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Land Lines: Modes of Communication in Kentucky's Queer Past and Present

By
Emma Rose Johansen

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation *summa cum laude*
and
for Graduation with Honors from the Department of History

University of Louisville

March, 2021

Land Lines: Modes of Communication in Kentucky's Queer Past and Present

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A Senior Honors Thesis Approved on March 5th, 2021
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I began this research trying to find myself in these sources. I now present this thesis as an homage to those before me. In *Lose Your Mother,* Saidiya Hartman writes, "History is how the secular world attends to the dead."[i] In *Refusing the Favor: The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880*, Deena J. González writes, "They left us a legacy, an inclination toward many responses. It seems important therefore to know something about them, to return the favor, and to exorcise their omission from history by suggesting patterns, revealing linkages between their society and culture and that of the encroachers, and insisting on more complex readings of their lives."[ii] I wholeheartedly agree with these sentiments, and I study history no longer for myself, but to honor and remember trailblazers previously unrecognized by historians.

To those who continue to fight when threatened with silence, those who shout with hoarse voices and burning lungs, I owe this to you. Thank you.

Abstract

As the queer historical discipline grows in reach, prominence, and scholarship, southern queer histories are on the tail end of this growing academic attention. Academic historians, digital humanists, and public historians alike have neglected Kentucky's rich queer history in academic circles. This thesis aims to mend this gap in historic interpretation through research in Kentucky gay press, television, radio, and their effect on Kentucky's queer organizing. Through extensive primary research in the Williams-Nichols archive, and secondary sources on the women in print movement, queer rurality, and gay media studies, this thesis measures the ways Kentucky queer communities have correlated with original gay newspapers, public access television stations, and radio shows in the mid to late twentieth century. This thesis is an expansion of the kentuckyqueerhistory.org project: a digital mapping initiative that began in the summer of 2018 and plotted over three hundred different sites of queer significance in Kentucky. While spatial humanities, digital humanities, and public history informed the initial stages of this research, we approach our sources with a new lens of queer southern studies and media studies. While the previous project plotted out the dots on the map, this thesis connects them through gay press and communications. At an intersection of queer history, southern studies, media history, and public history, this project argues the importance of interdisciplinary lenses in mapping and defining Kentucky's queer past, present, and future.

Lay Summary

As a note on terminology, this thesis uses the labels "LGBTQ," "LGBT," "gay," and "queer" interchangeably. The primary sources referenced in this work most often use the term "gay" to describe themselves and their organizations, so this term is most frequently used. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer groups were all included in the term "gay," as gay

– much like the word “queer” today – was used to encompass experiences and expressions we would most likely label more specifically under “bisexual” or “transgender” today. The linguistics and labels of the queer community are still fluctuating, but the following manuscript takes care in presenting peoples and organizations mentioned with the languages self-described in the times active. Furthermore, specific names and addresses censored for privacy reasons in some primary sources are still censored in this thesis. For the respect of people’s living and dead, dead names of persons who identified as transsexual or transgender are also not included in this work. As dead names are names assigned to trans people at birth that usually do not reflect the person’s true gender identity, it is disrespectful to trans people to include names they denounced later in life.

This thesis also uses “southern” and “rural” somewhat interchangeably but makes careful distinctions when necessary. This thesis is meant to bring complexity to the stereotype of a simple, monolithic South, so this author distinguishes between the urban South and the rural South when needed in the text. Also, Kentucky’s place in the American South is still highly debated, as Kentucky was technically a border state during the Civil War. However, even if we were officially a border state does not mean we were neutral in the conflict: like the rest of the South, Kentucky had plantations growing tobacco, distilling bourbon, and more. This author counts Kentucky as a crossroads between the Midwest, the North, and the South all in one, especially when considering the Ohio River’s necessity for trade throughout the colonial era and earlier. The state has larger historical roots in the South compared to the North and Midwest, as well as similar political systems and policies. Thus, Kentucky has pieces of itself in all these regions, but should be considered a part of the South first and foremost.

In terms of methodology, “spatial humanities” are trends in the larger humanist disciplines – including but not limited to language arts, history, philosophy, anthropology, political science, and literature – that shift academic ways of categorizing the humanities not through chronological methods, but rather through geographical means. Comparatively, “digital humanities” prioritize digital, accessible projects and modes of showcasing historical patterns. Many spatial humanists overlap tools with digital humanists, such as ArcGIS programs for digital mapping. These methods show a “spatial turn” in the humanities that take into account cultural and social landscapes and borders.

Key Words

Kentucky history; southern studies; media history; digital humanities; gay press; gay journalism; queer history.

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Preface

When visualizing queer history, scholars first imagine the bustling cities of New York, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The limited scholarship dedicated to gay and transgender history thus far has been centralized in major urban areas, and the gap of academic research in the queer American South has contributed to the myth that gay history began in these places, or that gay history is confined to them. While the burgeoning field of queer history is beginning to challenge this gap, Kentucky has a rich LGBT narrative that is falling behind in these waves of intellectual change. This is due in part to a broader ignorance of southern histories, especially southern histories of minority rights and forms of resistance. The objective of this thesis is to measure and articulate the modes of communication and routes of gay journalism and media throughout Kentucky's past and present. Through the pre-Internet media trifecta of newspapers, television, and radio, Kentucky's queer past and present can be defined on its own merit then later contextualized into a larger regional network of queer organizers. These modes of connection will be explored alongside the significance of place in a queer context: where internal identities become extroverted expressions, and how these expressions were communicated regionally and nationally through gay journalism.

This project began two years ago during the Summer Research Opportunity Program (SROP): a ten-week initiative for undergraduate students to create original research with academic mentors and professors. I began this project in the summer after my freshman year with Dr. Lara Kelland of the history department. Dr. Kelland taught digital history, public history, and the history of sexuality at the University of Louisville until last spring, where she became the E. Desmond Lee Endowed Professor in Museum Studies and Community History at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Our SROP project was first meant to compose a digital

map of queer history in Louisville, but our archival research soon revealed an incredibly rich history throughout the state. This initial project, *Statewide Pride: A Cartographic Perspective of LGBT History in Kentucky During the 20th Century*, curated a digital map of over three hundred sites with queer significance in the state. In the fall of 2018, Dr. Kelland and I published our findings on kentuckyqueerhistory.org. There, the digital map is visible to the public along with a brief narrative summary of Kentucky's gay history in the twentieth century. The digital map curated from these sources have been presented at the 2018 Kentucky Honors Roundtable and the 2019 National Council of Public History Annual Conference. As Dr. Kelland has left the university to take another position, I've been inspired by Dr. Christine Ehrick's work in media and radio history and the cultural and historiographical effects of each medium. Her expertise will aid the curation of an overarching narrative on Kentucky's queer past in context of the rise of gay press and media representation.

The vast majority of this initial research utilized the Williams-Nichols collection at the University of Louisville's Archives and Special Collections. As one of the largest LGBT archives in America, the Williams-Nichols collection measures to over 100 linear feet of artifacts, photographs, and documents within and beyond Kentucky. Two years later, I return to this project with a greater knowledge of the historical discipline, the methods of historiography and public history, as well as a background and newfound interest in media studies and forms of queer journalism. Our team anticipates the means of connection and communication in Kentucky queer life to heavily rely on Kentucky's first gay newspaper, *The Letter (1990 – 2000s);* [1] the Louisville television show, *All Together Now (1984-1986);*[2] and the podcast, *Strange Fruit*

[1] The exact date of *The Letter's* closing is unknown to this author, even after extensive research, but records of publications in the University of Louisville's Archives and Special Collections end in the early 2000s.
[2] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Williams, N. David.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

(2012-present).[3] While we anticipate other ways of connecting queer people within and beyond Kentucky, these three mediums provide a fruitful launchpad and clear structure to our research. While the initial SROP project drew the dots on the map, this thesis aims to connect them and ask: how were the gaps between rural and urban queer communities bridged via gay press and media? How may *The Letter* follow a broader historical trend of gay journalism and identity-focused periodicals following the AIDS crisis?

While this thesis will continue to use the Williams-Nichols collection for a majority of its primary sources, this project expansion will analyze secondary sources previously unused in this context. These secondary sources will explore LGBT community formation through newspapers, television, and radio nationwide to provide a solid foundation for a specific focus on gay journalism in Kentucky. Much of the initial project would not have been possible without the "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative" published by the University of Louisville's Anne Braden Institute for Social Justice Research in 2016. Spearheaded by Dr. Cate Fosl, Daniel J. Vivian, and Jonathan Coleman, this document is the first of many attempts to bridge the gap of southern histories, and southern queer histories, in the historical discipline.

The fields of queer history, public history, and media history all intertwine with this project and each have their own reasons for academic attention and publishing. Firstly, the most direct and effective way to measure community building beyond place is through journalism and other indirect forms of connection. Kentucky's LGBT newspaper *The Letter* is a prime example of indirect communication closing gaps between rural and urban gay lives. This newspaper began in the 1990s and advertised many of the places featured on our digital map, including bars,

[3] Says, Simon. "Behind The Podcast: A Conversation with Strange Fruit Hosts Jaison Gardner and Dr. Kaila Story." Medium. Blog | Simon Says A.I. transcription, February 20, 2018. https://blog.simonsays.ai/behind-the-podcast-a-conversation-with-strange-fruit-hosts-jaison-gardner-and-dr-kaila-story-a168c07b240b.

churches, and community centers. Here, cultural and journalistic projects transcended the legal and physical borders of Kentucky county lines. In the same vein of journalism and gay press, both queer television and radio also have a smaller, but no less significant, role in connecting the dots between LGBT places and peoples in Kentucky, the Ohio Valley Region, and the broader American South. The Louisville television show *All Together Now* from the 1980s and the current podcast *Strange Fruit* will expose unique methods used by different mediums in gay journalism and media. Overall, our thesis aims to argue the importance of media studies and lines of communication when analyzing place and heritage of queer histories.

