

## Richard Inman (1926?- )

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On April 19, 1966, WTVJ Channel 4, Miami's leading television station, broadcast "The Homosexual," one of its *FYI* series of documentaries. Aimed "against the homosexual child molester and toward the parent who never thought it could happen to his or her son," "The Homosexual" was dominated by the likes of Detective Sergeant John Sorenson of the Dade County Sheriff's Department of Morals, and Lieutenant Duane Barker, former civilian advisor to the Florida Legislative Investigative Committee. The only person who dared to present a less-than-negative view of homosexuality was Richard Inman, described by

*FYI* host Ralph Renick as "president of the Mattachine Society of Florida, whose goal is to legalize homosexuality between consenting adults." At a time when most gays hid behind an assumed name, a potted palm, or in a shadow, Inman used his own name and allowed his full face to be shown on television. Although Inman's television appearance left much to be desired, the fact that he was there at all made the showing of "The Homosexual" an important event in the gay history of Florida.

Who was Richard Inman? Unfortunately for posterity, Inman dropped out of sight around 1969, just when the Stonewall uprising revolutionized the lesbian and gay movement. Inman's departure from the scene kept the next generation of activists from learning from his achievements and from his mistakes. Florida's activists were forced to reinvent the wheel, often with tragic consequences. Not until the 1990s was Inman "discovered" by gay historians, who finally gave him the recognition that he deserved. James T. Sears, whose book *Lonely Hunters: An Oral History of Lesbian and Gay Southern Life, 1948-1968* (1997) contributes so much to our knowledge of Inman, called him a soldier of fortune turned taxi driver who challenged the homophobia and ignorance of heterosexuals as well as apathy and timidity

among homosexuals. Other historians such as John Loughery (1998) called him a voice in the wilderness in Miami while Eugene Patron claimed he was a virtual one-man band for gay rights. Foster Gunnison Jr., who worked with Inman, regarded him as an unsung hero of the movement, while Jack Nichols (1999), who knew Inman as well as anyone still alive, dubbed him "the South's Pioneer." "Inman was the first Southerner to challenge anti-gay laws in the courts, to write in mass circulation publications about gay men and lesbians and to appear on local television and radio programs," adds Nichols (1999). As the Sunshine State's first out-of-the-closet activist, Inman dared to be openly and actively gay at a time and place when that was a dangerous thing to be. By challenging both an antigay political establishment and a closeted gay community, Inman earned the title of Florida's Gay of the Century.

Florida in the 1960s was, according to James T. Sears, the Mississippi of the homosexual. The state government, controlled by "pork chop" politicians, responded to the threat of homosexuality with a ferocity not unlike its earlier reaction to communism and the civil rights movement. The Florida Legislative Investigation Committee, chaired by State Senator Charley Johns (hence the "Johns Committee") targeted gays in state universities and other public institutions. A series of state and local laws outlawed gay sex, barred homosexuals from certain professions, and criminalized drag. Ordinances that prohibited gays from working or congregating in a bar were used to justify repeated police raids. Violence against "bachelors" was tacitly tolerated, if not actively encouraged, by the authorities. The media was uniformly hostile. Against such organized prejudice and terror, Florida's gays and lesbians retreated into their closets, hoping against hope that they'd be ignored. Jack Nichols was only slightly exaggerating when he told Jim Sears that in 1966, Florida was the worst place in the Union for gay people.

Only Richard Inman dared to challenge the status quo. Born in Tampa around 1926, Inman arrived in Miami in the 1940s. Although Inman's pre-activist past is murky, we know he married twice, had two long-term gay relationships, and was an active part of Miami's "furtive fraternity." We also know that he was arrested at least twice for "simply being in a gay bar"—not an unusual experience at a time when gay bars were illegal. During the 1950s Inman, either alone or with a partner, owned a mortgage company and "dozens of Miami properties," including several bars. However, in 1964 Inman filed for bankruptcy and was already working as a driver for Miami's Diamond Cab.

Frustrated in business, Inman turned to politics: "I had never before been a member of a homophile organization," he wrote.

