

2021

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Recommended Citation

Johansen, Emma R. and Johansen, Emma R. (2021) "Y'all Means All: The Southern Queer Experience and Grassroots Archives as Places of Remembrance," *The Cardinal Edge*: Vol. 1 , Article 8.
DOI: [10.18297/tce/vol1/iss1/8](https://doi.org/10.18297/tce/vol1/iss1/8)
Available at: <https://ir.library.louisville.edu/tce/vol1/iss1/8>

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Y'all Means All: The Southern Queer Experience and Grassroots Archives as Places of Remembrance

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ABSTRACT

While the burgeoning field of queer history grows in academic prominence and scholarship, southern queer identities and histories are left in the gaps of this trailblazing research. As a segment of a larger senior honors thesis on gay press in Kentucky and the broader American South, this brief research report will specifically examine queer rurality, visibility, and space in the archive. This report also aims to highlight the political and sociological importance of remembering, studying, and teaching queer heritage, especially in the rural American South. This report argues that the complexities of southern queer histories are especially felt in the Women-In-Print Movement and in the methodologies of early queer historians in the mid-twentieth century, and that these waves of intellectual change should be included in narratives of national queer history. While many assume gay identities and southern identities to be mutually exclusive, the histories and peoples weaved throughout this research report prove that there is a vibrant culture that is both proudly southern and proudly queer in Kentucky and the American South.

KEYWORDS: History of Gender; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies; Museum Studies; Public History; Social History; United States History

Alison Bechdel, at four or five years old, sits in a diner with her father in Philadelphia in the mid-1960s. She hears a jingle of keys, a hard step of a boot, and the push of a hand truck. In a matter of seconds, she sees someone that she has never met before, but feels like she knows. By sight, this woman - with a button up shirt, short hair, and the keys to the delivery truck on her belt loop - is everything Alison wants to be. She feels like they are part of the same kind, from the same country: "Like a traveler in a foreign country who runs into someone from home--someone they've never spoken to but know by sight--I recognized her with a surge of joy."¹ As Alison recognizes her, her father does too: "Is *that* what you want to look like?" The woman is in the diner for a few seconds to deliver a package. She doesn't look at Alison. She never says a word. "No," Alison doesn't know what else to say. It's a lie.

"But the vision of the truck-driving bulldyke sustained me through the years," Bechdel later writes.² Bechdel's story is a common one in queer experience and identity formation. Originally from the small town of Beech Creek, Pennsylvania, Bechdel has feelings only

contextualized in a packed diner in the bustling city of Philadelphia. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*, as a whole, is a biography both about Bechdel and her gay father as they remain in, or break free from, the closet. Bechdel explores the ways she formed a lesbian identity, and a further butch identity, in her childhood in rural Pennsylvania. As a child, she wanted crewcuts, muscles, tweed, and sneakers.³ These desires had yet to coalesce into an image, a label, until she accompanied her father on a business trip into the city. There, the actuality of her desires was realized, and the vision Bechdel saw of a woman - as 'inverted' and masculine as she - planted the seeds of her coming out in college.

Media portrayals of queer experience often center on this juxtaposition of "rural" and "urban" queer histories and communities. While the general field of queer history is growing in academic prominence, most scholarship in queer history document the two urban "poles" of American gay rights movements: New York City and Los Angeles. The little research devoted to rural queer communities, particularly those in the American South, have few, if any, mentions of Kentucky. *Statewide Pride*,

¹ Bechdel, Alison. *Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 118-119.

² Bechdel, "Fun Home," 119.

³ Bechdel, "Fun Home," 103-106.

a digital humanities project began by Emma Johansen and Dr. Lara Kelland in the summer of 2018, explores the role of place and space in Kentucky queer history during the twentieth century.⁴ This initiative has digitally mapped over three hundred sites of queer significance across the state, from the mountains of Appalachia to the skyscrapers of Louisville and Lexington. While most sites are concentrated in Kentucky's major cities, this digital map has proved that queer history has touched all of Kentucky, including its rural areas. While *Statewide Pride*, and a subsequent senior honors thesis on the topic, took a broad approach in expanding queer rurality and drawing its connections to urban gay liberation movements through gay press and journalism, this brief research report will survey queer rurality, visibility, and space in the archive. This report also aims to highlight the political and sociological importance of remembering, studying, and teaching queer heritage, especially in the rural American South.

