Efforts to expand legal protection to gays, lesbians and bisexuals, or "gay rights" in shorthand, have become a staple of American politics at the end of the twentieth century. Indeed, some observers argue that gay rights had become the civil rights issue of the 1990s (Gallagher and Bull 1996:x). These efforts and their proponents have meet with strong opposition. In some respects, this opposition resembles resistance to civil rights for African-Americans and women, but it also has its own peculiar features, being deeply embedded in religious traditionalism and the Christian Right (Wilcox 1996; Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997).

This essay is a description of the major forms opposition to gay rights has taken in recent times, using interview and documentary evidence. First, the importance of the Christian Right as the major source of opposition is established, and then three major forms of opposition are identified (instrumental, reactive, and proactive), based on differences in the motives, means, and methods of Christian Right activism. All three kinds of opposition can contribute to the strength of the Christian Right, although each also has its liabilities. The most common kind of opposition, reactive, is likely to be even more important in the near future.
Opposition to gay rights is rooted in various kinds of social traditionalism (Button, Rienzo and Wald 1997:chp 6). Of course, "tradition" is a problematic notion in the United States, given the country's modern cast, intense individualism, great diversity, and dynamic nature. But precisely because of the unsettled character of American society, social stability and conventional arrangements are often prized and strenuously defended (Wiebe 1975). If accepted for long enough and bolstered by the substantive values of enough people, such arrangements can take on the patina of "tradition," even though they may not be especially old. Social traditionalism has by and large opposed homosexuality, often harshly (Bawer 1994), although the attitudes of the American public are increasingly ambivalent toward gay rights.

Attempts to change the conventional treatment of homosexuals regularly challenges three important sources of tradition: organized religion, groups and institutions concerned with maintaining social order, and the business community. Organized religion is the most potent source of opposition, and here social convention is reinforced by religious values. Simply put, most religious groups in the United States have long believed that homosexual behavior is morally wrong. These views are frequently rooted in sacred texts and codes of sexual conduct derived from those texts. There are, however, enormous differences on how these beliefs are defined and applied, with some religious groups attaching intense stigma to homosexuality and others adopting a more latitudinarian approach.
Evangelical Protestantism, one of the largest religious traditions in the United States (Kellstedt et al. 1996), is especially prone to stigmatize homosexuality. Evangelical theology puts a special stress on individual morality and assigns to social institutions, including the government, responsibility for fostering individual moral behavior. Historically, these beliefs played an important role in establishing social convention regarding homosexuals, and Evangelicals have been especially attached to those conventions. In recent times, Evangelicals have been the mainspring of opposition to gay rights, often joined by other theologically conservative churches, such as the Mormons. Much of this opposition has been carried forward by the Christian Right, a social movement concentrated among religious traditionalists.

It is important, however, to distinguish between the Christian Right and its religious base. Evangelicals are diverse in religious terms and not all are stridently antigay (Wald 1997:186-188). Other important religious traditions are even more divided on this issue. For example, mainline and black Protestants, Roman Catholics and Jews all contain elements that are critical of homosexuality, although not usually with the fervor of Evangelicals. But within these groups there are also elements tolerant of gay rights, and still others that are strong proponents. In fact, some of the strongest advocates for the gay community are found among the theological liberals in all these groups (Melton 1991). For this reason, gay rights often generates
intense conflict within religious institutions.\(^2\)

Groups and institutions with a special interest in social order often oppose gay rights as well, but usually more on the basis of social convention than substantive beliefs (Diamond 1995). For instance, some secular conservatives stress the maintenance of social control and thus find gay rights problematic. So, organizations as diverse as the John Birch Society and the Free Congress Foundation frequently speak out on the issue. Similarly, the military and police are frequently suspicious of gay rights because of the fear that changes in social convention will undermine their missions. However, there is some diversity here as well. Some conservatives are libertarian in focus and sympathetic to all manner of individual rights. And within the military and police there are also individuals who believe that gay rights will improve the performance of their institutions.

