

# ANITA BRYANT

## Hatemonger descends on Kansas City

by STUART HINDS

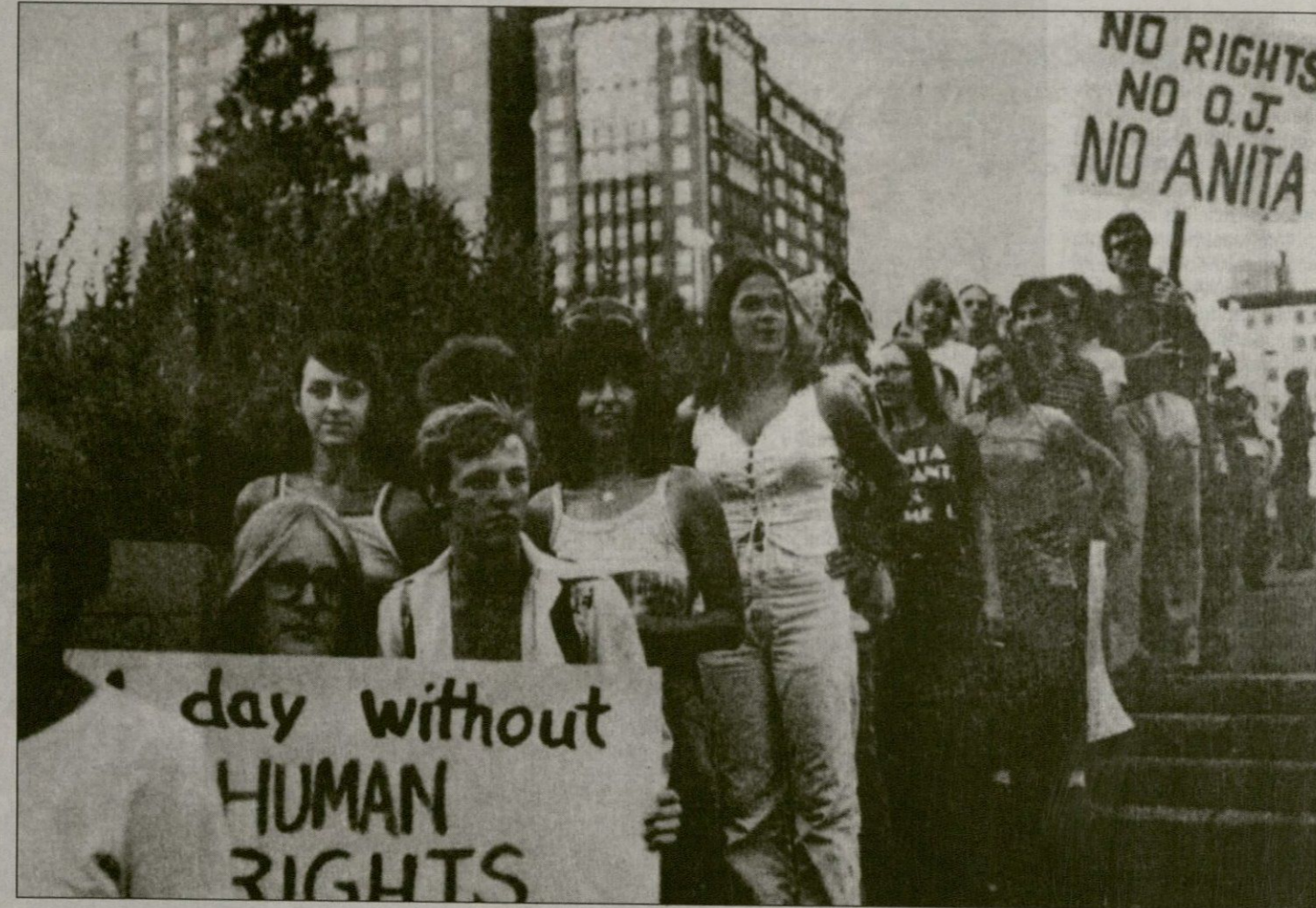
**D**ear Friend:  
When the homosexuals burn the Holy Bible in public ... how can I stand by silently? ...I don't hate the homosexuals! ...But I had no idea my speaking out would lead to such frightening consequences:

