

CHAPTER EIGHT Doing Time on Maple Drive “I drove the car off the road on purpose.”

In this chapter titled "Doing Time On Maple Drive," the author examines the revolutionary changes regarding societal perceptions of LGBTQ+ rights, particularly focusing on the battle for marriage equality in the United States. The chapter opens with the political scholar Timur Kuran's observations on how unexpected revolutions can catch even the most knowledgeable individuals off guard. He illustrates this by detailing reactions to the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, where even dissidents and academics failed to foresee the exact moment of change. Kuran highlights the idea that major shifts often occur suddenly, leaving many stunned in retrospect.

The narrative shifts to Evan Wolfson, who, inspired by John Boswell's writings on historical attitudes toward homosexuality, proposes that the institution of marriage should be the focal point for the fight for gay rights. Wolfson believed that claiming marriage would signify equality and challenge societal notions surrounding gay individuals. However, during the early discussions and activism in the 1980s, the fight faced significant backlash and indifference, as popular media portrayed gay relationships negatively, often highlighting gay characters' isolation and struggles rather than depicting them as whole individuals.

The chapter reflects on the 1992 made-for-TV movie "Doing Time on Maple Drive," examining how it presented LGBTQ+ narratives. It highlights the tragic story of Matt, a character grappling with his sexuality and ultimately attempting to end his life rather than confront his truth. The portrayal of gay characters in media at that time followed certain rules that minimized their experiences, often reducing their identity to a problem needing resolution. This hindered the movement for acceptance and equality.

Despite the struggles, there was a gradual shift in cultural norms, propelled in part by the sitcom "Will & Grace," which depicted gay individuals in a positive light and helped alter public perception. The chapter culminates in the realization that cultural portrayals can significantly affect societal attitudes; hence, the success of LGBTQ+ marriage equality in the U.S. ultimately stemmed from persistent activism coupled with changing representations in popular culture, demonstrating how narrative shifts in media have the power to redefine social structures and beliefs.