The business community also has a pragmatic approach to gay rights, reflecting social conventions (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997:187-189). On the one hand, many businesses oppose gay rights because of the fear that such changes will increase their costs. Small businesses are especially sensitive to such changes due to their low profit margins. Researchers have discovered that small business owners are very common among antigay activists, although this may reflect religious sentiments as well economic interests (Lunch 1997). On the other hand, some businesses value gay employees and customers, and major corporations are most likely to accept gay rights for these reasons (Griffith 1998). Because of
these divisions in the business community, business associations such as the National Federation of Independent Businesses and the Chamber of Commerce rarely take public positions on gay rights, and if they do, it is usually to urge the avoidance of controversy that can hurt the business climate.

All of these groups can be aroused to oppose gay rights, depending on how much the proposed changes challenge their traditions. Indeed, the magnitude of the challenge appears to be a key variable in the breadth of the opposition. For example, modest extensions of employment law to cover sexual preference typically produce less opposition than major policy changes such as the legalization of same-sex marriage. Given the divisions over gay rights found within most religious communities, advocates of social order and the business community, such groups are unlikely to lead the opposition to gay rights under normal circumstances. Not surprisingly, then, opposition to gay rights is spearheaded by the groups most united and hostile to homosexuality. The Christian Right is the chief vehicle for such opposition, and as we shall see, differences within the Christian Right account for the major varieties of opposition to gay rights.

The Christian Right and Opposition to Gay Rights

The Christian Right is a social movement concentrated among Evangelical Protestants and dedicated to restoring "traditional values" in public policy (Green 1996; Wilcox 1996).\(^3\) The current
movement arose in the late 1970s in response to perceptions of "moral decay" in American society. Chief among the "decaying traditions" was the patriarchal family, defined as two, legally married heterosexual adults and their children. Changes in women's roles, the legalization of abortion, and the spread of sexual permissiveness were central to this perception of moral decay, as were changes in social arrangements that once supported the traditional family, including schools, law enforcement, and popular culture.

Gay rights represents both kinds of changes: homosexuality occurs outside the ideal of the traditional family and legal protection for homosexuals challenges conventional arrangements supportive of such families. For these reasons, opposition to gay rights was one of the original pillars of the Christian Right. Organized opposition existed prior to the rise of the contemporary movement (Diamond 1995) and may well have been a precursor to it (Crawford 1980). However, the advent of the Christian Right increased the level, intensity, and sophistication of the opposition.

Like other social movements the Christian Right can be understood in terms of the motives, means, and methods of its activists (Green, Guth and Hill 1993; Green, Guth, and Wilcox 1998). Variations in these factors help account for the different kinds of opposition by the Christian Right. "Motives" are the grievances that provide the rationale for movement activism. As we have noted, opposition to gay rights is a potent motive for
Christian Rightists, but such grievances come in different forms (Lienesch 1993). Perhaps the most common view is that homosexuals engage in sinful behavior, and thus gay rights is tantamount to condoning immorality. The assumption is that sexual orientation is a matter of individual choice and that gays should be encouraged to make "better" choices. Holders of this position are not necessarily hostile to homosexuals (though usually critical of their advocates) and often feel sympathy for them, including an urge to help gays change their "lifestyles."

A less common but more intensely held view adds to immorality the notion that homosexuals are dangerous, and that if protected by law, they will threaten the entire community. Homosexuals are seen as purveyors of disease, such as AIDS, and crime, such as pedophilia. Holders of this view are frightened by gays and hostile to their advocates. A small minority of Christian Right activists add to immorality and danger yet another idea: homosexuals are subversives bent on undermining society. The gay community is seen as actively recruiting individuals, especially the young, to their "cause," which range from fostering the "new world order" to serving the forces of evil. Holders of this view are deeply hostile to all aspects of the gay community.