- Ugly persecution at the hands of militant homosexual groups
- The attempted blacklisting of my career
- Constant bitter threats to shut me up for good
- Misguided individuals hounding me and my family – even when we go to church

All this, because I stood up for my children – as a mother – as an American – as a Christian... I cannot remain silent while radical, militant homosexuals are waging a campaign for special privileges under the disguise of "civil rights"... Do you realize what they want? They want to recruit our school children under the protection of the laws of our land! ... They want to recruit your children and teach them the virtues of being a homosexual!

This excerpt was used in a direct-mail solicitation by rabidly anti-gay crusader Anita Bryant in the late 1970s. Bryant achieved a national profile as the leader of a movement that brought about the repeal of municipal gay rights ordinances in several cities across the country, including Wichita, Miami and Eugene, Ore. In the summer of 1977, Bryant made an appearance in Kansas City.

Anita Bryant was born in north-east Oklahoma. An amateur singer as a child, she progressed to beauty pageants, was chosen Miss Oklahoma in 1958, and was second runner-up in the 1959 Miss America contest. She realized



Protestors in Barney Allis Plaza.

lasting success as a singer, scoring gold records with her versions of "Paper Roses" and "My Little Corner of the World" in 1960 and "Wonderland by Night" the following year. Her talents led to regular appearances with comedian Bob Hope during his USO holiday tours across the globe. Subsequently Bryant was featured in national television commercials, becoming the spokeswoman for the Florida Citrus Commission in 1969. Some readers may remember her famous slogan: "Breakfast without orange juice is like a day without

sunshine!"

In 1977 Bryant was living with her family in Miami, where in January of that year the Dade County Commission passed an ordinance that prohibited discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Bryant's personal interpretation of conservative Christianity led to her vehement opposition to the ordinance.

"What these people really want, hidden behind obscure legal phrases, is the legal right to propose to our children that theirs is an acceptable alternate way of

life... I will lead a crusade to stop it as this country has not seen before", she declared.

Bryant became obsessed with the perceived threat of homosexual recruitment of children. "As a mother, I know that homosexuals cannot biologically reproduce children; therefore, they must recruit our children."

Her Florida effort struck a chord with other conservatives across the country. Her campaign to repeal Dade County's ordinance – dubbed "Save Our Children" – gained support from the likes of

FROM KC COMING OUT, SEPTEMBER 1977.

of vodka and apple juice. Protests were held in cities large and small, and Bryant was regularly confronted at her public appearances by queer activists. This negative publicity resulted in lost work and lost wages for Bryant. It was in this milieu, still flush from her victory in Florida, that Bryant travelled to Kansas City in July of 1977 to perform at a convention of the Christian Booksellers Association.

Bryant gave a concert at 9 p.m. July 13 at the Muehlebach Hotel that was sponsored by the Christian Audio Visual Corporation. After the concert she was taken to the Music Hall in Municipal Auditorium for a taping of Pat Robertson's evangelical television series "The 700 Club," in Kansas City in conjunction with the booksellers' convention.

