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Dear Colleague:

Gay Studies? Students are clamoring for such a program at UW-Madison. I envisage the following list of modern cultural-intellectual figures in the curriculum: poets Hart Crane and W. H. Auden, novelists Marcel Proust and Thomas Mann, playwrights Tennessee Williams and Jean Genet, film directors Paolo Pasolini and Luchino Visconti, composers Peter Tchaikovsky and Benjamin Britten, mathematicians G. H. Hardy and Alan Turing, philosophers George Santayana and Ludwig Wittgenstein, critical theorists Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault, and geographers Alexander von Humboldt and Derwent Whittlesey.

Homosexuals differ from other minorities in that although their sexual predilection must be hidden from the law, their works belong to--indeed, are the jewels of--high culture. Culturally, homosexuals, unlike other minorities, are far from marginal or invisible. Another difference is this. Homosexuals belong to cosmopolitan civilization. They have always felt more at home in the great cities of the world than in small towns and the provinces. They are not ethnics from rural backgrounds, with nostalgic longing for roots, family ties, and the immemorial ways of agricultural life. They delight in culture and artifice--indeed, extreme artifice, of which "camping" is a well-known symptom. They are proud of their rootlessness--of being habitués of bars and coffee houses, and denizens of highrise apartments. They may be cultural snobs, but socially they are egalitarian, for they know that in the eyes of conventional society their status dithers between prestige (if they are creative) and outcast.

Homosexuals tend to live in the present. They are either poet-mystics, seeking the transcendence of time in a blinding vision (the "Illuminations" of Rimbaud), or they are slaves to sensation--the perfect orgasm of the passing moment. One thing they lack is a feeling for ancestors stretching back into the misty past and of progeny extending into the misty future. When I meet a proud new mother or father, I say: "Congratulations! You are on your way to becoming an ancestor and a founder of nations." Lineage to the homosexual, however, is an ethnographic curiosity rather than a deeply felt and understood human experience. Hence his tendency toward mild depression, to be overcome by the glitter of city life.

Best wishes,