"Means" refers to the resources that allow the movement to pursue its grievances, and the most important of these resources are movement organizations. Like other movements, Christian Right organizations are products of entrepreneurial leaders, who identify sympathetic clienteles and mobilize resources. Because of the
importance on individual leaders, these organizations are diverse, competitive, and often short-lived (Wald 1997:249-251). There are at least three different kinds of organizations in the contemporary Christian Right, and each is linked to one of the three common grievances regarding gay rights.

The largest and best known movement organizations are "general purpose" groups, such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family. The primary goal of these groups is to gain political power; the strategy is to organize activists at the grassroots to pressure the political system. Both pragmatic and opportunistic, general purpose groups seek to harness opposition to gay rights to their broader purpose, and judging from surveys of their membership, they draw broadly on activists who believe homosexuality is immoral (Guth et al. 1994).

Another kind of organization is "limited purpose" groups. Usually based in localities or regions, such organizations are vehicles for specific confrontations. Limited purpose groups are frequently created to oppose gay rights initiatives; good examples include the Colorado for Family Values and Take Back Cincinnati, organizations which conducted anti-gay rights campaigns in Colorado and Ohio, respectively. Judging by public statements and interviews with participants, such groups draw heavily on activists who see gays as a danger to the community.

Yet another kind of organization are "specialized" groups. These organizations resemble general purpose groups in national scope, but they resemble the limited purpose groups in stressing a
particular constituency or issue. Some such organizations specialize in opposition to gay rights; good examples are the Traditional Values Coalition and The Report, an antigay "research" and propaganda group. Specialized antigay groups apparently draw most heavily from activists who view gays as subversive. Specialized antigay groups have an ambiguous relationship with a large network of groups dedicated to "converting" and "healing" homosexuals, such as Exodus International. While both kinds of groups often cooperate with one another, the latter are far less hostile to individual gays.

"Methods" refers to the opportunities for the movement to redress its grievances by the deployment of resources. The Christian Right employs a number of methods to achieve its purposes, and they are frequently linked to types of movement groups and grievances regarding gay rights. A great portion of movement activity is dedicated to building organizations, such as raising funds and recruiting activists. Such organizations can then be used for the "three L's" of modern politics: electioneering, lobbying, and litigating. In recent times, the Christian Right has focused on electoral activities because the numbers of religious traditionalists in the mass public are a potent source of power. In addition, the movement often tries to influence public opinion on issues it cares about, including homosexuality and gay rights. General purpose groups have the broadest repertoire of methods, while limited purpose tend to focus on one activity. Specialized antigay groups also do a number of
Three Kinds of Opposition

In sum, the Christian Right contains within it a variety of motives, means and methods that influence its opposition to gay rights. If the movement is often the spearhead of opposition to gay rights, then it is fair to say there are different kinds of spears, with different kinds of effects. We can usefully summarize this diversity by imaging three ideal types of opposition to gay rights: instrumental, reactive, and proactive. Each reflects a different mix of motives, means, and methods.

Instrumental opposition is the use of antigay rhetoric to obtain political power. The chief motive for such efforts is to implement a broad agenda of traditional morality, of which opposition to gay rights is one part. The chief means of implementing this ideology is mobilizing resources to support general purpose organizations. Such organizations allow for a wide range of methods in politics. From this vantage point, activists can negotiate with other interests over "traditional values," including the treatment of homosexuals.

Reactive opposition is the rejection or repeal of specific proposals regarding gay rights. The chief motive for such efforts is to prevent changes in the law that are seen as dangerous to the community. The chief means for such opposition is the "mobilization of outrage" in a narrow context, and then reaching out to other kinds of traditionalists. Thus, gay rights is the
only focus of the activity, the methods employed arise directly from the occasion, and the effort dissipates once the controversy has passed. Such efforts allow activists to maintain or restore the status quo ante regarding gay rights.