Such organizations were entirely to be found only in the major cities of the North and in California. . . . I knew nothing about the history, aims, or goals of the homophile civil rights movement. . . . In the past, homosexuals had meekly accepted their arrests, paid their fines to the court, and then run for cover. Never before had anyone stood up to the Legislative Investigation Committee, the State Attorney, or the police departments when confronted by their harassment tactics. (Sears, 1997, p. 216)

It was a tough job, but someone had to do it.

Undaunted by the odds, Inman founded in 1963 the Atheneum Society, which, according to Sears (1997, pp. 213-214), was the first state-chartered, explicitly homosexual organization in the South. Its objective, wrote Sears, was to combat gross injustices affecting homosexual citizens which are perpetuated by certain heterosexuals who masquerade behind the guise of justice and decency. Although bartender Lea Surette and attorney Marty Lemlich were listed as vice president and secretary, the Atheneum Society was basically a one-man project. Even so, Inman's group benefited from the discreet but generous assistance of George Arents, an elderly millionaire who owned the U.S. franchise for Ferrari. "George is very closety," Inman later told Jack Nichols, "but he does provide me with pocket cash when there's printing to be done, or when I want to get a mailing out."

With his Atheneum Society in tow, Inman soon became, in Sears' words, "the lightning rod for Florida's nonexistent homophile movement." He tried to impress the Florida establishment by claiming to represent 200,000 homosexuals. When that didn't work, he threatened to stage a gay parade, "with hair-ribbons flying and 'bells-a-ringing' if the authorities continued to harass gay people" (Sears, 1997, pp. 217-218). Before long Inman was "privately engaged in correspondence and conversations with political leaders and kingmakers." The Society's newsletter, *Viewpoint*, although it never had the 4,000 subscribers in nineteen states that Inman claimed, was, according to Jack Nichols, certainly read by influential Florida politicians, members of the media, and law enforcement officers. Inman relied on these contacts, real or imagined, as allies in his long-running feud with two of Florida's most powerful politicians: State Senator Charley Johns and Dade County State Attorney Richard Gerstein.

It wasn't long before Inman caught the attention of Franklin Kameny, whose Mattachine Society of Washington helped revolutionize the homophile movement after 1961. In January 1965 Kameny asked Jack Nichols, his friend and cofounder of Mattachine Washington, to establish contact with the elusive Mr. Inman. Thus began what Nichols later called "some of the most remarkable letters of the Movement during that era." After six

months of correspondence Nichols decided that it was time the two activists got together. In June Nichols and his lover, Lige Clarke, flew to Miami, where they arranged to meet Inman at Coconut Grove's tony Candlelight Club, already a favorite hangout for the rich and closeted. After a sumptuous dinner the trio decided to visit George Arents and his lover at Carousel, Arents's stately Coral Gables mansion.

Jack and Lige were impressed by their new friend. In his memoir of Inman, written for *GayToday*, Nichols described Inman as being

In his forties, . . . tall and slim. He pontificated in earnest tones. He was dead serious about gay rights, and since he was the only person brave enough to stand up against Florida's bigoted establishment, we assured him—though we lived afar—that we wanted to help. We were conducting, after all, a challenge to state-sponsored cruelty. Because he was willing to take on both the politicians and police, we looked hopefully to him. It was apparent that because of our enthusiasm, he looked hopefully to us too.

Nichols and Clarke convinced Inman, "after a piña colada or two," to change the name of his organization from the Atheneum Society to the Mattachine Society of Florida: "By urging Inman to change the name of his fledgling organization so that it reflected, along with other Mattachine groups, a party line that emphasized gay equality, we argued that he could become part of a national trend, one that eased the isolation he was experiencing as he struggled alone." Inman (of course) became president of his newly renamed organization; Nichols became vice president and Clarke—since he did editing for the Army's Joint Chiefs of Staff—was appointed editor of the newsletter. For his part, Arents promised to subsidize Florida Mattachine: "You just ask when you need something" (Nichols, 1999).

Although Nichols and Clarke soon returned to Washington, they kept in touch with their new ally, primarily through a series of almost daily letters between Nichols and Inman, which are the primary source for all historical writing about Inman. Meanwhile, "Robert C. Hayden" (Lige Clarke) edited the Florida segment of the "Homosexual Citizen," published in conjunction with the Mattachine Society of Washington. Doubtlessly influenced by Lige and Jack, Richard soon adopted, in John D'Emilio's words, "a Kameny-like tone in his dealings with public officials" (1983, p. 233).