Secondly, queer histories are integral to broader historical understandings as a form of reparative justice. The broader historical discipline and academic knowledge set have for centuries been systematically denied to numerous marginalized groups on the basis of race, gender, ability, and sexuality. While the "sudden" rise of gay rights and the legality of same-sex marriage brings the illusion of a more progressive America, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are still threatening ideologies that are embodied in our most recent Presidential administration. Some claim American forms of bigotry are a scar on the past, but that is to assume these forms of discrimination, prejudice, and oppression are over. Daily, through political policy and gaps in historical research, we re-open the wounds of homophobia and transphobia and pick at the scabs. We haven't even stopped the bleeding, let alone wait for it to scar. In my academic career, I've realized that there are many unresolved traumas and pains in history, and the history of sexuality is no exception. In studying the heritage of queer communities and identities, the traumas of secrecy, ostracization, and systemic violence are real and breathing in the archive. This project is meant to bring these narratives to light: while many people studied were never able to openly be themselves in life, we can give them that freedom

and visibility after their passing. Furthermore, to understand the "sudden" wave of gay rights, we must analyze the undercurrents of activism, organizing, and community building previously unstudied in this arch towards justice.

Previous scholars in gender and sexuality studies have implied that queer history is centralized in urban areas alone, in spaces such as New York's Greenwich Village or San Francisco's Castro District. In their focus on places where queer people are more obviously out and visible, the queer historical discipline thus far has ignored places where queer people have been less visible in ways similar to how urban gays are visible. This neglect, though unintentional in most cases, perpetuates the myth of gay people being invisible in the South, or the South being uninhabitable for the LGBT community. In reality, queer history is American history, and queer people have lived and left traces of themselves in every corner of the nation. These stories and peoples are in the archives, waiting to be uncovered. Previous historians of sexuality have utilized methodologies that begin in urban areas and work outward: this project aims to dismantle that assumption in queer research and work from the rural to the urban. How did the queer experience in rural areas shape the urban LGBT community? What ratio of rural queer life was reported compared to urban life? This thesis aims to highlight the ways in which rural gay and trans communities may have had a greater effect on queer experience in Louisville, Lexington, and other larger cities of the American South than academics have previously assumed.

This thesis will improve upon earlier stages of this project, bringing a new lens in which to organize and articulate the places of Kentucky's queer past and present. While my past research methodology focused on location, place, and cultural landscapes, this thesis will interpret connection, community, and movement in Kentucky's queer history. Though this thesis

will only scratch the surface of an underutilized fountain of knowledge on queerness in the American South, it will be borrowing methods and practices of four different disciplines. Media studies, southern studies, public history, and queer studies will all form academic bases for a new lens on already groundbreaking research.

The trifecta of pre-Internet journalist mediums - newspaper, television, and radio - reveals a queer subculture that has been historically necessary to solidify gay community, visibility, and solidarity. This thesis argues that gay press and journalism changed purpose and methodology depending on its medium and audience, but all of these modes of communication were integral in solidifying a statewide queer community. This specific focus on gay press will enlighten scholars on the broader pattern of LGBT community-building across state and county lines - filling the gap between rural and urban queer studies. This new approach to this body of knowledge will now focus on modes of connection and communication within these communities and beyond. While our previous project found pins on the map, this thesis will begin to connect the dots.

Methodologies in Queer Archives: Interpreting Complicated, Sexual Histories

The methodologies of this project proved difficult. There are very few archives dedicated to queer history, especially in the American South. This work has heavily borrowed from *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives: Researching Sexual Histories,* published in 2015 and edited by Amy L. Stone and Jaime Cantrell, with a forward by Dr. Ann Cvetkovish, director of the Pauline Jewett Institute of Women's and Gender Studies at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada. 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 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."[4] 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."[5] 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."[6] 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

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[4] 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
[5] Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, "Out of the Closet, into the Archives," 7.
[6] Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, "Out of the Closet, into the Archives," 6.

growing collections.[7] 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. When I first looked into the Williams-Nichols Collection, I was amazed at how many sources about a history – about myself, people like myself, all in my home city, my home state – were right under my nose. I was baffled that the sheer amount of documents – 8,000 different items spanning approximately 100 linear feet – in this collection had evaded academic attention.[8]

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.[9] 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.[10] Allan Bérubé is also credited as an

[7] Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, "Out of the Closet, into the Archives," 7-8.
[8] https://library.louisville.edu/ekstrom/lgbt_studies/primary. Specifically, in the 100 linear feet of the collection, the Williams-Nichols Archive holds over 3,500 books, 3,000 issues of journals and periodicals, nearly 25 linear feet of manuscripts, hundreds of video and audio tapes, and almost 1,500 items of LGBT memorabilia.
[9] 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.
[10] Ibid.

influential "grassroots community historian" that uses bottoms-up methodologies to circumvent academic institutions that may silence queer histories (but may also bring much needed financial stability).[11] 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.[12] 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."[13]

When I first dug into these primary sources, very early on in my coming out experience, I felt connected to a past I had never known but was still fiercely linked to. The effects of queer history, gay liberation, and LGBT activism left ripples all around the city. Suddenly, the roads in Cherokee Park made sense – such a wide road was turned from a loop to a one-way street to cut down on cruising in 1993.[14] A small apartment in St. James Court became the beginning of one of the first gay power organizations in the state. West Jefferson Street in Downtown Louisville housed more than the County Courthouse, but the first lesbian marriage case in the country through the *Jones v. Hallahan* case in 1970. On that same street was City Hall, which announced the passing of the Fairness Ordinance to a bustling crowd of activists and supporters after seven years of organizing on October 12th, 1999, when I was barely a month old. In Buechel, the Bashford Manor Mall I've driven past every day for years to get on the expressway was the site

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[11] Rosenthal, "Make Roanoke Queer Again," 40.
[12] Rosenthal, "Make Roanoke Queer Again," 41.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Louisville Parks), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

of a PDA protest on March 27th, 1992.[15] While researching, I began to look at my home with new eyes, and it was as if time had collapsed on itself. It was as if I was opening up the past in painful, but cathartic ways: digging up its wounds, but also its victories. And apparently, like many times during this project, I found that I wasn't the only one to feel this way.

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 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."[16] For Halberstam, queer time is a collapsed, flattened time. The figures of the past are still crucial to how we, as queer people, perceive ourselves. To know ourselves is to know the ones before us, and 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."[17] 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.

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[15] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: The Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Letter,* April 1992. This PDA protest, where activists would show public displays of affection in spaces usually toxic to queer couples, was associated with the group SHOP. More information on this group is unknown to this author.
[16] Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, "Out of the Closet, into the Archives," 5.
[17] Katz, Jonathan. Gay American History : Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.s.a. : A Documentary. New York: Crowell, 1976, 8.

Not just the one being remembered, but the one watering the plants and tilling the soil. Katz argues the importance of defining ourselves 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."[18] 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, now, others 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.[19] In this sense, the power in gay identities lie in our 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."[20]

Y'all Means All: The Rural Queer Experience

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

[18] Katz, "Gay American History," 7.
[19] Katz, "Gay American History," 7-8.
[20] Katz, "Gay American History," 2.

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.”[21] 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.[22] Bechdel’s experience 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.[23] 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.

I was first introduced to queer rurality through Bechdel’s *Fun Home*. I was even further introduced to a distinctly lesbian experience in gender non-conformity and masculinity. I devoured *Fun Home* in the University of Louisville’s art library my first semester of college and felt heard in a way I had never been heard before. For Bechdel, her queerness was felt in her rural Pennsylvanian home, but was confirmed – defined – in downtown Philadelphia.

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[21] Bechdel, Alison. Fun Home: A Family Tragicomic. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006, 118-119.
[22] Bechdel, “Fun Home,” 119.
[23] Bechdel, “Fun Home,” 103-106.

Furthermore, her “homosexuality remained at that point purely theoretical, an untested hypothesis” before her first girlfriend in college.[24] Though this narrative comforted me in my initial coming out experience, it still reveals a particular power dichotomy in how queer experiences are written, and perceived, 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 begin to stake their claims in local, rural communities after Black, women’s, and Vietnamese liberation movements. A rural-to-urban migration within Kentucky, where LGBTQ people move to urban areas to find acceptance, definitely exists now, and has existed for decades. However, queer agency in rural communities is a more complicated gray area.[25] Kentucky and the Ohio River Valley is a connected thread to many regions: southern, northern, midwestern – sometimes seen as a “heartland” of pure Americanism.[26] The many different subcultures of Kentucky – dependent on economic and cultural factors – also perpetuates a “presumed urban/rural divide.”[27] 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.”[28] Furthermore, rural Kentuckians hold a vibrant queer community on their own

[24] Bechdel, “Fun Home,” 58.
[25] 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.
[26] Fosl, et al, “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative,” 19.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Fosl, et al, “Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative,” 20.

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."[29]

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.[30] 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 this thesis hopes to do the same.