Proactive opposition is the preemption of attempts to promote gay rights. The chief motive of such efforts is to limit the ability of gay rights advocates to pursue their objectives. The chief means of such opposition is the mobilization of bias against the "special interests" of the gay community; organization and resources arise from the prospect of stalling a subversive enemy. The methods employed also vary with the context, but the focus is constricting the politics surrounding the issue, thus eliminating the opportunities for the advancement of gay rights.

The impact of these forms of opposition can be usefully summarized by a sports metaphor. The primary impact of instrumental opposition is to "field a team" of Christian Right activists, who may oppose gay rights as part of their broader agenda. These efforts are successful to the extent they interject movement activism into political process. The primary impact of reactive opposition is "playing defense" by directly resisting gay rights; its success depends on mobilizing a large enough coalition of traditionalists in favor of the status quo. Finally, proactive opposition is "offense as defense," seeking to preempt gay rights proposals by law. Here success requires broad public acceptance of gay rights advocates as an illegitimate "special interest."
Instrumental Opposition: Fielding a Team

In terms of sheer volume, instrumental opposition to gay rights by the Christian Right probably outpaces all other forms of antigay activity. Homosexuality and gay rights is a common element for nearly all movement organizations, and general purposes groups such as the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family. Instrumental opposition is most clearly evident in the organization building efforts of these groups and is least obvious in their public activities. Of course, for limited purpose and specialized antigay groups, instrumental and substantive opposition are largely one in the same. However, these groups are much smaller and often locally focused, while the general purpose groups are larger and nationally focused (Anti-Defamation League 1994).

The most common form of instrumental opposition is direct mail fundraising, which takes place largely within the confines of these organizations and their prime constituencies. As a fundraising technique, direct mail of all sorts relies on strident appeals and hot button issues (Godwin 1988). Indeed, it is quite common for political groups on all sides of a controversy to use strongly worded appeals to raise funds, including fearful denunciations of each other. Gays and gay rights are favorite targets of direct mail of Christian Right groups—much as the Christian Right is a target of fundraising by a variety of liberal groups.

A review of Christian Right fundraising letters from the 1990s illustrates the extent of this practice. General purpose groups, like the Christian Coalition, mention gay rights in about three-
quarters of their appeals. About one-half of these mentions, or a little less than two-fifths of the total, the issue is discussed in some detail, and in about one-half of these, or about one-fifth of the total, gay rights is the focus of the letter. The great bulk of the more detailed mentions concern advocates of gay rights rather than homosexuals in general, and when this occurs, the remarks are usually quoting information from a specialized antigay group.

These figures can be contrasted in two ways. First, mention of abortion is nearly universal and far more strident in the fundraising efforts of general purpose organizations. Second, the direct mail of limited purpose and specialized antigay groups nearly universally mentions gay rights, and is far more vitriolic in tone and substance. Although nearly all Christian Right leaders have at one time or another made strong statements about gays and gay rights, usually for internal purposes, such comments are standard fare for specialized antigay groups (Anti-Defamation League 1994:131-138).

This pattern extends to other activities of Christian Right groups as well. For instance, the publications and press releases of general purpose organizations regularly mention gay rights, but with less frequency and intensity than the other kinds of groups. Gay rights also plays an important role in the construction of voter guides and legislative score cards of general purpose groups. For instance, in 1994 about one-third of Christian Right voter guides mentioned gay rights in some way. General purpose groups
sometimes endorse and support the activities of limited purpose and specialized antigay groups, but until recently, have rarely initiated such efforts themselves.

Gay rights is much less visible in the public agendas of general purpose groups (see Reed 1996). For example, the legislative proposals of the Christian Coalition and Focus on the Family in the 1990s had only brief mentions of gay rights. Much to the surprise of observers, general purpose organizations publicly down play hostility to homosexuals, and some Christian Right leaders have criticized their colleagues for their strident antigay rhetoric. This disjunction between the sentiments expressed inside and outside of these organizations raises some questions about the integrity of these groups and their leaders.