Although Mattachine Florida never had more than a handful of members, Inman and his friends managed to make it appear bigger than it really was. Lige contributed to this hoax by carrying, at a Mattachine-sponsored picketing of the State Department in Washington, a sign that read "This Demonstration Is Sponsored by The Mattachine Society of Florida, Inc." Mean-

while, according to Jack, Inman was bluffing Florida politicians with a threat to picket that would never materialize, promising a line around the Capitol Building in Tallahassee. The problem was that Florida's Mattachine had only subscribers, supporters, and contributors, and, like Inman's replaced Atheneum group, it had no active membership other than Inman himself.

There was a good reason for Inman's rash behavior. After the Johns Committee published its notorious "purple pamphlet" titled *The Homosexual Citizen* (1964) new antigay bills were introduced in the Florida Legislature. They included the Sexual Behavior Act, which would criminalize same-sex kissing and dancing, and the Criminal Sexual Psychopath Act which, according to Nichols, would have allowed the state to put those accused of "the abominable and detestable crime against nature" into mental hospitals and the state could confiscate their personal possessions to pay for their hospitalization. Inman was working overtime to stop passage of these repressive laws, in spite of his poor health—he had a heart condition—and the fear of losing his job with Diamond Cab. All this did not stop Inman from starting still another group, the Florida League for Good Government, to oppose the proposed legislation and to push for adoption of a Model Penal Code that would incidentally legalize homosexual acts in Florida.

It was at this time, according to Nichols' memoir, that Lige arranged to take a photo of our phony Florida sponsorship sign showing Washingtonians posing as Floridians clustered around it with the State Department building as its background. Inman distributed this photo among Florida's politicians to give credence to his picketing bluff. When the legislature quickly dropped the bill, he exulted that our bluff had worked. Whatever the reason behind the Florida Legislature's decision, Inman was quick to take credit for it.

Sears credited this unusual victory on "Richard's understanding of the intricacies of Florida politics, coupled with his diverse network of contacts." Inman did this in spite of Florida's closeted gays, some of who "sent critical, anonymous letters about him to various lawmakers" (Sears, 1997, p. 233). Inman's surprising success made him an important part of America's still-small homophile movement. One of the activists with whom Inman began to correspond at this time was Bob Basker, president of the Chicago-based Mattachine Midwest. Basker, whose involvement in leftist politics went back to the 1940s, shocked the conservative Inman by advocating the right of "commies" to serve in leadership positions. In spite of that, the two men maintained a firm friendship, which continued after both Basker and Inman moved to California in the 1970s.

In the fall of 1965 Florida Mattachine joined the East Coast Homophile Organizations (ECHO). Although Inman refused to attend the ECHO Con-

ference held in New York City, he allowed Nichols to represent his organization. Finally in February 1966, Inman took Nichols' advice and agreed to attend the organizing meeting of the North American Conference of Homophile Organizations (NACHO), held in Kansas City. While in Kansas City, Inman and Nichols met Foster Gunnison Jr., "a kindly intellectual" (Nichols, 1999) from Hartford, Connecticut, who had recently become active with the Mattachine Society of New York. The overworked Nichols "begged" Inman to accept Gunnison as his new vice president, although Nichols remained in touch with the Floridian. As a result of this meeting, Inman and Gunnison began their own massive correspondence.

Inman was a master of "political dialectics," which he described in a 1965 letter to Mark Forrester

as the way a politician will say one thing in his platform then do the opposite once elected and then get away with it without anyone calling his cards. It could be described as disagreeing with someone, but agreeing with them to their face so strongly that they don't hear you put words into their mouth and then before they know it, they are doing what you wanted them to do in the first place.

A born Machiavellian, Inman believed that the end justified the means and admitted he was not above playing the dirtiest kind of politics. "When pinned down, you either lash out at those who disagree, or you attempt to totally subjugate those who do agree," Inman wrote in a letter to Frank Kameny.