For Bechdel, her queerness was felt in her rural Pennsylvanian home, but was confirmed – defined – in downtown Philadelphia. Furthermore, her “homosexuality remained at that point purely theoretical, an untested hypothesis” before her first girlfriend in college.⁵ This narrative, while personal and valid to Bechdel's lived experience, reveals a particular power dichotomy common in how queer experiences are written and perceived. Many people, LGBTQ or otherwise, first perceive queerness as being idle – incubated – in the country, but finally hatched in the city, in college, or in moving out of their small, “backwards” hometown. Dr. Cate Fosl describes this dynamic as the “major narrative flow” of U.S. gay history: one that ignores the complex network of LGBTQ people who began to stake their claims in local, rural communities after Black, women's, and Vietnamese liberation movements. A rural-to-urban migration - where LGBTQ people move to urban areas to find acceptance – certainly exists in Kentucky and has

existed for decades. However, queer agency in rural communities is a more complicated gray area.⁶ Kentucky and the Ohio River Valley is a connecting thread to many regions: southern, northern, midwestern – sometimes seen as a “heartland” of pure Americanism.⁷ The many different subcultures of Kentucky – dependent on economic and cultural factors – also perpetuates a “presumed urban/rural divide.”⁸ Though the cultures of Louisville and Lexington are notorious for claiming they are “not like the rest of Kentucky,” Fosl argues that: “Louisville and Lexington share more in common than most of their residents might like to think insofar as their respective queer communities are both greatly shaped by rural Kentuckians.”⁹ Furthermore, rural Kentuckians hold a vibrant queer community on their own merit: often using the southern tolerance for eccentricity as a tool for acceptance in small communities. Mayor John Cummings saw this in his town when Vicco, Kentucky became the smallest town to pass an LGBTQ anti-discrimination law, or a fairness ordinance, in the nation. In an interview with Fosl in 2016, Cummings stated that: “We are so small that everyone comes to terms with everybody whether they agree or disagree.”¹⁰

Katherine Schweighofer calls this dynamic the “country-as-closet” construct, as it reinforces the assumption of LGBTQ identities as inherently urban, seeing queerness and rurality as mutually exclusive – impossible.¹¹ One of the many purposes for Fosl's work on the “Kentucky LGBTQ Historical Context Narrative” was to challenge the narrative flow that ignores the contributions of rurality to queer cultures and histories, and *Statewide Pride* aims to achieve the same. This paradigm of queerness being first experienced, actualized, in the city is a common thread among many queer people – but it isn't always the case. The assumption of queer culture being founded in the urban, then seeping into the rural, is flipped on its head in *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon*.¹² In this

⁴ <http://kentuckyqueerhistory.org/about-the-project/>

⁵ Bechdel, “Fun Home,” 58.

⁶ Fosl, Catherine, et al. “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative.” Report for the Kentucky LGBT Heritage Initiative, prepared by the University of Louisville Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research 2016, 19. Fosl discusses the rural-to-urban migration in terms of a nationwide migration – where queer people move from the nation's interior to the coastal cities of New York City and Los Angeles for acceptance. This dynamic also happens statewide – where many LGBTQ Kentuckians move to the urban areas of Lexington and Louisville in the same fashion.

⁷ Fosl, et al, “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative,” 19.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Fosl, et al, “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative,” 20.

¹⁰ Fosl, et al, “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative,” 20-21.

¹¹ Gray, Mary L, Colin R Johnson, and Brian Joseph Gilley, eds. *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies. Intersections: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Genders and Sexualities*. New York: New York University Press, 2016, 223. This point refers to the chapter “Rethinking the Closet: Queer Life in Rural Geographies” by Katherine Schweighofer, that runs from 223 to 243.

¹² Harker, Jaime. *The Lesbian South : Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the*

manuscript, lesbian identity – and a broader gay culture – is spread throughout the women in print (WIP) movement, spearheaded by lesbian feminists in the rural South.