The most likely answer to these questions lies with the pragmatism of the general purpose groups. On the one hand, attacks on gay rights are used internally because they are effective in raising money and mobilizing activist support. On the other hand, a softer tone is used for external purposes, including cooperating with secular conservatives and Republican politicians, because it is more effective in coalition building. This balance of internal and external communication strategies is hardly unique to the Christian Right. However, it does carry serious liabilities: harsh internal language can undermine external relations, while a civil tone in public debate can alienate core activists.

Instrumental opposition does not appear to directly foster connections with other kinds of traditionalists outside of the
Evangelical camp (Guth et al. 1994). If movement donors and activists are any guide, relatively few mainline Protestants, Catholics or Jews participate in these organizations. Similarly, secular conservatives are rare, with little overlap with groups like the John Birch Society or the Free Congress Foundation. Many Christian Right activists are involved in small business and some have military and police backgrounds, but these individuals are also deeply religious. So, these groups do not build a broad conservative alliance within their ranks; instead, they are one distinct element that can participate in such an alliance (Green 1996).

What are the political effects of instrumental opposition to gay rights? To the extent that the issue helps build strong movement organizations, it can produce a cadre of grassroots activists who can oppose gay rights should the opportunity arise, even if the parent groups do not seek or initiate such actions. The volume and persistence of instrumental opposition suggests it is quite effective in this regard. Along these lines, general purpose groups can become repositories of information and expertise for opposing gay rights, much of it generated by specialized antigay groups. Likewise, to the extent that the issue helps elect or appoint movement supporters to office, it contributes to a government that is at least unsympathetic and often hostile to gay rights. Thus, from the grassroots to the Capitol Hill, instrumental opposition can create beacons around which other traditionalists rally in specific confrontations. As one movement
activist put it: "We are fielding a pro-family team; when we need to play against the gay rights, we'll be ready."

Reactive Opposition: Playing Defense

Christian Right activists are frequently involved in outright opposition to gay rights proposals, whether or not they are on the "teams" of general purpose organizations. Most such battles are fought in direct reaction to proposals made or changes achieved by gay rights advocates and their allies. Not surprisingly, these efforts are waged mostly by limited purpose groups founded during specific confrontations, sometimes aided by specialized antigay and general purpose organizations.

There is a logic to reactive opposition. Throughout most of the United States, conventional treatment of homosexuals is the norm and barely attracts public attention. Even if local citizens hear about gays rights from the news media or from the instrumental opposition by movement groups, it may not arouse any immediate concern. In fact, in many places the mobilization of bias is so strong against gay rights that the issue never arises. But once it does, mobilization in defense of the status quo can be sudden and intense.

The typical pattern is for gay rights advocates to propose or produce a change through legislative channels (Haider-Markel and Meier 1996). Opposition arises at once and pressure is brought to bear on public officials to oppose the change. The longer the controversy persists, the more likely it is to generate organized
opposition. If a proposal actually becomes law, then the opposition hardens and expands the scope of conflict, often taking the form of a referendum or recall election, if these tools are available, or devolving into electoral politics if not. Key factors in the intensity of the reaction is the magnitude of the change propose and the traditionalism of the community (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997:173-177).

Reactive opposition tends to begin with activists who have had some previous experience in antigay activities. These core activists then mobilize sympathetic religious communities, many of whom may never had been politically active. At this point, core activists often seek technical information and assistance from the broader Christian Right, usually from specialized antigay groups. Here is where the organizing efforts of general purpose groups and the propagandizing of specialized antigay groups can make a big difference. Finally, the core activists seek support from other traditionalists in the community. Here other religious groups, secular conservatives, and especially the business community are quite important. Each can provide critical resources to a local effort, but more importantly, the absence of opposition from these quarters can allow such an effort to proceed unhindered.

