people, many of whom are also racial minorities, find a way into the *relatively* successful politics of racial minority emotions that have made some small and slow strides since the political transformations of emancipation and civil rights.

Crucially, the comparison between minority sexuality and minority race does not rely on reinforcing the essentialized narratives of race; I have no interest in advancing here an argument that queers are queer because they were “born that way.” Instead, the rhetorical connection queers make to race is emotional, sentimental, and charged with a peculiar political force that has developed while the pathology of race relations in the United States has shaded the political and cultural life of the United States. The comparison between queers and people of color is emotional, not genetic. Curiously, this assertion of a “like race” status sidesteps authentic or realistic claims that riddle and often limit much minority-based writing and politics. Queers accomplish as much by using what becomes a prosthetic voice borrowed from sentimental racial protest—a literary and figurative but still very political voice—that need not be overly precise in a hostile public

sphere that is always ready to hate, to regulate, and to restrict the freedom of its queers. In the pages that follow, I will describe and develop these racial structures of hateful feeling that have been and will continue to be instrumental for queers as we struggle with religious authority and nationality in the United States. This leads me to a thematic question that will guide this entire book: What, then, does it mean to *feel* like, rather than to *be*, a racial minority?<sup>25</sup>

The book starts with a chapter that introduces a theory of religious rhetoric that provides the foundation upon which I will build the bulk of the book's arguments: a theory of religious language that will lay out the architecture of hate's racial valence. Janet R. Jakobsen and Ann Pellegrini lucidly assert, "To be traditionally American is to be Christian in a certain way. . . . When the president takes his oath of office and makes his inaugural address, there are always references to God, and we all know which God is being invoked (after all every president of the United States has been Christian in some way, and only one has been Catholic)."<sup>26</sup> I can't agree more with this assertion, and I take their first, illustrative example of Christian Americanness, the presidential oath, as a cue for how I want to communicate Christian rhetoric's force in U.S. politics. Put most simply, conservative Christian rhetoric can be one of the most authoritative kinds of political speech that, despite the myriad religious differences in the United States, functions as the lingua franca of the American nationality. This national tongue is a traditional language of authority that all sorts of people, regardless of personal religious orientations and affiliations, can manipulate in order to reconsolidate so-called traditional values. Yet even though all sorts of people can say these religious words, hold and benefit from the values and feel the beliefs these words imply, they are not the people who benefit the most from their utterance. Instead, it is the leader, or leaders, of the United States who stand to gain the most from making some people traditional and others foreign to American traditions, if not to American citizenship. This chapter therefore contends that American religious rhetoric is a sovereign language

—the fundamental language of those who rule in an inequitable manner, enabling some people to count as worthwhile and some as disposable. Sovereign-speak permits some lives to be sanctified by the right kind of national-family value while restricting others from that value. And queers are often those who will be restricted from counting as valuable.

Indeed, this sovereign language of religion helps those who are leading, those who are in power, characterize queers as threats to the national security—a security repetitively figured as the security of the traditional, heterosexual family. Nevertheless, the rhetorics of religious violence are not necessarily and only violent. Violence and language are not the same thing.<sup>27</sup> This chapter explores the manner in which this sovereign Christian rhetoric does necessarily hurt, but also sometimes helps. More specifically, I will show how this sovereign speech has permitted queers access to the “like race” narratives of inequality and social injustice. The evocation of the analogy illustrates the effects of being targeted as people who cannot be fully included in the nation-state. Queers activate the sentimentality of racial civil rights that do not permit, since the Fourteenth Amendment, exclusions based on race. Religious hate speech activates the “like race” analogy, and in some cases operates as the “like race” analogy itself. Angry words, primarily Christian, signal the oppressive forces that inflict feelings of pain, injustice, and loss. These feelings, moreover, are like the feelings of injury, pain, injustice, and loss experienced by those who are discriminated against because of their race, many of whom are also queer. Thus, religious hate speech, in the mouths of queers, signals the queer suffering and pain that are described as the suffering and pain of race, a form of minority complaint and opposition that should not be overlooked or permitted. Religious hate speech gives queers the opportunity to describe their queerness through the feelings of race.

Certainly there are extreme dangers in the analogy—the analogy is not appropriate. This chapter thus also explores the difficulties of this comparison, reminding us how analogous language works in order to still consider why this method of political articulation is so crucial for queers. Indeed,

even though critics such as Janet Halley have so smartly critiqued the “like race” strategy, we must continue to ask why this analogy is one of the few options for official recognition of subordinated and oppressed status in the United States. In fact, I wonder if there is really any other way to tell the story of queerness in a politically efficacious manner that would render queers’ lives valuable and worthy of constitutional protections.