Jamie Harker, a professor in English and director of the Sarah Isom Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Mississippi, wrote *The Lesbian South* to bring academic attention to the lesbian feminists that sat at the innovative rise of gay press and second-wave feminist bookstores.¹³ In the work's introduction, "Southern, Feminist, Queer: The Archive of Southern Lesbian Feminism," Jamie Harker writes about how John Howard's *Men Like That* inspired a new, queer lens with which she examined her home in Atlanta: a youth filled with feminist bookstores, Faulkner, and gay southern culture. Harker writes that "Howard made the point that what mattered in Mississippi was not if you were gay but if you were *known*."¹⁴ Harker writes that Mississippians were embedded in webs of kinship and friendship. The "open secret" of their homosexuality allowed them to live quite comfortably. This was a drastically different life than the one characterized by out, urban gays. Harker writes, "National gay magazines frame queer life as a binary: out, liberated gays in urban areas in the North and West and oppressed, closeted queers in a homophobic South (and arguably Midwest). But there is often a third way, one that Howard first articulated for me: 'They were aware but rather *chose to ignore*.'"¹⁵ This "purposeful ignorance" may coincide with the aforementioned "tolerance for eccentricity" Fosl saw in many smaller Kentucky communities. However, Howard argues that much of the sexual freedom enjoyed by gay men in Mississippi were deeply intertwined with male, white, middle-class privilege.¹⁶ Though the degree of acceptance for LGBTQ people varied from county to county, there is no doubt that the WIP movement spearheaded an out, public queerness in the American South.

Harker argues that the WIP movement was composed of southern lesbian feminist writers working to revolutionize print culture from its male-dominated and white-centered roots.¹⁷ This literary movement was anchored in small

feminist periodicals, presses, and bookstores. For women involved in WIP, mainstream presses and publishers would dilute women's experiences; only through independent publishing could women be their authentic selves in print. Though these efforts were common in other feminist magazines, the WIP movement caught a niche of feminist thinking absent from general feminist publications: lesbian sexuality and desire. Harker explains that this movement created ripples of pioneering female writers felt across the nation by "providing a broader case of readership and promotion."¹⁸ In researching these WIP writers, Harker hopes to create "a genealogy of southern lesbian feminism" and connect countless feminist thinkers and publishers together, in a web of "radical politics, queer sexuality, and liberatory space." Barbara Grier of Naiad Press and June Arnold of Daughters, Inc., published well-known southern authors such as Rita Mae Brown, Blanche McCrary Boyd, and Bertha Harris, kickstarting their careers. Feminist collectives in North Carolina published periodicals such as *Sinister Wisdom*, based in Charlotte, and *Feminary*, based in Durham. These publications "nurtured" southern feminist authors like Minnie Bruce Pratt, Professor of Writing at Syracuse University, developer of their LGBT studies program, and partner to Leslie Feinberg. Alice Walker, author of *The Color Purple* (1982), Mab Segrest, author of *Memoir of a Race Traitor* (1994), and Louisville-native Ann Allen Shockley, author of *Loving Her* (1974), were all deeply influenced by the WIP movement.¹⁹ These writers had complex relationships with southern identity and the intersections of identity found within the American South. For example, Alice Walker embraces black southern culture, but rejects white southern culture. Some authors saw the South as a mechanism that propelled their radicalism and lesbianism, others saw southern culture as a barrier between both these forms of identity.²⁰ Harker recognizes the ways these authors embodied many different identities, as well as being southern; being radical, queer, Midwestern, Latina, and Black are not mutually exclusive to being southern. Though many authors discussed by Harker as being crucial to the WIP movement had a complex relationship to the South, they each used the

Queer Literary Canon. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

¹³ <https://english.olemiss.edu/jaime-harker/>

¹⁴ Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2. Author's emphasis.

¹⁵ Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2. Author's emphasis.

¹⁶ Much of Howard's work argues that male privilege, as well as race and class privilege, allowed for these sexual freedoms. Retzliff, Tim. *The Oral History Review* 29, no. 2 (2002): 174-76, 174.

¹⁷ Romesburg, Don, ed. *The Routledge History of Queer America*. The Routledge Histories. New York, NY:

Routledge, 2018, 27-28. These roots are referenced in *The Routledge History of Queer America*, when discussing print cultural in colonial Philadelphia allowing port city book-importers and presses to print sexually risqué material. Some of these prints held gender variant or homoerotic texts, but the access to print culture in the colonial era and early republic was almost completely restricted to white men.

