



Different Daughters: A History of the Daughters of Bilitis and the Rise of the Lesbian Rights Movement

By Marcia M. Gallo

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Nearly fifteen years before the birth of gay liberation, the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) was the world's first organization committed to lesbian visibility and empowerment. Like its predominantly gay male counterpart, the Mattachine Society, DOB was launched in response to the oppressive anti-homosexual climate of the McCarthy era, when lesbian and gay people were arrested, fired from jobs, and had their children taken away simply because of their sexual orientation. It was against this political backdrop that a circle of San Francisco lesbians formed a private club where lesbians could meet others in a safe, affirming setting. The small social group evolved over the next two decades into a national organization that counted more than a dozen chapters, and laid the foundation for today's lesbian rights movement.

Different Daughters chronicles this movement and the women who fought the church and state in order to change not only our nation's perception of homosexuality but how lesbians see themselves. Marcia Gallo has interviewed dozens of former DOB members, many of whom have never spoken on record. Through its leaders, magazine, and network of local chapters, DOB played a crucial role in creating lesbian identity, visibility, and political strategies in Cold War America.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) may be little known today, but Gallo makes clear how crucial this organization was to the nascent lesbian rights movement. Beginning as a tiny San Francisco social club in 1955, the group soon organized local chapters in New York, Los Angeles and beyond, incubating many figures on the lesbian political and literary scene until the organization waned in the 1970s. In this easy, well-ordered read, Gallo draws on many interviews with pivotal DOB figures, focusing less on juicy gossip than the tensions that drove the group's evolution: lesbian commonality versus race, class and ethnic differences; political activism versus social activities; collaboration with other homophile organizations versus independence; women's rights versus gay rights. Gallo gives considerable space to the history of *The Ladder*, which began as a mimeographed newsletter and soon became a lively, highly literate forum for lesbians nationally and even internationally. She evokes the tense atmosphere of DOB's beginnings, when being out was nearly synonymous with being outcast, while highlighting the several black leaders of the group and how DOB found allies in San Francisco's religious community. This is a respectful, respectable look at an organization overdue for recognition. (Nov.)

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From [Booklist](#)

Despite continuing intense racial segregation in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the groundbreaking lesbian organization the Daughters of Bilitis (DOB) provided opportunities for women to work together and socialize without color bars and with less of the armor of conformity outside the home that the concurrent cold war climate of fear mandated. Against a repressive backdrop of homophobic bar raids, arrests, and firings, the initially secret society of northern California lesbians was founded in 1955 as a social club that in 1956 produced the nation's first lesbian newsletter, *The Ladder*. So doing, DOB made an all-important outreach that broke through fear and isolation to affirm lesbians throughout America, albeit via protective pseudonyms. DOB and *The Ladder* also spread through word of mouth, expanding for 20 years into a national sociopolitical effort with regional chapters that paved the way for the lesbian rights movement and helped change history. Gallo's engrossing, detailed history is an essential addition to the popular literature of sociopolitical issues, women's studies, and gay-lesbian history. *Whitney Scott*

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Review

"A pleasure to read even as it provides essential historical information--it's both brilliantly researched and beautifully written." -- *Martin Duberman, author, Stonewall*

"Everybody interested in feminism, social and political history, stories of bold life journeys...will be eager to read this...splendid" -- *Blanche Wiesen Cook, author, Eleanor Roosevelt, Volumes I and II*

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