This paradigm of queerness being first experienced, actualized, in the city sat with me until I began researching queer rurality for this thesis. The assumption of queer culture being founded in the urban, then seeping into the rural, was flipped on its head once I read *The Lesbian South: Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon.*[31] In this manuscript, lesbian identity – and a broader gay culture – is spread throughout the women in print 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

[29] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 20-21.
[30] 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.
[31] Harker, Jaime. The Lesbian South : Southern Feminists, the Women in Print Movement, and the Queer Literary Canon. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

feminist bookstores.[32] 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 looked at 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.*"[33] 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.*'"[34] 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 intwined with male, white, middle-class privilege. [35] 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 women in print (WIP) movement was composed of southern lesbian feminist writers working to revolutionize print culture from its male-dominated and white-centered roots.[36] This literary movement was anchored in small feminist periodicals,

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[32] https://english.olemiss.edu/jaime-harker/
[33] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2. Author's emphasis.
[34] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2. Author's emphasis.
[35] Most of Howard's work argues that male privilege, as well as race and class privilege, allowed for these sexual freedoms. Retzloff, Tim. *The Oral History Review* 29, no. 2 (2002): 174-76, 174.
[36] 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

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 women in print 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."[37] 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. 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 women in print movement.[38] 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,

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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.

[37] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 2-3.

[38] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 3.

others saw southern culture as a barrier between both these forms of identity.[39] 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 women in print movement had a complex relationship to the South, they each used the word "southern" as a means to identify themselves and connect with each other.[40]

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."[41] 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."[42] 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

[39] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 6.
[40] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 7.
[41] Harker, "The Lesbian South," 4.
[42] 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.

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."[43]

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."[44] 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."[45] 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 we 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

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[43] Dews, C. L. Barney, and Carolyn Leste Law. Out in the South. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001, 3.
[44] Dews, "Out in the South," 2.
[45] Dews, "Out in the South," 3.

organizations already in those cities. 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."[46] The confrontational politics used by ACT-UP New York were inspired by tactics from the New Left of the 1960s and gay liberation fronts in the 1970s. Opposingly, 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, too.[47] 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 that pushes small town gays to find acceptance, step away from 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 no doubt was concentrated in the urban South, places 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 activists, or even more "mid-Southern" states like Kentucky.

Throughout *Out in the South,* Law and several other writers argue that the mythologizing of 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

[46] 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.
[47] Ibid.

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."[48]

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."[49] Their oral history initiative found common experiences of loneliness, needing community, internalized homophobia, and frequent hate speech 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.[50] 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" when asking if there even a southern gay identity is, or a common past among southern queers, 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 Colombia, or New Orleans, or Nashville, to one of those places - we can find each other, we can sit down and chat, and

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[48] Dews, "Out in the South," 3.
[49] Dews, "Out in the South," 17.
[50] Ibid.

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."[51]

The social hierarchies of the South, 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 by many mediums: the first of which being gay press.

In the Fine Print: Kentucky's Gay Press Movement

Kentucky gay organizing cannot be studied without going to the *Louisville Courier Journal* and the *Louisville Times*. The *Louisville Courier Journal*, established in 1868, was a catalyst for the few gay businesses in existence during the early 1940s and 1950s. Newspaper ads were the most common ways people knew about bars, clubs, and restaurants with a majority gay clientele – like the Beaux Arts. The Beaux Arts opened on April 16th, 1947 on 3rd and Chestnut, operating out of the Henry Clay Hotel. The Beaux Arts was the first known bar in Louisville to eventually serve an exclusively gay clientele. There is only one surviving photograph of the

[51] Dews, "Out in the South," 231.

interior, which was decorated with a flair for American patriotism common in American bars after the liberation of Paris from the Nazis. David Williams also notes that the interior was inspired by a gay favorite movie at the time, *Mildred Pierce.*

The Beaux Arts didn't begin as an exclusively homosexual bar. Early ads in the *Louisville Courier Journal* aim to attract intelligent, upper class gentlemen as a "rendezvous for the smart, sophisticated crowd who demand glamorous surroundings and exceptional drinks."[52] Though these newspaper ads for the Beaux Arts weren't outwardly catering to homosexual men, their approach to advertising did change in the latter half of 1948. Other advertisements featured words like "queen" and "gay" that had been part of the gay subculture since the 1920s, purposefully misspelling gaiety as "gayety."[53] On August 12th, 1948, a *Louisville Courier Journal* ad for the Beaux Arts read: "Treat the queen of your heart to a treat fit for a queen. Start the evening at the gay Beaux Arts."[54] These terms were used frequently in gay nightlife but were unknown to the general public until the 1950s. Gay citizens of Louisville would have discreetly recognized these terms, originating from San Francisco and New York City, which had spread nationwide after World War II. Later into the early 1950s, suburbanization pushed heterosexual men out of "happy hour" at the Beaux Arts, where men who would usually spend hours after work drinking with coworkers to instead care for new wives and children. Over the course of the late 1950s to the early 1960s, advertisements reflected this change: focusing from presumably heterosexual businessmen to working class men and women. Those of a lower socio-economic status were relatively unattached from a suburban home and children, so were instead free for a

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[52]Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Bars [Louisville] – The Beaux Arts [1947-1955]), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Louisville Courier Journal,* July 22nd, 1948.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Bars [Louisville] – The Beaux Arts [1947-1955]), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Louisville Courier Journal,* August 12th, 1948.

night-on-the-town. Gay people may have also been included in this, as few had children or wives to care for in the aftermath of World War II's baby boom.

David Williams argues that the Beaux Arts switched demographics from heterosexual men to homosexual men around 1953, with very few outward advertisements because of McCarthyist rhetoric pushing homosexuals out of government and prominent business positions. Williams also argues that a rising Louisville star, Renée Hoffman, began her organ career at the Beaux Arts as it was too risky for her to join an outwardly gay bar during the McCarthy Era. However, Williams argues that Hoffman's audience switched from straight in late 1952 to entirely gay in 1955, when she had become a local gay favorite. The exact timeline for this switch in the Beaux Arts clientele is unclear, but suburbanization, McCarthyism, and discreet advertising all played a role in this shift.

The *Louisville Courier Journal* noted on February 21st, 1957 that the Henry Clay Hotel was being sold to new management.[55] The Beaux Arts club within the hotel most likely closed two years earlier, as a 1956 City Directory noted 306-308 W Chestnut as "vacant." By 1957, Nolan's Cocktail Lounge a few doors down on West Chestnut and Gordon's bar on fourth street already had an openly gay clientele. It's unclear if these establishments arose after the Beaux Arts's closing, or if competing businesses drew the Beaux Arts to ruin. Nationwide, the 1950s homophile movement – kickstarted by the Mattachine Society in Los Angeles and the Daughters of Bilitis in San Franciso – was defined by a deep hatred and fear of the "Lavender Menace."[56] As Senator Joseph McCarthy cracked down on supposed homosexuals in the federal

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[55] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Bars [Louisville] – The Beaux Arts [1947-1955]), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Louisville Courier Journal,* February 21st, 1957.
[56] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 61-62.

government, many gay businesses and establishments were forced to close, or go deeper into the closet than they already were.

The Louisville Courier Journal continued to discreetly advertise gay establishments, though it's unclear if the paper was aware of the nature of these businesses. New gay bars and clubs rose in and out of prominence throughout the late 1950s and the entirety of the 1960s, including the Downtowner in Louisville,[57]Aunt Nora's in Louisville, and the Bar Complex[58] in Lexington. Dr. Cate Fosl describes these establishments as "the difference between lives of loneliness and isolation and feelings of acceptance and belonging."[59] During these turbulent years defined by social uprisings and racial justice that led to the Stonewall riots, the aftermath of the McCarthy era left scars on the gay community. While the mid-1960s nurtured a "vibrant gay subculture" throughout Kentucky, but especially Louisville and Lexington, it still remained closeted to the public. As gay bars, cruising spots, and athletic leagues became essential for meeting other queer people, Kentucky's activism switched back to where it all began: the newspaper. And newspaper in Kentucky, nor in America, would be the same without Lige Clark.

Lige Clark was born Elijah "Lige" Hayden Clarke in 1942, right outside of the town of Hindman, in Knott County, Eastern Kentucky.[60] He graduated from Eastern Kentucky University, then later served in the U.S. army, and began his activism within explicitly gay journalism in 1965. Clarke had been working at the Pentagon, in the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, when he joined a small band of Washington D. C. Mattachine Society members to stage

[57] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 55. The Old Downtowner went by many names throughout the decade, the first being Nolan's Cocktail Lounge, then Sam Meyer's Downtowner in 1957, then eventually just the Downtowner in 1969.
[58] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 52-55. The Bar Complex has also gone by many names. The Mayfair Bar (opened on Lexington's East Main Street in 1948) was replaced by the Southern Cocktail Lounge in 1953, then reopened as the "Gilded Cage." In 1967, the Gilded Cage switched management and became "the Living Room." Finally, in 1980, the building became known as the Bar Complex, which is still its name today.
[59] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 54.
[60] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 68.

the first openly gay picket in front of the White House on April 17th, 1965.[61] Clarke allegedly hand-painted nine of the ten signs displayed at the protest (which remarkably occurred four years before Stonewall).[62] Clarke and his partner, Jack Nichols, were "instrumental in moving the beleaguered and semi-secret Mattachine forward on the east coast," Fosl argues.[63] Clarke and Nichols formed new chapters of the Mattachine Society, organized pickets and protests in front of the State Department, and formed a regional coalition called ECHO: East Coast Homophile Organization.[64] Clarke and Nichols would later move to New York City and form the "New York Notes" column for the monthly *Los Angeles Advocate* (later shortened to the *Advocate)* in 1968. During the late sixties, the *Los Angeles Advocate* would shine as the nation's premier LGBTQ newspaper.[65] Later on in 1968, Clarke and Nichols also created the column "The Homosexual Citizen" in the newly established, sexually explicit magazine, *Screw* (owned by Al Goldstein).[66] The column ran until 1973.[67] Clarke and Nichols signed on this column under "Lige and Jack," without surnames, as this was their first publication in a non-gay magazine. In 1969, Clark and Nichols founded the United States' first gay weekly publication, aptly titled *GAY. GAY* was published by Four Swords, Inc., also formed by Clarke, Nichols, their business partner Jim Buckley, and activist Kay Tobin Lahusen (who worked for the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop in New York at the time).[68] Though *GAY* wasn't associated with any particular organization, it reached a large fanbase and had astounding commercial success.[69]

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[61] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 65.
[62] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 66.
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 67.
[67] D'Emilio, John. Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of Lgbt Community Newspapers in America. Edited by Tracy Baim. Firsted. Chicago, Illinois: Prairie Avenue Productions and Windy City Media Group, 2012, 93.
[68] D'Emilio, "Gay Press, Gay Power," 93.
[69] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 67.