Jim Sears (1997, pp. 255-256) called Inman the "Gordon Liddy of pre-Stonewall gay politics." "His nonconventional tactics, web of contacts, and philosophy of 'political dialectics' differentiated him from other homophile leaders. In his legislative struggle he adeptly used the media both openly and surreptitiously." Nor was Inman afraid to work with people who would ordinarily oppose his cause:

Richard used his closely guarded connections with those in the "rackets" . . . , federal agencies, and anti-Castro fronts who provided protection. He also relied on wealthy but closeted homosexuals like George Arents . . . , on friendly capitol reporters who kept his lobbying efforts outside prying public eyes, on a cadre of gay politicians as well as state politicians who delivered key votes, and on longtime political insiders such as the chief clerk of the Florida House and former secretary of the Johns Committee, Mrs. Lamar Bledsoe (to whom he even sent a vase of red roses). (Sears, 1997, pp. 255-256)

Although Inman was more progressive than some California homophile leaders (who favored education over activism), in post-Stonewall terms he was very conservative. A firm anticommunist, Inman opposed the ideas and tactics of the New Left (which Basker embraced) and criticized the demonstrations and protests of the Vietnam era in a letter he wrote to Warren D. Adkins in 1965: "Civil disobedience like sit-ins," he wrote, "DEFINITELY NO! We start that and then we'll be classed right along with the Vietnam and Berkeley crowds. Why in hell do some of us think we must ape others? Can't we be original? Don't we have an original and unique problem?" The homophile movement, Inman insisted, should not be "contaminated" with any other agenda. Like other "conservative" activists before and since, Inman argued that

diversions such as marriage, adoption and an unnecessary preoccupation with the subject of pornography all tend to create enormous resistance in the minds of the public and lawmakers against the homophile movement. These major and minor items should be listed and separated and the entire emphasis of the movement put upon [law reform, nondiscrimination and freedom of assembly]. Shove the others to the back, at least for now, until we get the items in the first group accomplished. (letter to Warren D. Adkins, July 1, 1965)

Although, according to Martin Duberman, Gunnison liked and admired Inman, he recognized that the Floridian was a "lone wolf" "halfway between a drifter and a taxi driver" (1994, p. 103). If Inman often seemed to contradict himself, as when (according to Duberman) he "helped in 1965 to organize, in conjunction with the South Florida Psychiatric Society, a program of free counseling for teenagers who 'want to get out of the gay life,'" he was probably just exercising his "political dialectics."

With that in mind, we could interpret Inman's equivocal performance in WTVJ's *FYI* documentary as another one of the master's Machiavellian gambits. Inman began his interview well enough when he remarked that "present laws are ineffectual and almost unenforceable" and should be replaced by laws that "make homosexual behavior between consenting adults, in private, not illegal." On the other hand, Inman shocked many gays when he said that homosexuality "is not a desirable way of life"; argued that reforming the law would "curb homosexuality"; and urged law enforcement agencies to "direct your efforts to prevent juveniles from becoming homosexual." When the interviewer asked about Inman's own sexual orientation, Inman lied: "I was a homosexual. But I gave it up about some years ago, over four years ago. It's not my cup of tea."

To many who watched the show, then and now, Inman's appearance in "The Homosexual" was a disaster. John Loughery, who reviewed "The Homosexual" while doing research for *The Other Side of Silence*, wrote that Inman's "performance" suggested gay men and lesbians would be better served by silence. Uncomfortable on camera and looking as if he had suddenly realized that acknowledging his sexuality was tantamount to admitting a crime for which he might be arrested, Inman squirmed before his interviewer's questions, ending with the claim that he had given up homosexuality four years earlier—"it's not my cup of tea"—although he believed that homosexuals deserved fair treatment. He giggled at the suggestion of gay marriage or gay adoption.

Others agreed with Loughery's sad assessment, which could be summarized by a quote from a Fort Lauderdale gay man who was in his twenties when the program took place: "You weren't exactly inspired to run out and join his organization." "Actually, he scared me more than the cop [Sorenson] they had telling the eighth-graders that any one of them could become a deviant if they weren't careful" (Loughery, 1998, p. 280). Although Nichols and Sears are willing to give Inman the benefit of the doubt, I cannot help but agree with Loughery and his unnamed subject. In his most important public appearance, Inman made a poor role model.