¹⁸ Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2-3.

¹⁹ Harker, "The Lesbian South," 3.

²⁰ Harker, "The Lesbian South," 6.

word “southern” as a means to identify themselves and connect with each other.²¹

Harker also cites southern exceptionalism as reasoning behind academia’s lack of attention to southern literature. She connects southern exceptionalism as the crux of the Confederacy’s defense of slavery and the racial segregation of Jim Crow, and this mechanism was used to ignore “the writers of color, white women writers, and queer writers, whose ‘perverse’ interests were seen as antithetical to the traditional, heterosexual community of the South.”²² Indeed, southern exceptionalism is a subset of a broader American exceptionalism, a place where - if America rises above hate and anti-democratic ideals - the South is stuck in them. As Sylvia Shin Huey Chong argues in “Exceptionalism,” the American South has been imagined as a “stand in for all manner of social and political problems, from the normalization of segregation to the brutality of the modern prison system, thus drawing attention away from the presence of similar issues in Detroit, New York or Los Angeles.”²³ Carolyn Leste Law agrees with this sentiment in *Out in the South*, stating the South has been “an easy repository for all that is backward and hurtful in the United States, past and present...It seems not a little disingenuous of the United States to heap all the racism, bigotry, and ignorance of an entire nation upon one region. As pernicious as the attitudes and prejudices of the South may be, so also are the attitudes and prejudices about the South that reduce and often misrepresent it.”²⁴

Just as the feminist writers in the WIP movement had a difficult relationship with the South, Carolyn Leste Law describes the South as a “complex region full of the most remarkable paradoxes.”²⁵ She further juxtaposes the Bible Belt with a lesser known “Faerie Belt” that stretches along the 36th parallel from Virginia’s Tidewater region, which passes through North Carolina, to Tennessee, then Arkansas, and reaches as far west as Taos, New Mexico. “Along that latitude,” Law describes, “lie dozens of pagan sanctuaries, communes of Radical Faeries, and lesbian separatist land cooperatives. Without doubt, the South is a very queer region where such extremes can coexist.”²⁶ While these complex histories of the South are key to understanding southern queerness, many mainstream

interpretations of LGBTQ history and activism prioritize urban areas and cultures. While cities like New York and Los Angeles have no doubt been crucial to gay liberation and gay rights movements, it’s time for historians and activists to recognize the South as deserving of study and attention in the same regard.

R. Bruce Brasell, as part of “*Greetings From Out Here: Southern Lesbians and Gays Bear Witness*,” writes that southern LGBTQ activists have had to continually remind their fellow activists in other parts of the nation that because of the South’s uniqueness from other regions of the United States, it can’t be analyzed with the same criteria scholars use to analyze the North, the West, or even the Midwest. For example, during the 1988 Republican and Democratic conventions in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Atlanta, Georgia, respectively, ACT-UP New York descended on these southern towns while estranging themselves from the lesbian and gay organizations already in those areas. Brasell argues that “ACT-UP New York considered the lesbians and gays in the southern cities that they visited unenlightened and apolitical for not embracing their particular style of confrontational politics.”²⁷ ACT-UP New York’s confrontational politics were inspired by tactics from the New Left of the 1960s and gay liberation fronts in the 1970s. Oppositely, southern organizations borrowed tactics from the Black civil rights movement of the 1960s, and once ACT-UP’s confrontational politics would grow less effective in the 1990s – urban queer movements would switch to the southern style of resistance.²⁸ This case study is a clear example of urban queer movements categorizing rural forms of activism as “lesser than” urban forms of activism, inherently assuming that queerness and southern culture are at cross-purposes with each other. There is a mythology to southern queerness, one that pushes small town gays to find acceptance outside the countryside closet, that is genuinely harmful to queer people outside of central cities like New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. While the civil rights movement was no doubt concentrated in the urban South – cities like Selma, Birmingham, and Atlanta – the activists in these cities were more directly connected to “Bible Belt” communities in the Deep South compared to New York

²¹ Harker, “The Lesbian South,” 7.

²² Harker, “The Lesbian South,” 4.