Clarke and Nichols would later publish a memoir about their lives together, titled *I Have More Fun with You than Anybody,* in 1972.[70] After Clarke and Nichols left *GAY,* Al Goldstein planned to convert the magazine into a strictly gay, pornographic publication, but failed to continue the fervor Clarke and Nichols brought to gay journalism. The paper closed in 1974.[71] At the magazine's peak in the early 1970s, more people bought *GAY* than the *Advocate* nationwide.[72]

Despite traveling all around the nation, Clarke was always welcome back home. After graduating from Eastern Kentucky University, he never stayed in Kentucky for more than a month at a time. However, this was in no way due to a lack of acceptance among his family: he was very close to his only sister and his mother before her death. His sister described Clarke as "everyone's favorite," and Fosl argues that his roots in Eastern Kentucky, and the economic decline he witnessed there, "fueled his outrage at any injustice."[73] Clarke never fully came out to some members of his family, but still wore his Kentucky roots with pride and wrote affectionately of his upbringing and his family. By the mid-1970s, Clarke was working on a book about men's liberation when he was murdered under "mysterious circumstances" near Vera Cruz, Mexico, with two gay friends.[74] Clarke's family, with the help of Kentucky U. S. Rep Carl Perkins (also from Hindman), had Clarke's body flown home where he would be buried in the Hicks Family Cemetery. His grave overlooks Highway 550 on the edge of Hindman's city limits.[75]

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[70] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 68.
[71] D'Emilio, "Gay Press, Gay Power," 94.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 69.
[74] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 71.
[75] Fosl, et al, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 72.

While Lige Clark was working on national gay press in New York, Louisville and a broader Kentucky were swept in the late 1960's fever of "alternative press." The *Free Press of Louisville* was no doubt one of these "alternative presses" Tracy Baim outlines in *Gay Press, Gay Power: The Growth of LGBT Community Newspapers in America.*[76] First established in late 1969 or early 1970, *Free Press of Louisville* focused on many kinds of radical activism characteristic of the long sixties: ending the Vietnam war, fighting against structural racism, as well as supporting the national gay liberation and women's liberation movements.[77] On August 4th, 1970, an ad for a "Gay Lib" group would catch the eye of seventeen-year-old Micky Shickel Nelson.[78] Nelson, a recent high school graduate who had just moved out of her family home with a then-girlfriend, describes to Dr. Fosl the first meeting of the Louisville Gay Liberation Front at Campbell and Jefferson street in Margo's Boutique in an oral history. Margo's Boutique, later renamed LAM Reducing Salon, was speculated to provide sex work and massages. She described demographics of LGLF as mostly white, ages ranging from seventeen to some members in their forties. Most members were either poor or middle class. Nelson describes a deep solidarity between gay men and lesbians, as well as trans people on the front lines. Nelson attributes trans people, labeled as transvestites in the interview, as the most open and visible members of the community as cisgender people would "always be able to tell they were gay." According to Nelson, Louisville was one of the last cities to keep a strong solidarity between subsects of the LGBT community, as their gay liberation initiatives were very open and

[76] D'Emilio, "Gay Press, Gay Power," 86.
[77] Specifically, the twelfth issue of the first volume of the *Free Press of Louisville,* there were calls to support Netra Edwards Hume, a Free Press editor who was imprisoned for falling in love with Sylvester Phillips, a black man, and having children with him. Also, it's important to note that in the third issue of the second volume of *Free Press,* Mayday anti-Vietnam protests specifically called on gay people to march in support of the anti-war effort. Manuscript Collection, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.
[78] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Gay Liberation Front - Louisville [1970s], Folder 7: Newspaper Articles, Interview with Cate Fosl.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

accepting. The *Free Press of Louisville* had a short run, ending soon after July 1971, but the paper sparked the awakening of gay liberation in Louisville and a broader Kentucky.[79]

After first establishing themselves in the summer of 1970, members of the LGLF – especially leaders Lynn Pfuhl and Mike Randall - implemented a variety of tactics to advocate gay liberation. Members would pass leaflets on Chestnut Street in protest of the Old Downtowner and the Queen Bee. The heterosexual owners of the aforementioned Old Downtowner saw gay liberation as a threat to their business, and actually hosed down LGLF members when they handed out pamphlets in front of the bar entrance. [80] If gay and trans people were more accepted in heterosexual bars, then the Downtowner losing exclusivity as one of the few gay-friendly bars in Louisville would tank profit. Furthermore, the owners allowed performers to cross-dress but rejected individual customers who cross-dressed. The LGLF also held Free Classes at the University of Louisville, educating the public on gay people and gay issues. However, these classes and leaflets were only the small-scale operations to what the LGLF could accomplish. As the *Free Press of Louisville* led to the Louisville Gay Liberation Front, the Louisville Gay Liberation Front spearheaded the first lesbian marriage case in the nation.

In 1970, Marge Jones and Tracy Knight walked into the Jefferson County Courthouse downtown for a marriage license. Though Kentucky marriage laws did not mention gender, Jones and Knight were declined a marriage license. The LGLF was persistent and wanted to challenge marriage laws in court. The lawyer Jones and Knight hired to represent them was Stuart Lyons, a heterosexual lawyer who apparently wanted a controversial case and Knight and

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[79] Ibid.
[80] Fosl, C. (2012). ""It Could Be Dangerous!" Gay Liberation and Gay Marriage in Louisville, Kentucky, 1970." Ohio Valley History 12(1): 45-64, 52.

Jones fit the bill. Most of Lyons's clients were countercultural hippies, drug addicts, the working poor, or disabled people - cases other lawyers refused to take. However, Lyons had, or at least wanted, a rumored knack of solving impossible cases: "If you faced the death penalty, you go to the 'Lyons' Den' and escape it." Though Lynn Pfuhl later remarked their efforts at the Jefferson County Courthouse as a spur-of-the-moment decision, Jones and Knight pressed on - with their case being dismissed after only three days on account of the founders of the marriage statute never 'intending' to include same-sex marriages.[81]

Though the trial did not favor Tracy Knight and Marge Jones, the fruit of the LGLF's labor coalesced into a new meeting space, and the first place of gay organization in Louisville: The Gay Lib House. At 420 Belgravia Court, the Gay Lib House was the new home for many members of the LGLF. For a few months, the Gay Lib House in the heart of St. James Court housed LGLF meetings and members until a November 1971 drug raid became the beginning of the end of the LGLF. As the group was celebrating Nelson's 19th birthday, officers raided the house on drug charges, separating members by gender and charging them all with disorderly conduct. After this drug raid, the LGLF would slowly lose steam. Furthermore, Marjorie Jones and Tracy Knight would later leave the LGLF on account of feeling "used by the group."[82] Soon after, Tracy Knight became untraceable: she left Kentucky and took all court documents with her, and her whereabouts are still unknown. While the backbone of LGLF activism had ultimately failed, there was a broader 'break' from gay liberation activism in the county until the AIDS crisis put gay acceptance and LGBTQ rights as even more of a life-or-death situation than before.

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[81] Fosl, "It Could Be Dangerous," 60.
[82] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Gay Liberation Front – Message from John Fish, 2009.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

As the Louisville Gay Liberation Front slowly disappeared from its heyday from 1970 to 1972, Kentucky gay organizing was kept underground during the late 1970s. As Dr. Fosl notes in *It Could Be Dangerous! Gay Liberation and Gay Marriage in Louisville, Kentucky, 1970*: "Gay activism didn't stop in Louisville, but it took a quieter turn for the next few years with the emphasis on internal community building even as more lesbians and gays 'came out.'"[83] When AIDS struck urban queer communities across the nation in unprecedented ways, the need for immediate, direct action motivated a plethora of LGBTQ persons in Kentucky to stand up and be louder than ever before. The formation of countless groups during the AIDS crisis created even more places for gay people to organize in support of AIDS sufferers and their partners, more places to march for a cure, and especially more newsletters.