In his career as an activist, Inman received scant support from South Florida's frightened gay community. Then as now, gay men in positions of power, afraid of a backlash, worked to sabotage the activist agenda. "Everyone is hiding and . . . afraid that somehow they will be connected and exposed. Everyone now says 'count me out.' Last night, two bars asked me politely 'don't come around here anymore,'" Inman complained in 1965 in a March 12 letter to the *Citizen News*. Inman also received harassing phone calls from anonymous parties and tickets from the Miami Police Department. The police department also tried (unsuccessfully) to get Inman's employer to fire him. Increasingly frustrated, Inman sued the city of Miami in February 1966, arguing that the city's antigay legislation "arbitrarily denies to certain and various persons their rights to the equal opportunities upon which this great country was founded." Sears called this lawsuit the "first civil rights legal action brought in the South by an admitted homosexual" (Sears, 1997, p. 248). Although Inman lost his case, he laid the groundwork for trials that eventually overturned Miami's antigay laws.

Inman's leadership deteriorated. He quarreled with Miami's popular mayor, Robert King High; with the press; and with other gay men. In March 1967 Inman abolished Florida Mattachine. Inspired by San Francisco activist Guy Strait, whom he had met at a NACHO conference, Inman opened the Atheneum Bookshop, a Miami emporium that sold gay erotica. In October of that year the Miami vice squad raided Inman's shop, charging him with



possession of pornography. Although Inman was acquitted on a technicality, it was his last stand as an activist. By August 1969, the *Miami Herald* could claim that the Miami gay subculture showed few signs of the minority group syndrome.

Since the demise of the Mattachine Society of Florida . . . Miami has had neither homosexual organizations nor militants. A politically docile, socially invisible subculture, it attracts little attention, and less support. (Sears, 1997, p. 253)

It remained for a new generation of activists to revive a movement that Inman had led single-handedly through its 1960s' rise and fall.

What happened to Richard Inman? According to Jack Nichols, Inman visited him in New York in 1970 at his offices at *GAY*, a weekly newspaper that he and Lige Clarke edited from 1970 to 1973. "After that he disappeared. He'd had a heart condition which could have claimed him early" (Nichols, 1999). According to Professor Sears, Inman moved to California around the time of his last meeting with Nichols, not long before Bob Basker and other activists resurrected Florida's gay rights movement. Inman eventually settled in Long Beach, California, where he led a quiet life oblivious to the winds of change around him. One of the few people Inman kept in touch with was Bob Basker, who last spoke with Inman around 1987. Unfortunately, Basker has since lost contact with his old comrade in arms. When Basker tried to telephone Inman recently, Inman's numbers were disconnected.

Whether dead or alive, Inman the man has vanished into oblivion, not waiting for new generations to recognize his achievements. It remained for Nichols to summarize, in his chapter in Sears' *Lonely Hunters* and in his own memoir, Inman's contribution to America's GLBT community:

Richard Inman, like a bright comet, soared through skies, lighting up America's early gay and lesbian liberation cause. Unique in our movement's history, he was committed to what he called "constitutional rights" and his brave willingness to step forward in a benighted area where savage antigay persecution had become standard government fare was, to me, a foremost inspiration in those heady times. I made Richard Inman my confidant and comrade-in-arms because I knew he was working virtually alone, sometimes despairing. I embrace the memory of him still. He serves our history as a shining example of what a single, committed, energetic individual can do—even though suffering setbacks himself—in the ongoing struggle to right the lot of the wrongly-persecuted. (Nichols, in Sears' *Lonely Hunters*, p. 255)

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This biography is based on an article "Richard Inman: Florida's Gay of the Century," which originally appeared in Miami's *The Weekly News*, Badpuppy's *GayToday*, and other publications in July 1999). A videotape of the program "The Homosexual," which appeared on WTVJ, April 19, 1966, is in the author's collection. The Stonewall Library and Archives in Fort Lauderdale also has a copy. It also has a copy of his letters and correspondence as well as a copy of the "purple pamphlet" issued by the Florida legislature, *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida*.

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