²³ Romine, Scott, and Jennifer Rae Greeson, eds. 2016. *Keywords for Southern Studies*. The New Southern Studies. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 309. This point refers to the chapter “Exceptionalism” written by Sylvia Shin-Huey Chong.

²⁴ Dews, C. L. Barney, and Carolyn Leste Law. *Out in the South*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 3.

²⁵ Dews, “Out in the South,” 2.

²⁶ Dews, “Out in the South,” 3.

²⁷ Dews, “Out in the South,” 163. This point is part of the chapter “*Greetings From Out Here: Southern Lesbians and Gays Bear Witness*,” written by R. Bruce Brasell, that runs from pages 159 to 172.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

activists, or even more “mid-Southern” states like Kentucky.

Throughout *Out in the South*, Law and several other writers argue that mythologizing southern gayness as an experience of pushing out, moving away - desires actualized and defined in the city, then hidden in the country - are false dichotomies of queer rurality. It’s clear that Law, Fosl, and Harker are in conversation with each other, and are part of a larger movement in the academy to recognize the significance of the South in queer studies. Law writes, “It is a popular myth that gay people cannot live in the repressive atmosphere of the South, that all gay and lesbian southerners are driven out, indeed are suspect if they choose to stay or cannot leave. The result, in the logic of the myth, is that there cannot be gay culture in the South.”²⁹

However, these assumptions of an “impossible queer South” are made complex later on in *Out in the South*, as the chapter on Kate Black and Marc A. Rhorer’s oral history project of gays and lesbians in Appalachia proves. “Out in the Mountains: Exploring Lesbian and Gay Lives,” argues the relevance of queer Appalachian culture in the University of Kentucky’s Appalachian Collection. Black and Rhorer interviewed five lesbians and four gay men, all of whom were white, to lend their voice on “coming-out experiences, homophobia, AIDS-phobia, and community building” in Eastern Kentucky.³⁰ Their oral history initiative found common experiences of loneliness, internalized homophobia, and ostracization among the interviewees. Only one of the interviewees continues to live in the mountains, the other eight live in either Lexington or Louisville as of publication in 2001.³¹ While these rural areas hold rich histories with LGBTQ peoples and identities, how does it feel to be in these isolating spaces, and how might these feelings change in urban areas?

Jim Gimsley, in “Myth and Reality: The Story of Gay People in the South,” asks if there even is a southern gay identity, or a common past among southern queers, and writes:

“We wonder about these things; we tell each other stories. Now that we have moved to the city - to Atlanta, or Birmingham, or Charlotte, or Columbia, or New Orleans, or Nashville, to one of those places - we can find each other, we can sit down and chat, and we do sometimes. Most of the time we find the ones who are most like us; we white queers sit down with white queers, we black queers sit down with black queers, latinos talk to latinos y latinas con latinas. We rich sit down with the rich and we poor sit

down with the poor. We men talk to the men and we women talk to the women. In this we are like the rest of the South, where the colors have rarely mingled, even under court order. In the South, the social hierarchy has remained strong, and distinctions of every kind have kept one category of person from dealing with another.”³²

The social hierarchies of the South, and of rurality, have been replicated – perpetuated – in the urban. In Gimsley’s analysis, the South is still within people when they move away; therefore, the South influences everywhere Southerners touch. For Gimsley, the rural queer experience is constructed in communication; when queer people talk to each other, organize, and mobilize, the urban/rural divide can be perpetuated, but it can also be questioned. The divisions between the bustling cities of Kentucky and the quiet, but no less vibrant, communities in rural Kentucky are united through a common history that must be preserved before key community members are lost to time.

While studying queer rurality and Kentucky’s role in the broader discipline of LGBTQ history, it has become apparent how time-sensitive these histories are. Without proper archival and preservation practices, the knowledge held in queer memorabilia, manuscripts, oral histories, and photographs could disappear at an alarming rate. Archival science, as an institution, has historically prioritized white, male, heterosexual, and cisgender voices. Many contemporary archivists strive to amend these gaps in historical knowledge by implementing anti-racist metadata, re-interpreting collections with new eyes, and prioritizing collections that document marginalized communities. The legacy of gay history as a school of thought, scholarship, and activism is only a few decades old, but grassroots archives have always been major centers of queer remembrance, political organizing, and knowledge building. The political power in remembering and analyzing previous generations of activism is a revolutionary act of kindness that allows queer people of the past, present, and future to unite and organize in solidarity.