There were countless newsletters traveling throughout Kentucky that were specific to organizations like Lambda Louisville and Gays and Lesbians United for Equality. There was also a "Heartbeat" newsletter for the Community Health Trust, but years active and number of issues for these publications are unknown by this author.[84] *Lambda News* was an offshoot newsletter inspired by the parent Lambda Louisville, an organization for gay men that began in April 1979.[85] The nonprofit corporation had its own Board of Directors, held sports tournaments, gay cruises on the Belle of Louisville, Derby parties, and more. The *Lambda News* newsletter consisted of tiny pamphlets, published somewhere before and during 1985.[86] While specific *Lambda News* newsletters were hard to trace in the Williams-Nichols collection, one report

[83] Fosl, "It Could Be Dangerous," 61.
[84] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Williams, N. David.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.
[85] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lambda Louisville: Flyers, General Info.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. A letter within this folder from April 10th, 1984 wrote that Lambda Louisville would celebrate its fifth birthday that month.
[86] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lambda Louisville: Flyers, General Info.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

found was an email chain from around April 1996. The email newsletter was reporting hate crimes, and no names were included to protect the individuals involved. One of the incidents described was in Boone County, Kentucky, where a disabled, white, gay man and his black partner were violently threatened by Klan members. Their dogs were later poisoned and one of the men were attacked when getting the mail. He and his partner were explicitly told by a worker from the Victim's Advocate to "stop calling the police" because they were "sick of him," though he had only called the police three times in eleven years.[87] Other incidents reported in Lambda News were cases of job discrimination, including a lesbian being denied a job in Sebree, Kentucky, and a man fired from being a substitute teacher as he was an "endangerment to children" in Whitely, Kentucky. Furthermore, police harassment was a frequent subject in Lambda News reporting. In Ashland, Kentucky, a man from Mediana, Ohio was pulled over after leaving the Stonewall Bar. He was verbally harassed once the cop found stage-makeup in his car. The man was charged with a DUI under drug usage and spent the night in jail, even though he passed both sobriety tests. It is assumed that the dates of Lambda News, though elusive, spanned over a decade as there were issues published in both 1985 and 1996. It is unclear if or when the organization, or the newsletter, fell into inactivity.

Another long-running newsletter throughout Kentucky was *the Lavender Letter*, which published monthly from 1981 to 1990.[88] *The Lavender Letter* held information on art gallery showings, theatre productions, and information on bars in the area – including the burning of historically black gay establishment, Harlow's.[89] They were also heavily involved with the

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[87] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Violence and Crime, anti-gay: Kentucky at large.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.
[88] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lavender Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.
[89] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lavender Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *Lavender Letter* 1, no, 2. March 1st, 1981.

Metropolitan Community Church, formerly known as the Church of the Open Door, which was a nationwide Protestant-Christian parish meant to include gays, lesbians, and other minorities in their preaching. For the first two years of publication, it seemed *the Lavender Letter* was meant to showcase cultural events including queer art and counseling available for LGBTQ individuals in the Louisville, Cincinnati, and Lexington areas. However, in the October 1981 issue of the *Lavender Letter,* the front page had a tiny excerpt, with a headline that read: "Rare cancer seen in 41 Homosexuals."[90] After this report, virtually every issue of *The Lavender Letter* would be focused on fighting the AIDS epidemic – listing resources for patients and their families, updated CDC guidelines, and more. Many of these resources included Louisville and Lexington's AIDS centers treating gay men as an alternative to viscerally homophobic medical professionals. Furthermore, the Gays and Lesbians United for Equality – a group formed after the Sam Dorr trial on job protections for gays and lesbians – created a phone hotline for Kentuckians to ask for AIDS information and assistance anonymously. While *The Lavender Letter* still promoted cultural events in and out of the state, much of their journalism shifted to immediate activism in combatting the AIDS crisis and the social stigma perpetuated against gay and bisexual men, in particular. *The Lavender Letter* folded in 1990 to evolve into *The Letterhead* which would later become *The Letter.*[91]*The Letterhead* had one issue from June 23rd to June 30th, 1990, that was less of a traditional newspaper but was instead a stapled booklet with a purple cover covered in the Louisville "Pride 1990" logo, as well as signatures from every staff member. *The Letterhead* was first published by Jeffrey C. Goldsmith, edited by Humphrey Marshall, produced by Michael A. Coley, and written by Marcelius Haynes, C. J. Paul, and Randall High. Many of these writers

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[90] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lavender Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *Lavender Letter* 1, no 9.
[91] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Williams, N. David.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

would stay throughout the name change and work for *The Letter* for years into its run. This first issue would set a precedent for every June issue of *The Letter,* which would be dedicated to pride events of the year and print a schedule of events, protests, gatherings, and more. However, *The Letter* published once a month, eleven months out of the year, for over ten years. The staff of *The Letter* were in no way limited to pride month or pride events. They were just getting started.

All previous national, regional, and local groundwork for gay press in Kentucky had culminated into *The Letter:* advertised as Kentucky's first gay and lesbian newspaper. The staff of *The Letter* were clear on their intent: they wanted to explicitly include the entire state of Kentucky in their journalism. Where *The Lavender Letter* and the *Free Press of Louisville* centered around Louisville and Lexington activism, *The Letter* would report on hate crimes cases throughout the state, include national news on the AIDS epidemic, and would always have a directory of sites in Kentucky that were safe for queer people. Furthermore, there was an intentional attempt at bridging the divide between Louisville, Lexington, and the rest of Kentucky. In one of the first editions of *The Letter,* from November 1990, there was a section called "Letters to the Letter" that featured comments from around Kentucky. One reader from Eminence, Kentucky was elated by the first few issues of *The Letter,* stating: "I picked up my first copy of *The Letter* in Hawley Cooke today. It is certainly well done and sorely needed in this community. My thanks and support for this endeavor."[92] Another reader from Lexington shared their excitement in the gay movement's rise in Kentucky: "I recently picked saw my first copy of your publication and was very impressed that we, in Kentucky, have come this far. I only hope that this will be one of the greater success stories. Thanks for good reading."[93] *The Letter*

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[92] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: The Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Letter* 1, no 5. November 1990.
[93] Ibid.

reached rural Kentucky and published around the state, but rural Kentucky also greatly shaped *The Letter.* There was a short biographic piece in as early as the fifth issue of the first volume on queer experiences in more agrarian parts of the state.[94] Written by a T. J. Bloechl, "Tales from the (Small) City" highlighted a southern lesbian's experience in finding gay culture in a small southern county. While they write on the absence of bars, bookstores, and hotlines near them, they do have a small network of other lesbians in the area. Though the infrastructure or businesses for gay people are missing in rural, small town areas, gay people still live there. While this specific anecdote was a heartwarming inclusion of agrarian Kentuckians in *The Letter,* most specific mentions of smaller cities in Kentucky were from hate crimes and anti-gay violence.

Unfortunately, many news updates within *The Letter* were violence-related – much like smaller newsletters like *Lambda News*. In many cases, one of the few mentions of cities in rural Kentucky is when there are reported gay bashings, sodomy charges, or murders in the area. A major example of the homophobic violence experienced in rural Kentucky was the case of Jerome Martin in Pikeville. In 1991, a twenty-eight-year-old black gay police officer was fired after a state police trial board found him guilty of sodomy in the fourth degree. Jerome Martin was the only black state trooper in Pikeville, Kentucky. He had a wife who was pregnant at the time. Mrs. Doris P. Ray of Lexington first accused Martin of sodomy in 1990, when driving through the Pinson Cemetery in Pike County. In the cemetery, Ray and her husband spotted an empty state police cruiser blocking a gravel road. Inside the cruiser, she saw Time Brenham and Jerome Martin having sex, but would later retract this testimony in 1996 because she "assumed" they were having sex but was unable to confirm this from where she could see. Martin's lawyer,

[94] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: The Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Letter* 1, no 5. November 1990, 9.

Earl Mullins, stated that Time Brenham was already a "suspected homosexual" in the eyes of Mrs. Ray. In 1990, Brenham was fired from the Johns Creek High School for allegedly having sexual relations with a sixteen-year-old related to Mrs. Ray. Furthermore, Ray's second husband was killed by a black man, which may have influenced a prejudice against Jerome Martin. At the police station, Martin was suspected as gay by his coworkers because of his friendship with Brenham, who was also rumored to be gay. He was already "unfavored" in his station as he dated white women as a black man. Polygraph tests played a major role in this case. Mrs. Ray took two polygraph tests, the first being inconclusive, and the second she had supposedly passed. However, the results of the second polygraph weren't made available to Mullins before the hearing. Sgt. Phil Toods hooked Martin up to a polygraph test, and claimed Martin was lying when he denied the charges. Martin claimed he was responding to a burglary at Brenham's home and was on the road near the cemetery and had to use the restroom beforehand. Martin's father said they would most likely rule against the use of polygraph tests because "you have the state police as the lawyer, the state police for the judge, and the state police for the jury." Martin could lose his job, face up to a year in jail, and a $500 fine. Mullins called this case an "old-fashioned lying contest." Carl Enoch, a representative of the ACLU and lawyer involved with the *All Together Now* broadcast, claimed that because it was no longer socially acceptable to be racist in Pikeville, the community and state police turned to homophobia to indict Martin.

Information on this court case was sent to multiple regional gay newspapers, one being *The Letter* based in Louisville, and another being the GLSO newspaper out of Lexington, Kentucky.[95] The GLSO published monthly and was managed by Mr. Craig Clere. According to

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[95] The GLSO newspaper is, at time of writing, not part of the Williams-Nichols Collection to the best of the author's knowledge. Furthermore, after digital research, it doesn't appear that other news outlets, publications, or histories of Kentucky journalism (gay or otherwise) mention the GLSO newspaper. A separate archive, the Faulkner Morgan

the *Louisville Courier Journal* from April 17th, 1993, Martin's conviction was overturned because of a Kentucky Supreme Court case from September 1992 that deemed the state sodomy law unconstitutional. In December 1996, Martin was allowed to return to his job. However, according to the *Louisville Courier Journal* from March 22nd, 1998, the Kentucky Supreme Court upheld the charges convicted unto Martin because he lied about his whereabouts to the force.[96] Though he was no longer charged with sodomy, the KYSC upheld his dismissal because he lied about the matter. David Williams confirms that Martin was known to be gay after this court case and became a female impersonator at the Bar Complex in Lexington. Jerome Martin was murdered in 2004 at Barren River Lake Resort Park after a high school reunion.[97] Jerome Martin was a quintessential example of black, gay Kentuckians no doubt existing in rural areas of the state, but many were treated even worse compared to their white counterparts due to local politics of race, class, sexuality, and masculinity. Martin's case also showcases a reality for many black people in America, and very often in the South: one of police brutality, a 'justice' system that is stacked against you, and deeply homophobic and racist sentiments in the workplace.