A good example of reactive opposition occurred in Austin, Texas in 1994 (New York Times 1994). Austin is the capital of Texas, the home of the University of Texas, and reputed to be the most liberal city in Texas. In 1993, the city council enacted a domestic-partnership policy for city employees that included gays.
The reaction was swift. Led by a local Baptist minister who had been previously active on the issue, a limited purpose group called Concerned Texans Inc. collected enough signatures to put repeal measure on the ballot, and then waged an effective campaign on its behalf. Aided by local churches and expertise from Christian Right groups (but apparently little money), the drive mobilized a large section of the electorate, winning 62 to 38 percent. Although few non-religious groups endorsed the drive, a focus on public expenditures apparently secured substantial behind the scenes support from secular conservatives and the local business community. The effort then disbanded after the election.

School boards are often a special focus of reactive opposition, and some cases have drawn considerable national attention, engaging the support of both specialized antigay and general purpose groups (Gallagher and Bull 1996:254-256; 219-220). For example, in 1995 a gay member of the Des Moines, Iowa school board was defeated by local effort aided by Bill Horn, an activist for the antigay project, The Report, and an infusion of cash from the state Christian Coalition. Another for example occurred in New York City in 1991, when a coalition of conservative Catholics, Jews and Protestants, including the Christian Coalition, campaigned against a sex-education curriculum, Children of the Rainbow, that included mention of homosexuality.

Although reactive opposition is most common at the local level, it also occurs at the federal and state level. Probably the best known example of the former is the outcry against President
Clinton's attempt to end the ban on gays in the military in 1993 (Rimmerman 1996). Here the Christian Right was very active, but it was joined by broad coalition of traditionalists, especially the military itself. Other examples include the perennial efforts of social issue conservatives in Congress to restrict the activities of the National Endowment of the Arts and to require that AIDS prevention efforts not to encourage or condone homosexuality.

A recent example of reactive opposition may be a harbinger. In February, 1998, a referendum in Maine repealed a gay rights statute passed in 1997 by the legislature and signed by the governor (Goldberg 1998). The Christian Civic League of Maine, a one-hundred year-old state organization, and the Christian Coalition of Maine, backed by its national office, collaborated to put the referendum on the ballot and campaign on its behalf. The referendum passed by a slim 51 to 49 percent margin with a 33 percent turnout, a figure high for an off-year election, but well short of typical turnout in contested elections in Maine. The coalition assembled thus appeared to be smaller and narrower than most successful reactive opposition. This campaign may reflect opportunism on the part of the Christian Coalition, which received a boost from the effort. But it may also signal a new involvement of general purpose organizations in reactive opposition.

Overall, reactive opposition has been quite successful. For example, Gamble (1997) found that antigay activists prevailed in the vast majority of referenda since the 1970s; such success has been especially common at the local level (Donovan and Bowler
Of course, reactive opposition does not always succeed and gay rights advocates regularly seek new venues for change (Wald, Button and Rienzo 1996). Since the 1970s, there has been something of a see-saw battle between proponents of gay rights and reactive opposition, which the former making gains and the other reacting. As one antigay activist put it: "We police the boundaries. It is an endless task just to hold the line." Or in the words of another: "We are always playing defense and in most of the country that is not a bad place to be."

Proactive Opposition: Offense as Defense

Not all opponents of gay rights are content to "play defense." Extreme views on homosexuality and frustration with reactive opposition have led some Christian Rightists to advocate proactive opposition. "We want to take the battle to the enemy" one activist proclaimed, and another remarked: "the best defense in a good offense." The goal here is to preempt the expansion of gay rights by constricting political opportunities through propaganda and legal restrictions.

Most proactive opposition has been unsuccessful largely because of its stridency. For example, the intense propaganda of specialized antigay groups, complete with "research" and "scientific facts," frequently fails to persuade the broader public to support additional restrictions on the gay community (Diamond 1996). Although such propaganda can arouse the core constituencies
of the Christian Right, it is often alienates other traditionalists. Similarly, proactive ballot initiatives, as opposed to reactive efforts, have generally fared poorly (Gallagher and Bull 1996:21-25); legislative attempts to preempt gay rights efforts have not been particularly successful either, with some notable exceptions (Dupuis 1998).