There are very few archives dedicated to queer history, especially in the American South. The act of building a community-based, grassroots archive can be a space for healing marginalized communities and in honoring those who have come before us. In *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Interpreting Sexual Histories*, Ann Cvetkovish compares archival work, especially the work of preserving queer archives, to Greg Youmans’s work in preserving American poet Elsa Gidlow’s garden, “which

²⁹ Dews, “Out in the South,” 3.

³⁰ Dews, “Out in the South,” 17.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Dews, “Out in the South,” 231.

he sees as a crucial part of her legacy, [and] a reminder of what lies outside the confines of archival spaces...For him, the archive is not a static or dead object but alive and capable of ongoing cultivation and transmission that can inspire new generations of queer activists and scholars. These accounts of the materiality of the archive validate the experience of archival research as a labor of love.”³³ However, not only are these archives of sexuality – as well as archival work in general – about memory, remembrance, and inspiration: archives are also the sites in which western knowledges are built.

Further in *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives*, Stone and Cantrell quote Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever* when he argues the archive as a state of political power because of its necessity in producing knowledge: “There is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation.”³⁴ Because of these dual purposes of the archive, preserving the past and producing knowledge, the methodologies of the archive are being put into question. Stone and Cantrell argue that an academic focus has shifted from “archives-as-source” to “archives-as-subject.”³⁵ These new ways of interpreting and valuing archival work and preservation are key to understanding the nuances of queer history and queer archives.

Furthermore, the relevance of queer archives also exists in circumventing government and academic institutions, as sites like the Lesbian Herstory Archives, the Pop-Up Museum of Queer History, and the GLBT Historical Society prove. These “counter-archives” have expanded upon and created new archival methodologies with the use of volunteers, space, and constantly growing collections.³⁶ Indeed, the Williams-Nichols archive began in such a fashion; the archive was born in 1982 by a single collector, Louisville activist David Williams, in his apartment in Old Louisville. The collection then expanded until it became too much space and funding to handle by one person, and the collection was then donated to the University of Louisville Archives and Special Collections. The Williams-Nichols Collection may be one of the largest LGBTQ archives in the United States,

with over 8,000 different items spanning approximately 100 linear feet, yet it has astoundingly evaded academic attention.

Gregory Rosenthal, an assistant professor of public history at Roanoke College, argues that queer public history can be used as an activist tool to combat queer erasure and the gentrification of queer spaces. In Rosenthal’s view, the sub-discipline of queer public history has roots within the 1970s gay liberation movement, which sparked a broad interest in history among LGBTQ Americans. This interest in queer histories and narratives inspired activist-scholars to organize some of the earliest queer community history projects in America.³⁷ These projects include Joan Nestle founding Lesbian Herstory Archives in New York City in 1974, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis founding the Buffalo Women’s Oral History Project in 1978, and Allan Bérubé founding the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay History Project in either 1978 or 1979. The latter organization was renamed the GLBT Historical Society, and – along with the Lesbian Herstory Archives – is still active today.³⁸ Allan Bérubé is also credited as an influential “grassroots community historian” that uses bottom-up methodologies to circumvent academic institutions that may silence queer histories (but may also bring much needed financial stability).³⁹ Rosenthal also borrows Andrea Burns’ work in *From Storefront to Monument* to argue that most of the first black museums in the United States were not founded by academic historians or museum professionals, but rather African American civil rights activists and grass roots organizers.⁴⁰ In Burns’ view, public history – and by extension, community history – was a natural progression of theory and practice of Black Power. This same rhetoric can be applied to Gay Power and gay liberation movements, where community histories are used as “a strategy for liberation, democracy, and consciousness-raising.”⁴¹

Stone and Cantrell cite Jack Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* to highlight queer heritage as crucial to understanding modern queer identities and movements. Queer time, in Halberstam’s view, “operates against logics of

³³ Stone, Amy L, and Jaime Cantrell. *Out of the Closet, into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories*. Suny Series in Queer Politics and Cultures. Albany: SUNY Press, 2015, xvii

³⁴ Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, “Out of the Closet, into the Archives,” 7.