One of the few major events documented in Covington, Kentucky was the murder of Harold "Sandy" Cohen in 1986. The *Kentucky Post* had included many problematic elements in their reporting, sentiments that may have been acceptable at the time but are no doubt homophobic today, especially in heterosexist, mainstream publications such as the *Kentucky Post.* In 1986, two men were charged in the slaying of Covington City Commissioner Harold "Sandy" Cohen. James Messmer and Gregory Moore killed Cohen near the Amtrack Station at

Archive in Lexington, may have these periodicals, but due to the limits of this project, the author was unable to travel for this research.

[96] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Police and Gays: The Jerome Martin Case [1991].), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville

[97] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Violence and Crime, anti-gay: Kentucky at large.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Louisville Courier-Journal,* May, 2004.

1901 River Road in Cincinnati, Ohio. Police were reluctant to discuss Cohen's private life, but the *Kentucky Post* reports his frequent patronage at Cincinnati gay bars. Jim Backer, owner of the Ramrod Bar, described Sandy as a “good person who worked hard to make Covington a good place to live for all people.” Another friend of Sandy Cohen, Alan Biondi, stated that, “Gays are not a threat to the family and society. Many gays make positive contributions to society, like Sandy did.” Backer said violence was nowhere near common in the gay community, as he has “never had to call the police to break up a fight in my bars. We’re just people. We just want to survive and be left alone. But people don’t understand so they assume all kinds of things. There’s no sexual activity going on in my bar and we have a dress code here. We don’t want drag queens.” With this, a number of arguments in the *Kentucky Post* article pose problematic elements.

Backer’s testimony implies a prejudice against gender non-conforming persons in the LGBT community and an intolerance for female impersonators, inherently associating drag queens with sex work. In this same article, Lawrence writes that Cohen’s case was nowhere near the first incident of its kind in the area. On August 17th, 1981, Donald H. Cerniak of Cincinnati, 32, was “beaten and stabbed to death by a Covington man.” In Downtown Cincinnati, Cerniak picked up Thomas Turner, “an admitted homosexual and male prostitute,” according to the *Kentucky Post*. When Cerniak wanted to have sex, Turner refused. When Cerniak “pressed the issue, Turner went berserk and murdered Cerniak.”[98] The *Kentucky Post* neglects to consider the incident as an act of self-defense on Turner’s part in preventing sexual assault. It is unknown how aggressively or forcefully Cerniak “pushed the issue” onto Turner, or if this possibility was

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[98] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Violence and Crime, anti-gay: Kentucky at large.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. Lawrence, Janelle, “Violence Against Gays is an Increasing Problem,” *Kentucky Post,* July 12th, 1986.

considered during the trial. Further in the article, Biondi defines a homophobe as: “a gay person who denies he or she is gay and lashes out at other gays.” This framing of homophobia as an act a gay person does unto another gay person, instead a system of institutional, legal, and social discriminations, puts the blame of queer bashing onto other queer people. Cohen’s case, and the subsequent reporting, showcase the urgent need for queer-owned and queer-operated journalism in the 1980s. While the *Kentucky Post* reported the incident as “yet another gay bashing,” gay newspapers handled similar cases with more tact and respect for people involved. As proven in the first issue of *The Letterhead* (later renamed *The Letter*), gay bashings were a call to action on part of the LGBTQ community: authors would encourage their audience to travel together, stand up for each other, and avoid areas known to be patrolled by undercover police and gay bashers.

Other crimes reported by the *Lambda News* included a lesbian being assaulted in February 1996 at Morehead University, which the university principal refused to condemn as a gay bashing. In Richmond, Kentucky, Becky O’Hearn, a lifelong tomboy and softball player, was killed by Harold McQueen Jr. in 1980 at the age of 22. On May 18th, 1998, Darrel Earwood was severely beaten with a tire iron near the Greenup Locks and Dam near Portsmouth, Kentucky by Jonathan Brown Adkins, 18, and Brandon Evans, 17. Adkins later told a friend, Sheena Lore, that he “kicked some faggot’s ass” because he wanted to “see his brains.” He threatened that if Lore told anyone, she would “end up like that faggot.” Earwood was a hairdresser and cosmetologist.

While *Lambda News* seemed to focus on hate crimes and anti-gay violence, *The Letter* and *The Lavender Letter* regularly posted about pride events, conferences, art showings, and location directories for gay-friendly sites across Kentucky. Most of queer archival evidence, both in the Williams-Nichols collection and beyond, is most tangible in court cases, violence, and

trauma. However, it would be an injustice to assume vicious homophobia and transphobia were all what these people's stories have to offer. The gap in the historical record in LGBTQ existence in rural Kentucky is a difficult subject of research to navigate, but the absence of their voices doesn't mean they weren't there. As explained in T. J. Bloechl's piece, as well as in Harker's work in *The Lesbian South,* and other secondary sources: The South has a rich, vibrant queer history, and some aspects of queer rurality are unknown to the academy because we have yet to produce more research into these stories. Through oral histories, much of the primary sources on rural queer life can be preserved before LGBTQ elders take their knowledge to the grave. Furthermore, the plethora of examples of violence in rural parts of Kentucky are by no means evidence of smaller counties in Kentucky being "more bigoted" than their urban counterparts. Urban areas have historically held a similar number, if not a higher number, of average homophobic and transphobic attacks per square capita compared to smaller towns. The archive's highlight on anti-gay violence in these areas shows that rural queer cultures, and their intricate networks of LGBTQ community, communication, and organizing were more often closeted than their urban counterparts.

While *The Letter* would be inherently more accessible to urban Kentuckians, as the paper was primarily produced in Louisville, the evolution of the publication would follow urban trends for inclusion and change in the movement. While the majority of *The Letter's* first years referred to their audience as strictly "gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals," a broader switch in national gay organizing began to include a new label to describe experiences that had been a part of the movement since the beginning: transgender.[99] The late 1990s showcased a new wave of inclusion that explicitly supported transgender people. Transgender people had always been a

[99] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: The Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Letter* 2, no 1. January 1991.

part of the gay liberation movement, yet their experiences were first labeled as “gay” or “transsexual.” *The Letter* expanded from “Kentucky's gay and lesbian newspaper" to “Kentucky's gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender newspaper” in October 1997.[100] This same issue, a trans woman in Kentucky told her story in an article titled “The Manual Trannie.” This was not the first time trans experiences were published in *The Letter,* but this may have been the first time these experiences were labeled as “transgender” instead of “transsexual” or “hermaphrodite.” While trans people developed new language to define themselves and their experiences in 1990s New York and San Francisco, Kentucky’s gay press was one to include these new changes to terminology fairly quickly compared to other gay periodicals.

Though gay press and gay newspapers were no doubt crucial to building an LGBT rights movement, there are some figures and events that have been missing from the medium. For example, gender non-conforming pioneer Sweet Evening Breeze can rarely be found in Lexington publications, at least ones searched by this author. Breeze was part of the “womanless weddings” phenomena from the 1930s to the 1960s and housed many LGBTQ-identified men, including artist Henry Faulkner, throughout the Jim Crow era. Furthermore, one of the most important events in Kentucky LGBTQ history was not found in the newspaper, but in the *Louisville Times Scene Magazine.* Kelly King’s 1978 interview for *Louisville Times Scene Magazine,* published by Teresa Morris and titled “This is Kelly,” would spark a new medium’s presence in gay life, culture, and journalism: television.

[100] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: The Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *The Letter* volume 8, no 11. October 1997.

Running Hot, Running Cold: *All Together Now* and Kentucky Queer Television

Kelly King was the bridge between LGBTQ newspapers and LGBTQ television, and her coming out in an article in *The Louisville Times* incited heavy backlash. *The Louisville Times* received countless hate mail in the next four weeks, from April 1978 to May 1978, as people around the county called the article on Kelly King "a sin against God," "revolting trash," "tasteless garbage," and even "the most disgusting waste of paper and print I have seen in a long time."[101] Despite the negative comments, WLKY-TV was inspired to produce a five-night miniseries on gay life in Louisville. It aired in May of 1978: a month after Kelly's original interview. On the last night of the program, Jack Kersey – a middle-aged realtor living in St. James Court – spoke candidly about gay life and community in Louisville. Without Kelly King's bravery, David Williams argues that Kersey might not have appeared on television that night, an act that makes him possibly the first person to come out on television in Kentucky. After extensive research, the Williams-Nichols archive doesn't house any tapes of these recordings. Unfortunately, it is unclear if WLKY have a recording archive at all, let alone an archive that would date as far back as 1978. As public backlash was rampant after Kelly King's appearance, it's undetermined if Jack Kersey received as much, or any, hate after his coming out. It seemed that after the initial "sting" of Kelly King's open queerness on television, straight and cisgender audiences had run out of steam by May 1978.