In the 1990s, a wave of proactive opposition appeared with a new twist: specialized antigay organizations developed more politic arguments for preempting gay rights. Operating under the slogan "no special rights," the argument claimed that extending legal protection to homosexuals was, in effect, granting new rights to a "special interest." The goal of these arguments was to maintain the status quo in political rather than policy terms. Despite the failure of most of these efforts, this new rhetoric has been embraced by general and limited purpose Christian Right organizations, and may become a staple of instrumental and reactive opposition in the future.

A good example of this new phase of proactive opposition occurred in the summer of 1998, when a coalition of fourteen movement organizations spent some $400,000 on full-page advertisements in The Washington Post, New York Times, and USA Today. Called the "The Truth in Love Campaign," these ads promoted efforts to "convert" homosexuals to heterosexuality, featuring testimonials by former gays and highlighting the therapies that "healed" and "rescue" them. This campaign was led by Janet Folger, the director of The Center for Reclaiming America, a group
associated with televangelist Dr. D. James Kennedy and strongly opposed to gay rights. The list of co-sponsors included general purpose groups, such as the Christian Coalition.

These ads ignited a storm of controversy over the origins of sexual orientation, much of it raising serious doubt about the efficacy of therapies designed to change homosexuals. However, the political message of the ads was clear: homosexuality is an individual choice, not a personal condition, and thus not deserving of legal protection. The more positive tone of the message was part and parcel of the "no special rights" strategy and designed to preempt gay rights activism by attacking a common rationale for it (Miller 1998).

The fullest expression of this new strategy appeared in a series of ballot proposition in four states: Oregon (1992 and 1994); Colorado (1992); Idaho (1994); and Maine (1995) (Donovan and Bowler 1997). These proposals were developed by specialized antigay groups and had explicitly political goals: prohibiting the enactment of state or local gay rights legislation of any sort. While general purpose groups backed most of these measures, they were not directly involved in their origins or implementation (see subsequent chapters in this book for more details).

Only the 1992 Colorado proposition succeeded, obtaining 53 percent of the vote. Efforts to capitalize on the Colorado victory were largely unsuccessful, however, and were undermined further in 1996 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the Colorado initiative unconstitutional in *Romer v. Evans* (63 FEP Cases 753 [1996]).
Court's ruling invalidated the particular strategy behind these referenda by prohibiting the enactment of measures that legally preempted efforts to protect gay rights (Asseo 1996). However, the Court took no position on the content of gay rights measures themselves, a fact that will surely redirect proactive opposition into other channels.

This wave of proactive opposition also found expression in the legislative process, especially after the Republicans gained control of the Congress and a number of state legislatures in the 1994 election. While most proposals to prohibit "special rights" for gays were not successful (Dupuis 1998), one important exception illustrates the phenomenon and its potential: the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA), which was passed by large margins in the Congress and signed by President Clinton in 1996 (CQ Almanac 1996).

DOMA sought to preempt the possibility that same-sex marriages would be legalized by indirect means. A state court case in Hawaii had ruled that the state's ban on same-sex marriages was unconstitutional, opening up the prospect that same-sex marriages would have to be recognized by other states under the full faith and credit provision of the U.S. Constitution. To prevent such a possibility, DOMA declared that states were not forced to recognize same-sex marriages if sanctioned by other states. It also defined marriage as "a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife," thereby precluding gay couples from participating in federal tax or social programs. Following the logic of Romer v. Evans, some legal scholars believe DOMA may also be
unconstitutional (Tribe 1996).