³⁵ Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, “Out of the Closet, into the Archives,” 6.

³⁶ Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, “Out of the Closet, into the Archives,” 7-8.

³⁷ Rosenthal, Gregory. *Make Roanoke Queer Again: Community History and Urban Change in a Southern City*. *The Public Historian* 1 February 2017; 39 (1): 35–60, 39.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Rosenthal, “Make Roanoke Queer Again,” 40.

⁴⁰ Rosenthal, “Make Roanoke Queer Again,” 41.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

heterosexuality and reproduction while exhibiting alternative relations to normative time and space. The peculiarity of archival time is inseparable from that of archival space; queer lives, often marked by the ephemeral, nonlinear, and nonsequential nature, are contained in archival spaces that are equally textured and complex.⁴² For Halberstam, queer time is a collapsed, flattened time. The figures of the past are still crucial to how queer people perceive themselves on both an individual and communal level. Furthermore, the significance of history in activist practices is not new either. The cruciality of knowing the gay past was evident to activists in the direct aftermath of the gay liberation and lesbian-feminist movements.

Jonathan Katz, author of *Gay American History: Lesbian and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* writes in 1976: “Knowledge of Gay history helps restore a people to its past, to itself; it extends the range of human possibility, suggests new ways of living, new ways of loving.”⁴³ Again, loving comes up in the context of historical remembering, of preserving histories about those who have been denied recognition, as an act of love – not just to one’s community but to oneself. Not just the one being remembered, but the one watering the plants and tilling the soil. Katz argues the importance of queer people to define themselves in a historical, social, political, economic, and psychological context: “The psychological-psychiatric professionals must be divested of their power to define homosexuals; Gay people must acquire the power to define ourselves.”⁴⁴ Katz has seen for himself, in 1976 New York City, a shift in “what it means to be gay.” The homosexual has been defined, previously, by oppression, an oppression that can only be alleviated through law reform and civil rights. However, Katz has noticed that others are beginning to see Gay liberation as part of a broader struggle over social institutions, both national and worldwide, in need of radical social change and a questioning of sexual division of labor.⁴⁵ In this sense, the power in gay identities lie in the ability to fight alongside other movements, to join the cause, in solidarity with fellow oppressed groups. Katz writes, “Starting with a sense of ourselves as characters in a closet drama, the passive victims of a family tragedy, we experienced ourselves as initiators and assertive actors in a movement for social change. We experienced the present as history, ourselves as history-makers. In our lives and in our hearts, we experienced the change from

one historical form of homosexuality to another. We experienced homosexuality as historical.”⁴⁶

As most queer archives are concentrated in urban areas, the significance of queer heritage and remembrance grows tenfold in rural communities. The need for academic attention and devotion to queer history (both rural and urban) is necessary for queer people to align with each other politically, socially, and organizationally. As major corporations and government bodies begin to show support for LGBTQ rights, the queer community must be reminded that, before Stonewall and ever since, companies and police groups have been reluctant to stand with queer people and fight for LGBTQ advocacy. It is unlikely for them to “approve” of queer love and expression without a strategic angle; they will placate to the bare minimum of the LGBTQ community’s demands for justice, then ignore or revoke the political agency queer people deserve as soon as they are in power. Even more apparent is the wish to downplay the importance and pride of queer identity, favoring assimilation over actual acceptance. To reduce gender identity and sexual orientation to “what’s in your pants” and “who you sleep with” is to drastically erase decades of social uprising and sexual liberation. Queer identities, in a heterosexist and cissexist world, are inherently political. As with all politics, the narrative of a long arc toward justice must be central in the fight against oppression; by recognizing and celebrating queer histories and experiences, queer peoples can better organize themselves and continue the fight for gay and trans liberation that began decades ago. Queer people of today have been passed the torch, it is their duty to keep the flame alive for those after them, in remembrance of those before them.

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⁴² Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, “Out of the Closet, into the Archives,” 5.

⁴³ Katz, Jonathan. *Gay American History : Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.s.a. : A Documentary*. New York: Crowell, 1976, 8.

⁴⁴ Katz, “Gay American History,” 7.

⁴⁵ Katz, “Gay American History,” 7-8.

⁴⁶ Katz, “Gay American History,” 2.

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