Kelly King and Jack Kersey's openness on cable television in the late 1970s would only form the beginning of Kentucky LGBTQ television. In June 1984, Gays and Lesbians for Equality (GLUE) began to produce *All Together Now* to "Entertain, educate, and enlighten the

[101] David Williams, Kelly King Biography

community at large."[102] The program, only accessible on VHS in the Williams-Nichols Collection, is covered in huge 80s hair, stock background and scenery of a typical morning show, and a theme song of Patti Labelle's "New Attitude" playing atop scrolling credits. Richard Wysocki, in his dissertation with the University of Louisville, writes that Gays and Lesbians United for Equality (GLUE) formed from a "particular injustice" done to Sam Dorr, a Louisville citizen and manager at First National Bank. Dorr was a member of a gay advocacy group with ties to the Episcopalian Church named Integrity (later renamed as Dignity/Integrity).[103] Sam Dorr had been elected president of this group in 1981, and "came out" to his employer to be transparent about his involvement in the advocacy organization. On November 20th, 1981, Sam Dorr was given an ultimatum to either resign from Integrity or be fired. Dorr resigned from the company but began a lawsuit that he would later settle out of court. Sam Dorr's case of job discrimination, as well as Harlow's mysteriously burning to the ground around the same time, inspired GLUE's formation.

GLUE planned to serve as "an umbrella organization with local social, religious, professional, and political groups…striving to bring unity to the gay and lesbian community in Kentuckiana…maintaining public relations liaisons with local news media…and serving as a contact source for community leaders and politicians."[104] *All Together Now* aired on Dimension and Storer public access channels on Thursday, according to GLUE meeting minutes from June 1984.[105] More information on the dates and times were spread across the *Courier-Journal* and

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[102] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now*.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *All Together Now,* January 18th, 1987.
[103] Wysocki, Richard, "The emergent matter of archives: a rhetorical investigation of the queer formation of the Williams-Nichols archive." (2019), 49.
[104] Wysocki, "The emergent matter of archives," 50.
[105] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now* I - General.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

the *Lavender Letter,* and *All Together Now* would air for about an hour once a month. Each show was filmed at the CommTen Center, a community center donated by Jack Kersey in 1984 and ran by GLUE members, on Preston Street. [106]

Much of *All Together Now* was a visual component to news already in *The Lavender Letter* in the mid-1980s: updates on the AIDS epidemic, where to get treatment, how to call the GLUE hotline for more information, and a calendar of events every month. The cold open for the program usually involved reading from the national gay newspaper *The Advocate,* then after a quick break, the volunteers for *All Together Now,* usually Pat Gittings, would cover issues pertinent to the gay community, such as sodomy laws, coming out experiences, and events at the Comm-10 Center. The members of GLUE working with the show also wrote skits and plays discussing coming out, celebrating the holidays when ostracized from family members, and gay historical figures.[107] Frequent guests included Carl Enoch, a gay lawyer that also worked with the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), Rev. Dee Dale from the Metropolitan Community Church, and John Bryne, an activist once imprisoned for breaking sodomy laws. Each of these individuals would bring their own perspective to gay issues of the time, many of which had practical uses to audiences: Enoch would discuss the legal rights for LGBTQ people, Rev. Dee Dale would deliver sermons on air as an openly lesbian preacher for the MCC, and Bryne would explain the ins and outs of sodomy laws and life as a gay man while incarcerated.[108]

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[106] Fosl, "Kentucky LGBTQ Historic Context Narrative," 112.

[107] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now,* Tape 3 - 1987.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

[108] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now,* Tape 1 - 1986.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now,* Tape 2 - 1986 & 1987.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville.

All Together Now ended around 1988 due to unexplained tensions between GLUE members, producers of *All Together Now,* and volunteers Katie Murphy and Willie McAnally. This conflict led to *All Together Now* becoming an entity separate from GLUE. Eventually, it was rumored that Katie Murphy and Willie McAnally left Louisville because of the disagreement, and while Willie has moved back to the area, she is no longer involved with the movement.[109]

In Eric Mark Freedman's 1998 Dissertation for the University of Southern California, "Producing (Queer) Communities: The Politics of Public Access Cable Television," Freedman argues that gay and lesbian public access producers have several common programming strategies across the nation. The first of these strategies is using public access television as a vehicle to spread information. Secondly, public queer access TV was used as a forum for media analysis and intervention with mainstream news publications, then lastly, queer public access TV was used for entertainment.[110] All of these strategies were implemented by queer public access programs as a form of coalition-based and consciousness-raising politics.[111] All of these strategies are evident in *All Together Now,* and the program was deeply influenced by a broader trend toward public access television outside of gay rights groups.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, access television became "increasingly stratified" with community-based programs and "specialized interest groups within quite restricted geographic areas." Freedman defines these community dynamics as centralizing geography and

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[109] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now* II - General.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. There is a letter from David Williams to Katie Murphy that writes: "Consider our friendship irretrievably broken," in context with the GLUE and *All Together Now* disputes. The letter is marked July 22nd, 1988.
[110] Freedman, Eric Mark. 1998. "Producing (Queer) Communities: The Politics of Public Access Cable Television." Order No. 9930495, University of Southern California, 121.
[111] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 122.

demographic – both of which would appeal to *All Together Now's* mission on educating both gay and non-gay people of Kentucky on gay issues.[112] Freedman also argues the differences between gay community building between journalist mediums, where communities can be most tangible and immediately understood through a "collectivity" or "collective production." While texts like newspapers are read, community building is more difficult to visualize and perceive with press publications.[113]

Many queer public access programs were focused on AIDS as a response to the urgency of the AIDS crisis in LGBTQ communities. Multiple issues already present in the movement were brought to the forefront of gay and lesbian politics when AIDS broke out, such as healthcare, insurance, prevention, mandatory testing, civil rights, sexuality, and drug use.[114] Freedman notices the mirroring of AIDS programs with mainstream television, including the talk show, one-on-one studio interview, and roundtable discussions formats.[115] In this sense, Freedman argues, queer public access programs were not very radical on a "purely visual level," as few producers deviated from the norm of mainstream television format or decorum. "To be truly radical," he asserts, "a program must defy these narrative limits; the act of production, like the work of the activist, should not be contained. Narrative can be an insidious form of regulation."[116]

Many of the first queer public access programs documented the loss felt in New York City during the AIDS epidemic. Activist groups like The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT-UP) formed explicitly queer coalitions in response to mainstream news agencies refusing

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[112] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 121.
[113] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 123.
[114] Ibid.
[115] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 123-124.
[116] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 124.

to accurately cover the real severity of the AIDS epidemic.[117] *Testing the Limits: NYC* was one of the first queer public access programs on television, which was run by local activists showing grassroots demonstration footage, street action, and interviews. The somewhat random bouts of footage cover a wide array of issues, such as the inadequacy of federal, state, and city governments in responding to the AIDS epidemic.[118]

In a later publication on the same topic in the Journal for Television and New Media, Freedman also argues that public access programming on cable television emerged as a new, grassroots form of journalism and noncommercial broadcasting in the late 1960s to early 1970s. He likened the struggle over the "broadcast television spectrum" in the 1950s to the fight over AM radio in the 1930s. Once available, cable TV channels dedicated for noncommercial use were often distributed free of charge on a first-come first-serve basis.[119] The first forms of community-based public access programs were, what Freedman labels, "guerrilla video." Guerrilla television was linked to visibility, consciousness-raising, and representation not just in appearing on television, but creating it.[120] Here, guerrilla video activists put producing in a studio on the same level as protesting in the street.

Freedman argues that national LGBTQ history is deeply embedded in the history of media technologies: "There are shared frames of reference through which one must consider all contemporary queer access work, frames that include the history of the gay and lesbian movement, the queering of movement rhetoric, and the AIDS crisis, but just as important, the history of the hardware (television, video, and cable) and the battle waged over public access

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[117] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 129.
[118] Freedman, "Producing (Queer) Communities," 133.
[119] Freedman, Eric. "Public Access/Private Confession: Home Video as (Queer) Community Television." Television & New Media 1, no. 2 (May 2000): 179–91,179.
[120] Freedman, "Public Access/Private Confession," 180.

itself."[121] Though Kentucky lacked some of the infrastructure present in more centralized queer communities like New York and Los Angeles, Kentucky LGBTQ activists still utilized growing openings in journalism and explored these new mediums and their potential in queer organizing. It's difficult to estimate the level of engagement *All Together Now* fostered with the broader queer community of Kentucky, but Pride events, protests, and more no doubt became more populated, solidified, and defined during this time. This "professionalization" of queer organizing during the AIDS crisis was achieved through *All Together Now, Lambda News, The Lavender Letter,* the CommTen Center, and many other initiatives. Though the exact impact *All Together Now* had on its audience is unknown, Kentucky's boom of organizations, news outlets, sites of queer significance, and demonstrations during the AIDS crisis can certainly be measured.

Coming Out, Tuning In: National Queer Radio and Kentucky's *Strange Fruit*

Queer representation on-air follows a similar pattern with national waves of radio evolution, and with national waves of public access television. Ryan Sugden of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee juxtaposes the 1970s queer radio program *Gay Perspective* in Milwaukee with the *Queery* program that ran from 2015 to 2016 in Madison, Wisconsin.[122] By Ryan Sugden's account, the queer community has fought for major mainstream media representation since the late 1950s. One of the first examples of queer identities on air was "The Homosexual in America:" an hour-long documentary that aired once on New York City's WBAI-FM in 1962. The program hosted a discussion between conservative psychiatrists, and a group of queer protestors wanting to challenge gay stereotypes.[123]

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[121] Freedman, "Public Access/Private Confession," 190.
[122] Sugden, Ryan. 2016. "Gay Liberation is One Thing, but Nobody Likes a Dyke: Emerging Frames in Queer Radio." Order No. 10243190, The University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee, ii.
[123] Sugden, "Gay Liberation is One Thing," 17.