Nevertheless, DOMA was unusually popular, drawing wide-spread support from many groups beyond the Christian Right. Both the magnitude of the challenge to traditional treatment of homosexuals (same-sex marriages) and the indirect nature of this challenge (via state courts) were critical in assembling such broad-based support for such a sweeping measure. Under most circumstances, this kind of proactive opposition would been very difficult for the Christian Right to achieve.

The Future of Opposition to Gay Rights

The gay community and their allies may not see much difference between these three kinds of opposition. After all, each is hostile to homosexuality and can hinder the advancement of gay rights. But as we have seen, opposition to gay rights is not of one piece, with differences arising from the different motives, means, and methods of the antigay activists. Instrumental opposition helps "field a team" of activists unsympathetic to gay rights by mobilizing traditionalists. Reactive opposition is "playing defense" against gay rights proposals fueled by fear of homosexuality, arising in particular contexts. Proactive opposition is "offense as defense" by hard-core specialists in antigay politics, seeking to constrict the politics of gay rights and thus preempt further battles. All such opposition tends to be led by the Christian Right and supported by its base among religious traditionalists, especially Evangelical Protestants.
Other sources of opposition are modest by comparison, although they can be aroused by severe challenges to their traditions.

What about the future? Instrumental opposition is likely to continue as long as the Christian Right is in operation because it helps "field a team" of activists. In fact, any decline in the movement may actually intensify this kind of opposition as the entrepreneurial leaders seek to maintain their organizations. However, instrumental opposition imposes limits on the capacity of general purpose groups to participate in broader conservative coalitions.

Proactive opposition has been slowed and redirected by negative public reaction to specialized antigay groups and the Supreme Court. Indeed, except in cases where gay rights advocates overreach and arouse a broad-based opposition, there are likely to be few attempts to preempt pro-gay rights political activity in the immediate future. Proactive opposition not been eliminated, however, because of the strategic gains "playing offense" offers to antigay activists--as can be seen in the popularity of the "no special rights" rhetoric. Thus, like instrumental opposition, proactive opposition has both costs and benefits for the movement, especially for specialized antigay groups.

Given these trends, there may be an expansion of reactive opposition in the near term. Continued activism by the gay community and its allies will surely provide further opportunities for reactive opposition, and general purpose and specialized antigay groups may bring greater coordination and sophistication to
local limited purpose organizations. Thus, the 1998 Maine initiative may be a model for the future. "Playing defense" patrols the boundaries of social convention and provides tangible victories, both of which help sustain and expand the broader movement. All this suggests the see-saw battle for gay rights will continue well into the next century.

Notes
1. This essay is based in large part on three-dozen interviews conducted in 1996 and 1997 with Christian Rights activists from across the country. Although few would be classified as movement leaders, all had been very active since the late 1980s, including opposing gay rights at the local, state and national levels. The interviewees were promised anonymity. The essay also draws on two decades of movement documents collected by the author.
2. In the 1990s, many mainline Protestant churches experienced bitter internal battles of the role of gays, especially ordination of practicing homosexuals. While formally separate from opposition to gay rights, these battles have fed into these conflicts.
3. In common discourse, this movement is referred to as the "religious right," and from its inception, the Christian Right aspired to be a true "religious right," mobilizing religious traditionalists from all backgrounds. So far, the movement has largely failed to meet this goal.
4. This sports metaphor arose repeated in interviews with Christian Right activists.
5. These statistics and those that follow are based on a collection of several hundred fundraising letters, voter guides, and other Christian Right documents. The numbers must be viewed with some caution since these collections are neither random samples nor comprehensive.
6. This sequence of events was recounted in numerous interviews with Christian Right activists; it fits the "community protest model" of policy change well (Button, Rienzo, and Wald 1997:17).
7. A good example is the case of arts funding in Cobb County, Georgia (Gallagher and Bull 1996:179-87). Such incidents are not always about gay rights per se, although they are clearly hostile to gays. The "defense of marriage" acts at the state and federal levels are another good example.

References