This attention on the analogous, rhetorical properties of queerness helps us understand that there is enormous political power in figurative, literary language. Thus, the next two chapters feature literary examples of religious hatred that occasion “like race” analogies. I focus on figures and violent rhetorics (rather than historical facts) here because I want to emphasize that we need to move away from strict, ontological considerations of queer representation. Given the adverse dynamics of the American jeremiad, we must stress that the religious rhetoric of violence and the lived reality of queers are not synonymous. We must entertain the possibility that the public articulation of queerness does not mean that one must be truthful or faithful. In fact, there is dire importance in conceptualizing one’s public identity as a fiction that can be manipulated for one’s political and cultural advantage.

Chapter Two provides us an extended engagement with James Baldwin, who understands the force of “like race” politics perhaps like no other writer. I start with him because he was an important political and literary icon of queer and racial protest throughout the second half of the twentieth century. His example makes salient that the vexed exchanges between religion, queer sexuality, and race are not new. Indeed, in both Baldwin’s critical and literary works, queers assume the language of Christianity in order to express their nascent, yet prohibited, queer feelings. Such Christian language, moreover, is traditionally conceptualized as *the* language of normal African American publicity and culture. But it is also a language that nevertheless has its roots in the sovereign powers of white religious morality. Knowing as much, Baldwin frustrates the claims of “real” authentic black experiences that are otherwise communicated through a religious

conversion story. Strikingly, John, his central character from *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, repeats the authoritative, sovereign Word of God not because he believes that his queer feelings will be forgiven and forgotten by his conversion (and that he will fully participate in his very heterosexual and natal community), but because the Word comes from the only language that can create connections between him and members of his community, especially his object of desire: Brother Elisha. Although John's own vocalizations of religious sentiments that express both queer sexuality and an irregular racial belonging are supposed to hurt him, such sentiments hurt only *figuratively*. Moreover, John is aided by this fictitious "hurt" of the religious Word; his powerful deployment of religious rhetoric enables John to narrate a story of injury, of his own queerly tortured and minoritized feelings, without saying anything too specific, or too "real," about his experiences as a queer minority. We believe and feel his suffering because we know the supreme harshness and hardness of the Word on its queers. We also are reminded at every point in the novel about the travesty of racial oppression. Yet nothing explicit or identifiable comes to the fore about John's nascent queer desires. I thus argue that John finds safety in the use of a sovereign religious rhetoric that is not therapeutic, confessional, or religious as much as it is strategic.

What Baldwin's novel reveals is a queer politics that is deeply invested in literary representations of religious Word violence, or hate speech. The peculiar collusions and contrasts between race and queer sexuality draw to attention the inadequacy of the comparison, and thus to the incomplete project of minority recognition in the political sphere. Our languages of resistance are severely inadequate in the hostile U.S. public sphere. But the realm of the literary can imagine a politics that moves beyond the contemporary political left that demands, I believe, too much precision and literal confession filtered through these limited languages of protest. The third chapter, "Like a Prayer," thus showcases the powerful function of a literary form of identity testimony, explaining, in part, why queer literature—writing that highlights rhetorical properties and fictitiousness—has long been

so important in the constitution of queer culture building and resistance throughout the last hundred years or so. I urge us to look beyond the reading protocol that assigns too much realism to literature (and politics) devoted to the representation of minorities.

This chapter features a variety of examples that deepen the force of Baldwin's example, providing a longer historical lineage for the hate-filled rhetorical strategies more contemporary writers, artists, and political activists employ in the later twentieth century. Examples include Stephen Crane's "An Experiment in Misery," Jean Toomer's *Cane*, and Tennessee Williams's *Suddenly Last Summer*. Each text features misshapen analogies between queers and race, analogies made possible by violent, religious words that can be twisted to block our immediate and realistic understanding of queerness. Such sacred words do not describe with precision or accuracy the minority body. And within the religious racial cover story, there lurks a queer feeling that needs a borrowed language of racial injury and violence to make that feeling felt.

Chapter Four and the Conclusion both argue that the literary, figurative lessons of much of the twentieth century are very necessary political lessons for our contemporary moment. In each, I analyze major developments in queer politics in the 1990s and the 2000s—two decades that have seen the rise of a mainstream queer visibility at the same time as conservative Christian condemnations of homosexuality have intensified. Chapter Four explains how racial sentimentality operates in much judicial review and in political methods of recognition in the fight over queer civil rights. In this discussion, I return to my home state, Colorado. Through an in-depth analysis of the rise and fall of Colorado's Amendment 2, I trace the manner in which Colorado and its persecuted queers were seduced by the fear that queers were seeking the entitlements of race, the entitlements of "special rights." This chapter begins with an overview of Amendment 2's vicious campaign, focusing on how the language of the religious right, despite its intentions, enabled queers to be considered a group of people who had been singled out by hate, thereby permitting queers to suggest that queer-