Sugden argues that the 1970s exhibited a rise in commercial radio, as part of the three waves of broad radio listenership. The first wave lasted from 1925 to 1940 with AM radio, and the second lasted from 1945 to 1965, which focused on hit music radio. In the third wave, known as format radio, FM music stations greatly increased listenership.[124] With the new FM radio stations, many station managers realized three lessons from the previous two waves of radio listenership. The first lesson was to focus less on network-based programming to instead prioritize local personalities and originality. Secondly, these stations revolved the most popular music recordings to "keep listeners tuning to the current musical trends." Lastly, radio had now become legitimate competitors with other mediums for sponsorships and advertisements.[125]

After initial exposure to gays voices on air, the western side of America developed explicitly queer radio programs in the 1960s. California's KPFA-FM read Allen Ginsberg's poem "Howl" on air but were forced to end the broadcast on account of Ginsberg's "overt homosexual tone."[126] After the Stonewall riots, the 1970s held more solidified, foundational ways to advocate for gay rights through NPR and school-funded radio programs that popped up across college campuses, like WGTB at Georgetown University in Washington D. C. Despite social success, these openly queer programs were often underfunded at the hands of the few stations who would air their material.[127] Many programs faded off the air once the 1980s hit, where figures like Rush Limbaugh and Howard Stern would openly mock many minorities and celebrate AIDS deaths on air.[128] In the 1990s, like in the 1970s two decades earlier, queer activists re-solidified their voices on the radio, both as producers and as a marketable audience.

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[124] Sugden, "Gay Liberation is One Thing," 14-15.
[125] Sugden, "Gay Liberation is One Thing," 15.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid.
[128] Sugden, "Gay Liberation is One Thing," 19.

Good Morning Gay America was one of the first products of this newfound queer consumerism, which was the first daytime drive-show hosted by an openly gay couple on a commercial radio station. Sugden argues that with newfound technologies of the 21st century, Internet-based and satellite radio programs are beginning to allow the "larger use of radio as medium for queer voices to speak to their community."[129]

In his analysis, Sugden argues that the *Gay Perspective* holds key insights to gay and lesbian politics during and after gay liberation, including the tensions between overt expression vs. passing, and gay vs. queer.[130] These community-based radio stations, often on college campuses, were the breeding ground for new waves of identifying, organizing, and educating in and out of queer spaces. Kentucky fell far behind these trends of queer radio for a myriad of reasons, and a space for LGBTQ activism on the airwaves wouldn't be carved until the 21st century.

While the national emergence of queer radio created by 1960s and 1970s student organizations was absent on Kentucky campuses, there were still key examples of radio's significance in Jack Kersey's activism. The GLUE hotline for gays and lesbians appeared mere weeks after larger, national hotlines did. In an interview with Pat Gittings on *All Together Now,* Jack Kersey stated that the GLUE hotline was established on September 15th, 1982.[131] *The Lavender Letter* reports that GLUE started training volunteers in June 1982.[132] The Gay Men's

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[129] Ibid.
[130] Sugden, "Gay Liberation is One Thing," 5.
[131] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now,* Tape 2.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *All Together Now,* February 1st, 1897.
[132] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lavender Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *Lavender Letter* 2, no. 6. June 1982.

Health Crisis of New York City, and its AIDS hotline, began on June 30th, 1982 on an answering machine that received over a hundred calls its first night.

Kersey stated that he had many issues with Louisville radio hosts and refuses to advertise on air because of the rudeness of a particular host. While Kersey isn't specific about the host or station in question, he reveals that a station altered an advertisement Kersey put in to mock his activism in the gay community. Instead of promoting "Jack Kersey Realtor Company," the radio host added dialogue from the hotline to the message to instead play "Jack Kersey gay and lesbian hotline" on air.[133] Though the hotline was prone to frequent prank calls, this incident only heightened the harassment volunteers working the hotline faced. An article in *The Lavender Letter* stated that the hotline was receiving an average of six hundred calls each month, though it is unclear how many of these calls were from actual people seeking resources or information on AIDS.[134] While this interaction with radio and the queer community would set back the LGBTQ on-air presence for a while, the hotline would substitute for another ethereal presence queer Kentucky would have on the airwaves. Key characteristics to radio, such as an untraceable voice, a faceless person on the other line, and the general anonymity of the caller/listener, creates an arguable connection between the hotline and queer radio. As the hotline ran for about a decade, there is no doubt of its reach across the state and beyond the Ohio Valley region. However, Kentucky's queer presence on the airwaves would be explicitly forged decades later with the podcast *Strange Fruit.*

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[133] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: *All Together Now*, Tape 2.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *All Together Now,* February 1st, 1897.
[134] Williams-Nichols Collection (Folder: Lavender Letter.), Archives & Special Collections, University of Louisville. *Lavender Letter* 4, no 7. July 1984.

Not many queer voices were heard on air in Kentucky until the *Strange Fruit* podcast began in 2014, in association with Louisville Free Public Media and WFPL. Hosted by Dr. Kaila Story of the University of Louisville and activist Jaison Gardner, "Strange Fruit: Musings on Politics, Pop Culture, and Black Gay Life" focuses on black gay culture, LGBTQ mental health, anti-racist resistance, and more. As the remnants of traditional radio migrates onto the podcast medium, the methodologies and means of journalism, press, and culture have become much more accessible to marginalized voices. Furthermore, measuring public engagement is infinitely easier with podcasts than traditional radio. With social media, producers of *Strange Fruit* and other queer podcasts can interact with audiences and track listenership with the click of a button. As using our voices has become easier than ever with social media, one can only imagine what the new influx of diverse voices sounds like on-air.

Land Lines: Kentucky's Place in the Queer Historical Discipline

With a rich, untapped history of queer place, space, press, and change, Kentucky deserves a legitimate and recognized role in the queer historical discipline. When historians search for the gay liberation movement, the history of gender non-conformity and the changing definitions of sexual identity, they should search more than New York and San Francisco. Between the poles of the United States, there are vast landscapes of queer organizing, experience, and ways of life that have been previously understudied by historians and queer theorists both. These movements and the people behind them deserve to be remembered.

In the second chapter of *Out of the Closet, Into the Archives,* titled "Secrets in Boxes: The Historian as Archivist," Craig M. Loftin asserts that the:

> "challenges of recovering the LGBT past are daunting. It is difficult enough to recover the voices of marginalized groups in history, but considerably more difficult when a

> group deliberately conceals and camouflages its existence. For most of the twentieth century, such concealment was necessary for LGBT people to get by in society. As a result, traces of gayness in historical records remain veiled, forcing LGBT historians to read between lines and infer subtexts in primary sources. In some cases, families have burned the letters, diaries, and other documents of their LGBT members to avoid scandal and loss of reputation, further obscuring the historical visibility of LGBT people. Such heterosexual revisionism is especially true of famous individuals, such as Peter Tchaikovsky, whose brother Modest penned a famously dishonest biography that deliberately concealed the composer's affairs with men. Modest was gay too, so by protecting his famous brother, he protected himself."[135]

In this research process, I've found another interesting dichotomy arising in my own research: in revealing the subjects of this thesis, I have revealed myself.

After this research, I feel more connected to my home, my identity, and my personhood than I have ever been before. Though I've lived in Louisville my entire life, I feel like I'm seeing Louisville and Kentucky as a whole for the first time all over again. I'm able to truly appreciate my home because I've discovered that my home can (and does) include me and has included people like me for decades. The ones that have come before me have fought to make it so. I'm eternally grateful for the resistance, and the record, that they have left behind. This thesis is in no way a complete and total history of Kentucky LGBTQ heritage, I only hope that this can lay a foundation for even more scholarship on the subject.

As the traditional press has dissipated into online subscriptions to local and national periodicals, as well as social media forming a news source in its own right, the history of the

[135] Stone, Amy L, Jamie Cantrell, "Out of the Closet, into the Archives," 51.

medium is unknown. Furthermore, as public access cable television has been long dead, cable television in general is decaying slowly to make way for streaming services. Many radio scholars also worry about the state of radio in the future, and if podcasting or satellite radio can really replace such an integral part of American journalism since its inception. While the future of these "outdated" technologies can't be determined, it's clear that these mediums were essential in building grass-roots communities and movements based on gender, class, race, ability, and sexuality alike.

Gay press and gay-owned, gay-operated newspapers were crucial to building and solidifying a Kentucky queer heritage and experience. Not only have these forms of journalism carved a medium made by and for gay people, highlighting gay issues ignored in mainstream presses, but these modes of communication allowed people to connect across arbitrary county and state lines. The subjective, ever shifting borders between the rural and the urban can be abolished with these works, as cities like Louisville and Lexington should be able to take pride in their influence from rural gay Kentuckians. As the movement has spread its messages through television, radio, and podcasts, one can only imagine how national movements have affected Kentucky, and vice versa. Kentucky's role in a broader southern queer history, and a national history of LGBTQ identity, organization, and liberation has been denied access to the academy for too long, and the academy will soon be taking shape to hear all the voices that have been previously silenced.

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[i] Hartman, Saidiya V. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route*. 1st ed. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007, 18.
[ii] González Deena J. *Refusing the Favor : The Spanish-Mexican Women of Santa Fe, 1820-1880*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1999, 106.