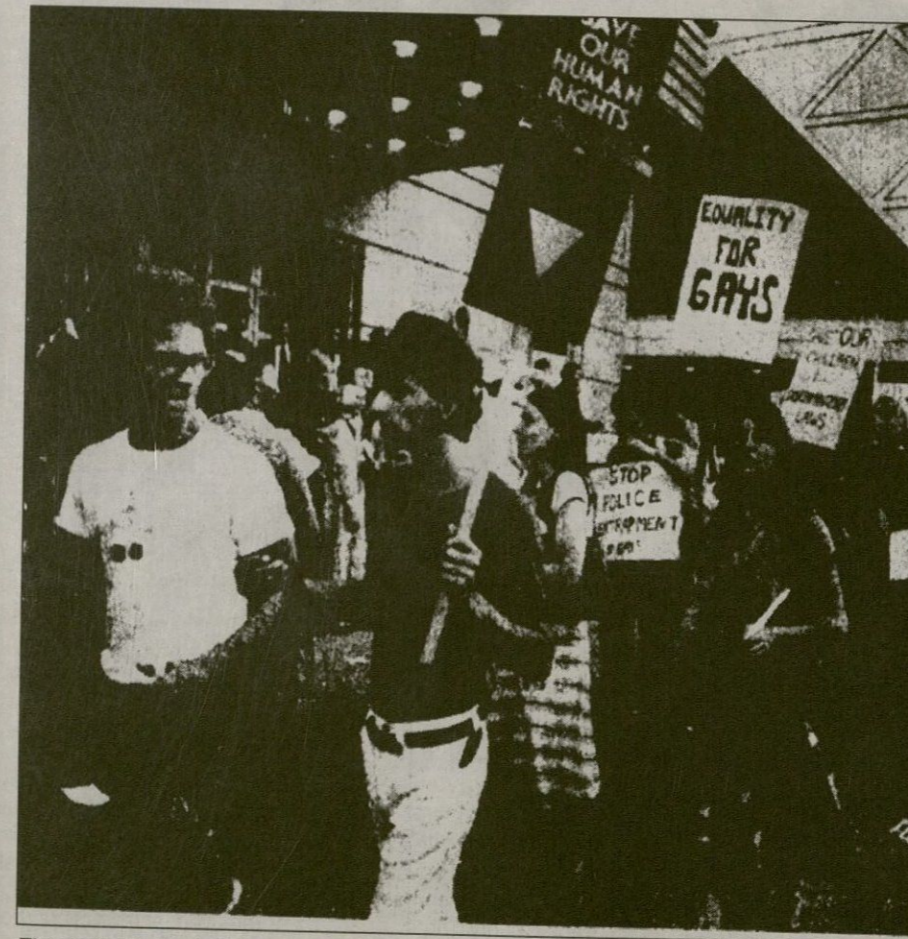
Timed with her appearance was a protest organized in part by the Christopher Street Association, which had been formed in



Kansas City only a month before for June's pride festivities. About 150 people gathered at a Penn Valley Park rally early in the evening, then marched up Main Street toward Municipal Auditorium. The march reportedly spanned two city blocks.

By the time it reached the Music Hall the crowd had swelled to more than 400, crowding the sidewalks along 13th Street and expanding into Barney Allis Plaza across the street. Waving signs that proclaimed "Love Knows No Sex," "Anita Go Home" and "We Are Your Children," the gathering was a peaceful but persistent protest. In an ironic twist, it was later reported by protesters that they encountered several

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The protest in front of the Music Hall in July 1977.

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&gt; BRYANT | PREVIOUS PAGE

of the Christian Booksellers Association members in local gay bars at the completion of each day's convention meetings.

Despite the protests, Bryant returned to the region several more times during the remainder of the year. She traveled to Joplin with the "Revive America Crusade" in September, participated in a "Revival Fires" rally in Columbia, and returned to Municipal Auditorium for yet another Christian rally in December.

At each visit she was met with additional protests, some of which included participants from the Kansas City area. One KC activist noted that Bryant was actually playing an important role in encouraging the movement for gay rights: "Anita has united a lot of people who would have never gotten together otherwise."