ness was *like* a racial attribute not because it was a natural condition of the body—not because they were born that way—but rather because the pain and violence inflicted on queers by pernicious laws sponsored by conservative Christians resembled the pain and violence that had been inflicted on racial minorities by other conservative groups. Within Amendment 2, there were clear violations of the Fourteenth Amendment, and the comparison to the history of racial distinctions that perpetuated quasi-slavery status for people within a population that was supposed to be equal made queers legible as a target minority. Amendment 2 was reversed largely because of the explosive political terrain of racial politics and racial analogies. This chapter thus urges that we consider the value of the language of second-class citizenship—a language of hurt and injury that belongs historically to African Americans, but a language that increasingly and dangerously also belongs to queers (as well as other racial categories, not to mention anyone else making a claim of social injustice). Race, however perniciously, operates as *the* fundamental category of difference in the United States—it is the “default font” of difference in the United States.

In the Conclusion, I contend that the religious hatred of queers is still very much a queer political concern, and regardless of the outcome of the same-sex marriage struggle, will be so for quite some time. For all the talk about the increasing tolerance and visibility of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, trans people, and queers in the world of entertainment, there is a genuine reluctance to give queers their full status as national citizens in terms of marriage, adoption, probate, employment, and civil rights. In order to navigate the increasing visibility of queers, especially since the outright disdain for LGBTQ persons was not successful in the 1990s, I point to a more oblique but very effective way the religious right can continue to hate fags (and other queers): the tenacious invocation of homosexuality’s association with pedophilia and incest.

The Catholic Church sex scandals, in particular, have helped politicians and media fortify this association. As the media buzz on about the scandals, conservatives again and again will usually mark the limits of liberal

tolerance and inclusion by casting the homosexual as an incestuous, pedophilic predator. With such a shady hobgoblin lurking about, anyone, not just Catholics, is free to speak about queers with great outrage. I must emphasize that I am not pursuing a line of inquiry in which pedophilia is viewed as a valued part of queer sexuality. Instead, I want to explore to what lengths those who are in charge will go to insure queers will not fully belong to America. Among the figures I discuss are a pedophile priest, Father Geoghan, who was murdered for being a homosexual; Rick Santorum, one of the most powerful U.S. senators who wondered if we would have to accept incest and pedophilia as rights if we were to accept private, consensual homosexual behavior; and David Sedaris, who autobiographically highlights how queer men are always considered potential sexual assaulters of children.

Of course, because outraged religious language operates in the ways I have been arguing, queer writers, theorists, and activists such as Dorothy Allison, Alice Walker, and Judith Butler, among others, have found ways to use this sex panic, exploiting the ferocity and sympathy of the debate to articulate the queer's minor, racial plight. The feeling of injustice, of politics that refuses to become enlightened and truly tolerant of queers, saturates these writers' works. But rather than pose incest and pedophilia as the apocalyptic outcome of a society that tolerates, rather than hates, its queers, these female authors use the associations of pedophilia and incest to characterize the structure of the traditional American family as already disastrous, especially when it is a structure that asserts to be the best of national institutions, but is an institution that is actually and viciously built upon exclusivity and hate.

But there is no simple reversal here, no simple volley of incest and pedophilia accusations from left to right. Instead, we are brought back to racial, sentimental politics in order to understand that the rhetorical violence spoken by the sovereigns among us have been spoken before, spoken perhaps in a meaner voice. And with all the hate and upsetting emotion one might feel about the current violence and the bleak future, there are still moments

of survival, of complicated lives full not only of hate, but also love, success, pleasure, pain, and all sorts of experiences that escape the political radar, or even the sovereign's awful grasp. Like others have done before us, we can choose to be rhetorical, fictitious, and analogical when called to account for ourselves. We do not have to admit to who we are, whom we love, whom we hate, or whom we fuck. Instead, we can lie, or tell a story, or do anything to make coping and survival, and not just realistic, precise minority recognition the only object of the politics game. We can manipulate some of the few narratives of resistance available, thereby disturbing us into a feeling that might move us, however undetected, into a better political future, even if that future is still aberrant.

Certainly, it is not easy to hate. And it is even harder to think of hate as a useful and strategic emotion. But hate is everywhere around queers, especially when religious morality and conservative forms of national belonging often constitute the nation at the expense of same-sex sexuality. By aligning such hatred with the shame of racism, queer political protest forces an analogy that deliberately does not fit. We must consider the use-value of the explicit use of hate speech. And after all has been said, we are left with the violence of religious rhetorics' racial analogies that have helped, and will continue to help, shape and direct the political, religious, aesthetic, and intellectual achievements and coping strategies of queers who understand and embrace that God might not give sanctuary to his queers through his love but through his hate.