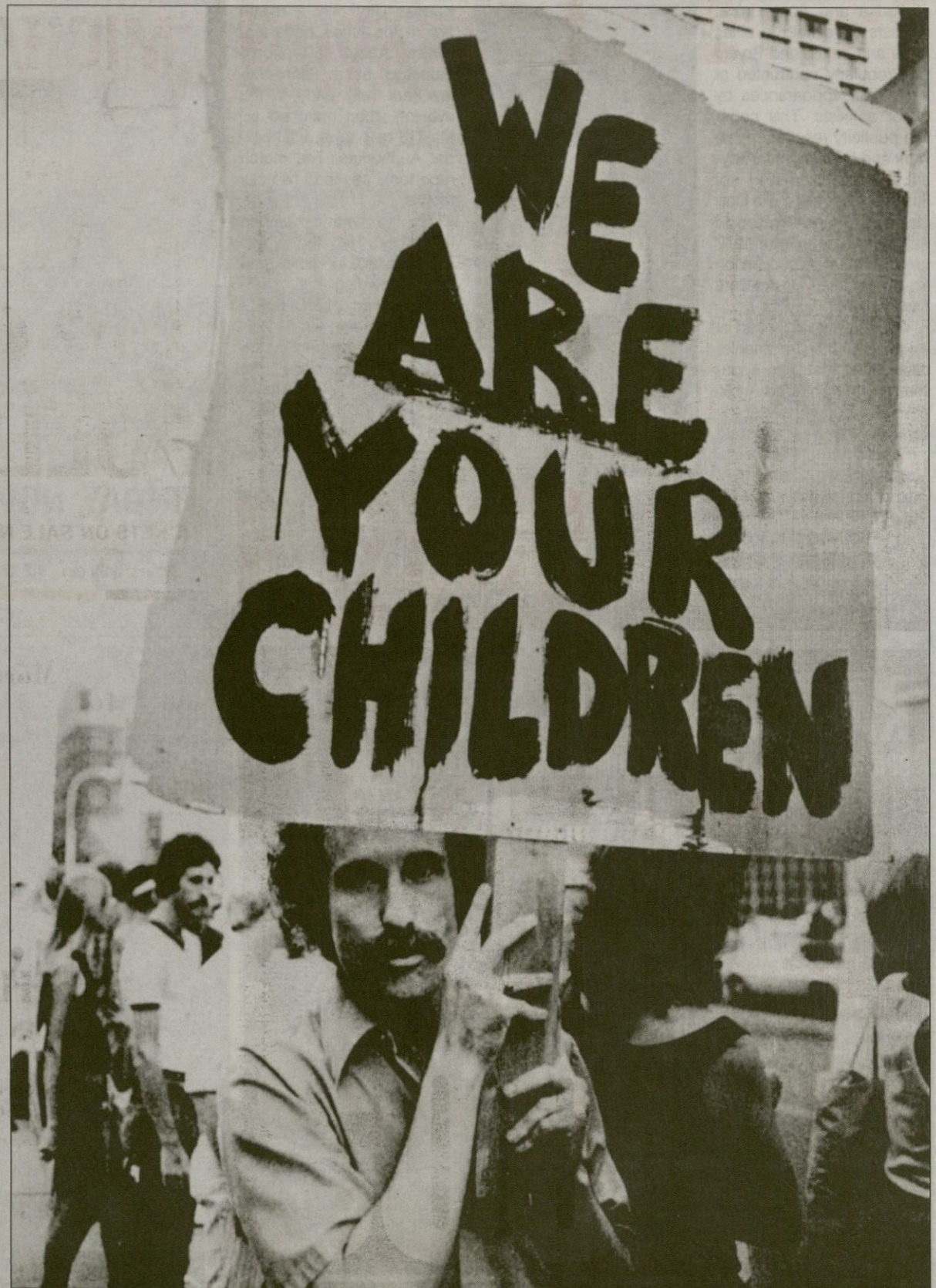
Bryant's career continued to suffer setbacks because of her anti-gay rhetoric. By decade's end she was no longer affiliated with the Florida Citrus

Commission, and she was a favorite topic for late night comedians, Johnny Carson in particular. She divorced her husband in 1980, which led to fewer opportunities with ultra-conservative fundamentalist Christian organizations.

She made several attempts at reviving her musical career. She tried a show in Eureka Springs, Ark., a different show in nearby Branson, and "Anita's Musical Mansion" in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., home to Dollywood, Dolly Parton's theme park. Each of these ventures failed miserably, leaving her massively in debt and ultimately bankrupt. Ostensibly she still operates "Anita Bryant Ministries International" in Oklahoma City, though the organization's website has not been updated since 2008. ▼

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at the University of Missouri-Kansas City

Stuart Hinds is the Curator of the Gay and Lesbian Archive of Mid-America at UMKC.



Leroy Chadwick at the protest outside Municipal Auditorium.

FROM STUDENT UNLIMITED



The July, 1977 protest in Kansas City.